Results-Oriented Leadership

Trust, credibility, and respect are the foundation.

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Lack of trust appears to be a growing problem throughout the workforce. Unfortunately, effective leadership is nearly impossible without trust. Trust alone, however, is not enough to create high-functioning teams. Rather, it takes trust, credibility, and respect. The three go hand-in-hand. Without them, a leadership void is likely to emerge.

Recent studies paint a grim picture of workers' attitudes toward their employers. Employees are losing trust in their supervisors and senior leaders. The result is a negative impact on employee retention, as well as productivity. A recent poll of more than 2,000 workers, conducted by Maritz Research Corp., revealed barely 7 percent of employees trust senior leaders to look out for their best interests. The Maritz study, “Managing in an Era of Mistrust,” found a mere 11 percent feel their managers show consistency between their words and actions; only 20 percent feel their company’s leaders are completely honest and ethical, and just a quarter of respondents trust management to make the right decision in times of uncertainty.

Distrust in the Workplace

One reason distrust exists in the workplace relates to the well-known phenomenon called “The Peter Principle.” Author Laurence J. Peter coined the phrase, meaning, in a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to their level of incompetence. An employee who demonstrates expertise is promoted continually until he reaches a level where he can no longer achieve mastery. The classic example is of a top salesperson who is promoted to sales manager but fails miserably in the new role. Just because individuals are successful at selling does not necessarily mean they will be successful in leading a sales team. When managers are not good leaders and cannot develop their team members to become high performers, employees begin to distrust them.

Second, distrust is likely to take shape in organizations where change is the norm—which seems to be every organization today. Changes in personnel, changes in direction, changes in products and services being offered, and changes in policies can create an environment in which trust is sabotaged. Employees too often don’t know what they can count on. This constant state of flux is likely to produce many mixed messages and can lead to a communication void that breaks down confidence and trust in management.

Three Key Principles

To overcome distrust, results-oriented leaders must build high-performing teams by modeling three key principles: trust, credibility, and respect.

1. **Trust.** To build trust, managers need to demonstrate that they are honest, reliable, and loyal. This means keeping their promises and modeling integrity at all times. They also need to encourage employees to be autonomous by supporting their decisions whenever they can. Rather than stripping employees of their decision-making responsibilities, even when mistakes are made, results-oriented leaders explain the reasons why a decision is not workable, thereby creating a learning environment, which goes a long way to building trust.

2. **Credibility.** Credibility is built when an employee knows a leader can make them better at doing a job. Results-oriented leaders do not do everything themselves, but instead engage, support, and guide their teams. They encourage team members to think, consider alternatives, and assess risks and rewards. They provide employees with the tools they need to do their job well. A results-oriented leader is there to broaden team members’ learning and capabilities, and that creates credibility.

3. **Respect.** Managers build respect when they show their appreciation for employees’ unique perspectives and contributions. Employees tend to want more out of work than just showing up for their shift. They truly want to contribute. They desire independence to do their job. When they feel valued, accepted, recognized, and treated with dignity, they are more inclined to perform at higher levels and remain with the organization.
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A colleague recently was describing a manager who effectively demonstrated results-oriented leadership based on an environment of trust, credibility, and respect. She indicated that as a developing newspaper reporter, her manager built trust by encouraging her to take on challenging assignments and accomplish them in the tight timeframes that are part of the writing world. He built credibility by making her a better writer in that he insisted that she redo her own work, based on his feedback, rather than him rewriting her stories for her. He also demonstrated respect by encouraging her and supporting her efforts as she developed her writing skills. In a pressure-filled work environment it can be easy for a leader to lose sight of the employee’s view of the work and become wholly focused on the project outcome. This example demonstrates that results-oriented leaders balance the pressure for outcomes with the needs of their team members.

Modeling Behavior

So how does a results-oriented leader model the key elements of trust, credibility, and respect? They do so within themselves, with individual team members, and with their team as a whole. First, people look to leaders for direction, so they carefully watch what managers do. If a leader says one thing, but does another, then employees are likely to adopt the position, “I don’t trust you.” So it is important that leaders demonstrate trust, credibility, and respect in every interaction.

Second, results-oriented leaders pay attention to individual team members. Rather than simply sharing a broad vision or goal, they take the time to help each team member see their part in achieving the goal and vision. They give performance feedback that helps employees improve their overall contribution to the team and company goals. They help employees exceed expectations by defining what is expected from each of them.

Third, results-oriented leaders recognize good work habits in a team. They lead from a mind-set of “we” and not “I.” In other words, good leaders do not take over a team and do all the work themselves. Rather, they get the team engaged so they work together to achieve their goals. A results-oriented leader is there to assist and develop.

An example of an organization that models this type of leadership is a small family owned company in Minnesota that has remained successful by emphasizing teamwork. Now in its third-generation, the company’s leaders hold weekly sessions with their entire team, bringing everyone together for training and planning. There is a real sense of engagement with team members that what they are doing every day matters.

Engage to Exceed

Although trust of management is lacking throughout the workforce, leaders can rebuild trust, credibility, and respect by demonstrating consistent behaviors in their own work practices and by serving as role models. Results-oriented leaders engage their team members to not only accomplish goals, but also exceed them. They do this by supporting employees’ sense of personal connection to the organization and work at hand (building trust), maintaining high standards for personal accountability (building credibility), and reaffirming each employee’s level of contribution to the team (building respect). The foundation for results-oriented leadership resides in demonstrating a combination of trust, credibility, and respect.

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