

TRAINING & LEARNING

TRUST

Why did India's poor march to the sea with Gandhi, against the salt tax? - Because they trusted him!

Trust is based on predictability: trusted leaders make themselves known and make their positions clear. Four leadership qualities together engender trust:

- Vision
- Empathy
- Consistency
- Integrity

Creating a vision

Leaders manage the dream: they have the capacity to create a compelling, over-arching vision that takes people to a new place.

A vision is a portrait of the future that grabs. Initially it grabs the leader, and then their magnetic intensity and commitment to it draw others in. Leaders love what they do. The passion that comes from knowing what they want, that is demonstrated by their unswerving commitment to a vision, communicates hope and inspiration.

Visions animate, inspire and transform purpose into action. Visions bring about confidence and a belief in others that they are capable of performing to their full potential.

Communicating the vision

Believing in one's dreams is not enough. Without communication nothing can be realised.

Leadership is a transaction between leaders and followers. Neither could exist without the other. Leaders must understand their followers, and followers must understand those who lead. This interaction creates a unified focus that flows from the communication of a clear, compelling, vivid and exciting image of a desired state of affairs.

Communication creates meaning. Mismanagement of meaning and lack of clarity only lead to evasion of responsibility and guilt.

Leaders must be able to influence and organise meaning, and to focus more on thinking than "facts" or "knowing", on the "know-why" before "know-how". Shared meanings and interpretations of reality facilitate coordinated action. Unequivocal communication of the message is key to aligning any group behind an organisation's goals.

Support through empathy

Leaders cannot achieve their dreams without getting people on their side. Their ability to understand themselves and their co-workers' needs and wants empowers people to experience the vision as their own. We call this ability empathy.

It is different from sympathy. In Parental Empathy, Norman Paul writes, "Sympathy bypasses real understanding of the other person [who] is denied his own sense of being. Empathy presupposes a separate individual, entitled to his own feelings, ideas and emotional history. The empathiser makes no judgements about what others should feel but solicits the expression of whatever he does feel and, for brief periods, experiences these feelings as his own."

When a leader empathises with us, it feels as though we are more than understood, we are known. We trust leaders who can acknowledge our position and walk in our shoes - without taking away our feelings or responses. Leaders must be self-directed and self-reflective, listening to their inner voice and directed by their values and vision. Learning and understanding are the keys, and empathy is what teaches us about others - and about ourselves.

Ethics and integrity

We have become numb to scandal and corruption. We must re-establish trust by developing leaders who express a clear and compelling vision, who develop empathy, and who behave ethically. Trust blossoms when leaders exemplify:

- Constancy - they create no surprises. They maintain continuity and security.
- Congruity - they walk their talk. Their morality is found in their behaviour.
- Reliability - they are there when it counts, ready to support their co-workers.
- Integrity - they are ethical. They honour their commitments and promises.

People would rather follow individuals they can count on than those who can change at any time. But in a constantly changing environment, how can a leader stay consistent without appearing rigid and unresponsive to shifting realities?

We don't advocate that leaders take a position and stick to it no matter what, but we do urge constancy in ethics and integrity. Leaders are responsible for the set of ethics and norms that govern people's behaviour. By their own behaviour, leaders demonstrate their commitment to the ethics they are trying to institutionalise. They set the moral tone by:

- Carefully choosing the people with whom they surround themselves
- Communicating a sense of purpose

- Reinforcing appropriate behaviour
- Articulating moral positions

In the end, vision, empathy, consistency and integrity are all facets of the leader's ability to build trusting relationships so all work together in harmony as a single organism.