

Achieving Results

A Black Diamond Associates Publication

November 2008

Becoming a Trusted Leader

“We can build our leadership upon fear, obligation, or trust. However, only a foundation of trust results in the collaboration and goodwill necessary to achieve our peak performance.”

These words, from organizational design expert Roger Allen, could hardly be more succinct in expressing the central role that trust plays in building and leading high-performance organizations.

With the integrity of our business leaders under such a microscope these days, it's valuable to take a moment for a refresher on trust in leadership. For integrity, though critical to trust, isn't the only element of a trust-based management style. According to Seattle-based management expert Stephen Robbins, trust is based on four other distinct elements in your relationship with the people you lead:

- **Competence** - At first this may seem strange—after all, can't incompetent people be trusted? Of course, but not if you want to lead. Leaders are held to a different standard, and part of what your team trusts is that you know what you're doing. It comes with the territory.
- **Consistency** - This is one of the most pragmatic elements of trust. If your team knows what you stand for, then they will believe that you will react in a predictable way to certain situations. Over time your consistently expressed values become the shared values of the team. Some charismatic leaders may



Continued next page



Black Diamond
A S S O C I A T E S

The interesting thing about trust is that it is a two-way street. If you want people to trust you, you have to trust them first. In your business, in order for you to trust your employees, you have to make sure they have to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them (goals), the proper skills and knowledge to execute (training and development), and a way to work that is in alignment with others in your organization (process). If you find that you can't trust your employees, you may want to ask yourself “What part of this do I own?”

Black Diamond Associates can help you build a high-performance organization that is based on trusting relationships. Our team of certified business coaches can help you develop your plan, people and processes to transform your business. When would you like to start?

Black Diamond Associates, LLC
809 E. Bloomingdale #402
Brandon, FL 33511-8113

813-655-3584
813-654-0748

Continued from page 1

purposely act unpredictably to “shake things up,” and they may well be wildly successful. But they won’t necessarily be trusted.

■ **Loyalty** - To a certain extent, your team can only trust you to the degree you are committed to their success and well-being. Max De Pree, the legendary CEO of Herman Miller and champion of the “servant leader” concept, puts it this way: “The leader’s first job is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the leader must become a servant and a debtor.” This servant/debtor relationship to your team is one that strongly conveys your loyalty to them.

■ **Openness** - Trust is ultimately the characteristic of a relationship, and it is through its relationship with you that your team expresses its trust. Openness is a cornerstone of the ability to build these relationships. If your team can’t get to know you, then they probably can’t get to trust you, either. With openness comes the requirement for a certain vulnerability: In this arena, you will generally have to “go first” by reaching out and creating such relationships.

By investing in building and strengthening these qualities in your leadership, you will be steadily reinforcing your trust relationship with the people who work for you. Those relationships, in turn, become the foundation for building a high-performance organization, particularly in times of change and stress, when people tend to rely upon their personal relationships. If your team trusts you in good times, they are even more likely to stand with you when the times turn challenging.

Author’s content used under license, © 2008 Claire Communications

“The way you see them is the way you treat them and the way you treat them is the way they often become.”

Zig Ziglar

“He who has learned to disagree without being disagreeable has discovered the most valuable secret of a diplomat.”

Robert Estabrook

Top 10 Ways to Handle Difficult Conversations

The fallout from conversations gone wrong is not pretty: trust and intimacy suffer, while resentment and misunderstanding build. But it is possible to improve the way we handle our most difficult personal conversations. Our relationships need to nourish us, not deplete us. Consider the following:

1. Set an agenda. Lay out the problem to be discussed, indicate that you want to hear the other person’s perspective and to speak your own, and that you’d like problem-solving to follow that.

2. Listen first. Until people feel heard and safe, they won’t have the mind-space to hear you.

3. Cultivate an attitude of discovery and curiosity. The authors of *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* found that people typically spend only about 10% of a difficult conversation on inquiry and 90% on advocating a position. A better balance leads to a better outcome.

4. Strive to understand what people are thinking, feeling and needing, not just saying.

5. Keep the focus on understanding what is happening between the two of you, not on “winning” or being right.

6. Don’t ignore feelings. They are often at the heart of every difficult conversation—and they matter.

7. Stay centered, supportive, curious and committed to problem-solving. Your attitude will greatly influence what you say.

8. Notice when you become off-center. Breathe. Choose to return to yourself and your purpose.

9. Return to asking questions about the other’s point of view if the conversation becomes adversarial.

10. Be persistent in your efforts to keep the conversation constructive.