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To achieve your success!



Coaching Works Monthly

It's a Matter of Perspective!

November 2007

Tools and Tips

Buy-in accelerates the trust-building process

How will a solid foundation of trust be of benefit to you, and those you work with?

Food for Thought

Businesses driven by trust will experience growing pains

Businesses driven by mistrust will suffer

Need Help?

To learn more about

On Thin Ice

Suppose you found yourself standing on thin ice in the middle of a pond, and the ice began to crack. What's the first thing you would do?

- A) Yell for help?
- B) Run for safety?
- C) Lay down face-first on the ice?
- D) Go about business as usual?



If you chose "A", "B", or "D", you're about to get the big chill. Both yelling and going about your business as usual, keep you firmly planted on your feet, which is exactly the reason why the ice began giving way in the first place. Running exerts even more pressure on the ice, and will cause you to break through more quickly, that is, if you don't slip and fall through first.

The best answer is "C". Lying down face-first, with your weight evenly distributed across the ice, decreases the amount of pressure per square inch of surface area, and increases your chances of not breaking through. In other words, opening up the expanse of your being, to that which most tenuously supports you, paradoxically strengthens your chances of survival.

It's a great way to build trust.

What is trust? As mentioned in the last issue of *Coaching Works Monthly*, trust is an emotionally based, invisible layer of "ice", which supports the open flow and collaborative exchange of information, ideas, resources,

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energy, and effort within a relationship (e.g., with self, others, in marriage, at work, as part of a team, organization, or within a business culture). When this foundation is solid, truth readily flows, even if uncomfortable emotions accompany this flow.

In business, a sturdy basis of trust provides the organic framework that is essential for individual, team, and organizational growth and development, relationship sustainability, effective change management, leadership development, ethical decision-making capacity, and best business practices. Trust and win-wins go hand in hand.

When trust is lacking (or when "emotionally thin" ice is present), the open flow and collaborative exchange of information, ideas, resources, etc., within relationships becomes severely impaired. This results in inefficient, misguided, avoidant, unpredictable, conflictual, and unethically sound strategies and behaviors, both within, and outside the work environment, which ultimately affect the bottom line. Unresolved conflicts between co-workers, festering resentments among team-members, adversarial supervisor-supervisee/executive-direct report relationships, hostile work environments, cultures embedded with "pink" elephants, and unethically driven leaders and executive boards, are all examples of relationships lacking trust, and resting precariously on emotionally thin ice.

So back to the original question - sort of. Suppose you found yourself standing in the middle of emotionally thin ice in your workplace, and the ice began to crack. What's the first thing that you would do?

- A) React defensively?
- B) Run for cover?
- C) Belly up to your emotions?
- D) Go about business as usual?

If you chose A, B, or D, don't feel alone, because you're in the majority. Most folks shy away from facing uncomfortable emotions directly, tending to react to, run from, or ignore them instead. Unfortunately, this only makes the underlying support that much more tenuous. The best answer, from a trust-building perspective, is C.

As an example, an executive found himself at odds with a direct report, unable to effectively address and resolve conflict brewing within their relationship. As a

result, trust was increasingly becoming in short supply, severely impacting relationship quality and performance.

In our work together, he discovered having been derailed by a number of uncomfortable feelings emerging in the relationship. Rather than facing these emotions directly, he'd utilized a well-worn strategy of sweeping his feelings under the carpet, and bending over backwards; trying to satisfy his direct report's needs and demands, in hopes of stabilizing the relationship. Much to his chagrin, however, his "carpet" had become increasingly lumpy, further exacerbating feelings of instability and mistrust within the relationship.

Rather than going about business as usual, he decided that it was time for a change. We devised an alternative strategy, which included getting up close and personal with those emotions he'd previously avoided in this relationship. Once he'd made room to both acknowledge and express his feelings (bellied up on the ice), he discovered that this information lent support to his position, added value to his experience, and was leveragable towards developing a far more effective conflict resolution strategy with this person. After taking the steps needed to execute this new strategy, which included a few challenging, yet necessary face-to-face conversations, the conflict dissipated, relationship performance and productivity improved, and a slight, yet noticeable increase in the amount of trust present appeared.

Given that emotionally thin ice is never in short supply, building trust is always a work in progress. Being proactive, rather than reactive, is key. With this in mind, here are a few simple, yet highly effective steps to help build trust, the next time cracks start appearing beneath your feet.

- Take a few deep breaths, while identifying, acknowledging, and taking *full* ownership of your thoughts/feelings/behaviors in the moment
- If others are present, share your thoughts/feelings with them, and ask for feedback on their perspective
- Regardless of what is said/not said by others, be sure to let others take full responsibility for their thoughts/feelings/behaviors. If you try to

carry the extra burden of their emotional weight, the only direction you'll be heading is down. Instead, evenly distribute your own emotional weight, so that you can respond, rather than react to the situation.

- Ask yourself how you can best leverage this information to the greater good of all concerned, remembering that the greater good begins with yourself.
- Identify the action steps that will allow you to make the most of this trust-building opportunity. If you need help, build this into your action plan.
- Execute these steps
- After all is said and done, evaluate what worked, and identify what could be improved upon, the next time a similar situation evolves. Ask others for feedback in this regard.
- If in over your head, back off from the situation, and talk with a trusted peer, supervisor, manager, or member of your HR department.

No matter how you go about it, there will always be an element of risk, when building a solid foundation of trust. Ironically, when the risk is acknowledged, the trust is built. Here's to your success!

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