

THE 13 BEHAVIORS OF A HIGH TRUST LEADER

Stephen M. R. Covey

What separates the great leaders from the good ones? What makes a manager a manager of choice by her reports, peers, and boss? What makes an individual credible with customers, suppliers, distributors, investors, and other stakeholders? While there are many dimensions to these questions, there is one common thread throughout: being an individual who can be trusted.

Perhaps a more important question than, "Who do you trust?" is the far more personal question of, "Who trusts you?" There are some organizations who ask all their employees directly the following simple, key question in formal 360° feedback processes:

"Do you trust your boss?"

These companies have learned that the answer to this question is more predictive of team and organizational success than perhaps any other question they might ask.

A High Trust Leader is an individual who has unquestionably strong personal credibility, has the ability to create and grow trust with others interpersonally, and who is then able to extend that trust organizationally.

High Trust Leaders are managers of choice who understand the impact trust always plays on two key outcomes—*speed* and *cost*—and how low or high trust either extracts a tax or produces a dividend on every activity and dimension within a relationship, team, or organization.

High Trust Leaders have learned how to interact with others in ways that increase trust levels while avoiding the pitfalls that deplete trust. While there are numerous actions and behaviors that affect trust accounts, we have identified the 13 key behaviors that High Trust Leaders have in common (the first five behaviors are primarily character-based; the second five are primarily competence based; the last three are equal parts character and competence).

As you go through these behaviors, you may also find it valuable to consider the opposite of these 13 behaviors and how such "withdrawals" deplete trust.

What's most exciting is that these 13 Behaviors of High Trust Leaders can be learned and applied by any influencer at any level within any organization. The net result will be a significantly increased ability to generate trust with all stakeholders in order to achieve better results.

The 13 Behaviors of High Trust Leaders are as follows:

CHARACTER BEHAVIORS

1. Talk Straight

Be honest. Tell the truth. Let people know where you stand. Use simple language. Call things what they are. Demonstrate integrity. Don't manipulate people nor distort facts. Don't spin the truth. Don't leave false impressions.

"I look for three things in hiring people. The first is personal integrity, the second is intelligence, and the third is a high energy level. But if you don't have the first, the second two don't matter."

- Warren Buffett, CEO, Berkshire-Hathaway

"Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not."

- Oprah Winfrey

2. Demonstrate Respect

Genuinely care for others. Show you care. Respect the dignity of every person and every role. Treat everyone with respect, especially those who can't do anything for you. Show kindness in the little things. Don't fake caring. Don't attempt to be "efficient" with people.

"The end result of kindness is that it draws people to you."

- Anita Roddick, Founder & CEO, The Body Shop

"If people know you care, it brings out the best in them."

- Richard Branson, Founder, the Virgin Group

3. Create Transparency

Tell the truth in a way people can verify. Get real and genuine. Be open and authentic. Err on the side of disclosure. Operate on the premise of, "What you see is what you get." Don't have hidden agendas. Don't hide information.

"The people I have trouble dealing with are people who tend not to give full information. They purposefully leave out parts of the story—they distort facts."

- Shelly Lazarus, CEO, Ogilvy Mather Worldwide

"Trust happens when leaders are transparent."

- Jack Welch, Former CEO, G.E.

4. Right Wrongs

Make things right when you're wrong. Apologize quickly. Make restitution where possible. Practice "service recoveries." Demonstrate personal humility. Don't cover things up. Don't let personal pride get in the way of doing the right thing.

"What I call Level 5 leaders build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will."

- Jim Collins

"Watergate wasn't so much a burglary as it was the failure to recognize mistakes, to take responsibility for them, and to apologize accordingly."

- Jon Huntsman, Chairman, Huntsman Corp.

5. Show Loyalty

Give credit to others. Speak about people as if they were present. Represent others who aren't there to speak for themselves. Don't badmouth others behind their backs. Don't disclose others' private information.

"If you want to retain those who are present, be loyal to those who are absent. The key to the many is the one."

- Stephen R. Covey

COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

6. Deliver Results

Establish a track record of results. Get the right things done. Make things happen. Accomplish what you're hired to do. Be on time and within budget. Don't overpromise and underdeliver. Don't make excuses for not delivering.

"There is no ambiguity around performance at Pepsi, which some people perceive as harsh. I see it as an important and necessary part of how you operate. You can't create a high trust culture unless people perform."

- Craig Weatherup, former CEO, PepsiCo

"Get good people and expect them to perform. Terminate them quickly and fairly if you make the wrong choice."

- Bill Marriott, Jr., CEO, Marriott Corp.

7. Get Better

Continuously improve. Increase your capabilities. Be a constant learner. Develop feedback systems—both formal and informal. Act upon the feedback you receive. Thank people for feedback. Don't consider yourself above feedback. Don't assume your knowledge and skills will be sufficient for tomorrow's challenges.

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

- Alvin Toffler

8. Confront Reality

Take issues head on, even the "undiscussables." Address the tough stuff directly. Acknowledge the unsaid. Lead out courageously in conversation. Remove the "sword from their hands." Don't skirt the real issues. Don't bury your head in the sand.

"We strive to tell everyone everything we can. We want a culture with open dialogue and straight answers. In terms of our work with employees, we have been direct with them even when they don't like the answer. Our goal is not to please everyone but instead for them to trust that what we tell them is the truth. You can't work the tough issues we face unless everyone, starting with the senior team, trusts one another."

- Greg Brenneman, former CEO, Continental Airlines

"Leaders need to be more candid with those they purport to lead. Sharing good news is easy. When it comes to the more troublesome negative news, be candid and take responsibility. Don't withhold unpleasant possibilities and don't pass off bad news to subordinates to deliver. Level with employees about problems in a timely fashion."

- Jon Huntsman, Chairman, Huntsman Corp.

9. Clarify Expectations

Disclose and reveal expectations. Discuss them. Validate them. Renegotiate them if needed and possible. Don't violate expectations. Don't assume that expectations are clear or shared.

"Almost all conflict is a result of violated expectations."

- Blaine Lee

"An individual without information cannot take responsibility. An individual who is given information cannot help but take responsibility."

- Jan Carlzon, former CEO, Scandinavian Airlines

Practice Accountability

10. Practice Accountability

Hold yourself accountable. Hold others accountable. Take responsibility for results. Be clear on how you'll communicate how you're doing—and how others are doing. Don't avoid or shirk responsibility. Don't blame others or point fingers when things go wrong.

"Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him and to let him know that you trust him."

- Booker T. Washington

"Remember, when you were made a leader, you weren't given a crown, you were given a responsibility to bring out the best in others. For that, your people need to trust you."

- Jack Welch, former CEO, General Electric

CHARACTER AND COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

Listen First

11. Listen First

Listen before you speak. Understand. Diagnose. Listen with your ears...and your eyes and heart. Find out what the most important behaviors are to the people you're working with. Don't assume you know what matters most to others. Don't presume you have all the answers—or all the questions.

"Nothing beats personal, two-way communication for fostering cooperation and teamwork and for building an attitude of trust and understanding among employees."

- Bill Packard, Co-Founder, Hewlett Packard

"We've all heard the criticism, 'He talks too much.' When was the last time you heard someone criticized for listening too much?"

- Norm Augustine, Former CEO, Lockheed Martin

Keep Commitments

12. Keep Commitments

Say what you're going to do. Then do what you say you're going to do. Make commitments carefully and keep them at all costs. Make keeping commitments the symbol of your honor. Don't break confidences. Don't attempt to "PR" your way out of a commitment you've broken.

"Trust is established through action and over time, and it is a leader's responsibility to demonstrate what it means to keep your word and earn a reputation for trustworthiness."
- Hank Paulson, CEO, Goldman Sachs

"Trust doesn't mean they tell you everything. It doesn't mean they don't posture. But it means if they say, 'We will do this,' they will do it. It is credibility. It is integrity."
- Scott Smith, Publisher, Chicago Tribune

Extend Trust

13. Extend Trust

Demonstrate a propensity to trust. Extend trust abundantly to those who have earned your trust. Extend trust conditionally to those who are earning your trust. Learn how to appropriately extend trust to others based on the situation, risk, and character/competence of the people involved. But have a propensity to trust. Don't withhold trust because there is risk involved.

"People ask me how I've had the interest and zeal to hang in there and do what I've done. I say, 'Because my father treated me with very stern discipline: he trusted me.' I'm stuck, I've got to see the trust through. He trusted me. I trust other people. And they did the job."

- Robert Galvin, Jr., Former CEO, Motorola

"The chief lesson I have learned in a long life is that the only way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him."

- Henry Stimson, U.S. Statesman

"I have found that by trusting people until they prove themselves unworthy of that trust, a lot more happens."

- Jim Burke, former CEO, Johnson & Johnson