

All Progress Begins with Telling the Truth

by John Stahl-Wert

Trustworthiness—the personal integrity of the leader—is a business asset. Being a leader who is trustworthy, a leader who does what he or she says, has a measurable value for the company's bottom line. The reason this is true is that workers produce far better results for the leader that they trust than for the leader that they don't trust.

The leadership of an enterprise must be credible—the leader must be believable—to the followers if there is to be growth in worker engagement.

All progress begins with Telling The Truth. I call this the T3 Formula. If you choose to become the kind of leader who exercises T3—who Tells The Truth—then the first person you need to tell the truth to is yourself.

The “Say-Do Gap”

A great many books have been written, and a great many workshops have been held, on the proposition that leaders don't communicate enough. This is true! Leaders don't communicate enough! And many problems are solved when leaders learn how to communicate their messages more effectively.

But underneath the well-worn “communication gap” is the real problem, which is a “say-do gap.” No effort to improve one's communication will fix the “say-do gap.” Why is that? Because the “say-do gap” does not exist because there isn't enough communication; the “say-do gap” exists because the things the leader communicates are not true!

Closing the “say-do gap” is Job One for every leader. There are reasons why closing this gap can be difficult.

Some of these reasons are related to the fact that the leader needs to learn how to exercise greater character. Some of the reasons why closing the “say-do gap” are related to the fact that the leader needs to learn how to exercise greater discipline. But however challenging it is to become a leader who is trustworthy, to become a leader who closes the “say do gap,” it is important to know the following:

- Trust is a real, concrete and measurable resource. Trust is as real as liquid assets, as concrete as physical infrastructure, and as measurable as product inventory.
- Trust can be gained. It can be earned. It can grow, compound and appreciate.
- Being trustworthy can be learned. It is not magic, nor elusive, nor vague. It can be mastered as a skill. Indeed, leaders MUST master being trustworthy.

Six Character Habits

But what are the specific character habits that a leader must master in order to become trustworthy? How can trust be built in one's leadership? Here are the six character habits that, when strengthened, will make you trustworthy in the eyes of those around you.

Character Habit 1: Tell the truth

Lying begins "innocently." Were you late for your appointment because you started late? If you started late, don't say that the traffic was bad! Small lies become big habits. Tell small truths—grow the habit!

Character Habit 2: Be the way that you seem

Live out the values you espouse. If you tell your workers that the customer comes first, then demonstrate in your actions that this is true. Do what is right for your customer! Do you repeatedly break your promises to your customers? Face this fact. Then fix it.

Character Habit 3: Keep your word

If you say you'll do it, then do it. Show up on time for your appointments. An appointment is a promise. Carry a journal with you in which you write down your "unfulfilled promises." Review this journal daily. Keep the list short.

Character Habit 4: Accept correction

If you make a mistake about something, admit that you were wrong. Say it! Learn to say the words, "I was wrong! I'm sorry!" This is an example of telling yourself the truth in front of others. Remember what I said about T3? Telling the truth makes a big impression!

Character Habit 5: Take responsibility

You're a leader. Therefore, you are responsible. If you make excuses for your failures, you will erode people's trust. Likewise, if you blame others for your failures, people won't trust you. Establish a policy of "no excuses!" Then stick to your policy!

Character Habit 6: Give proper credit

Was a success that you enjoyed the result of someone else's idea? Then say so! If you overstate your role, you are committing both theft and deceit. Trustworthiness is established when you say things like: "You are the one who did the good job! Thank you so much!"

You Don't Mean It If You Don't Measure It

In *Ten Thousand Horses*, I teach you how to set concrete measurable goals about becoming a leader of integrity. Only things that are measured will get done! If you decide that you want to become trustworthy, then you must be very disciplined about this goal—like all important goals—and you must set measurable mile markers toward your goal and evaluate your progress against the goals that you set. A free workbook is available at www.tenthousandhorses.com to help you with the job of creating a work plan to become a person of greater integrity.

Business is no different than life. If you want to do well, you will need people to trust you. Trust speeds up decision making. It makes deals work more smoothly, and leads to more business. Customers return to companies that they trust. Employees stay with bosses they trust.

In fact, business is nothing more than a promise. If you are in business, you are making a promise to your customers that your product or service will do for them what you say it will. If they believe you—if they trust you—then you will have a customer, you will make a sale, you will reap a profit, and you will enjoy a prosperous future.

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