

Building up Trust

Trust is one of our most precious commodities.

Ulf D. Posé tells you how to build up trust - instalment number three.

Every economical crisis is also a crisis of trust. Expectations that have not been met, as well as shattered hopes and dreams that have not come true provoke distrust. Once trust is gone, you can see how hard it is to build up, because trust is full of requirements. It is based on being mutual. But that also means everybody can contribute to its growth - by being trustworthy and being prepared to trust others. Our series of articles will shed light on what builds trust.

Competence is an important requirement for building up trust. Besides linguistic competence, there is behavioural competence to be taken into account. I remember a talk show where a politician was bluntly attacked by members of the opposing party. One of the attackers was rather excited: "Sir, you have not the slightest idea". The victim of this verbal attack leaned back and countered rather smugly: "Sir, I readily admit that you have more ideas than I do. All I have is competence". That hit home!

Behavioural competence means what our activities are based on in terms of abilities, competence, and the knowledge of facts. What it does not mean is that we are content with vague ideas and beliefs. Also, it does not mean that you consider yourself competent based on just a feeling towards something. We have a dangerous mixture. More often than not, this world's misery is not caused by bad intentions, but by good intentions paired with incompetence.

Basically, demanding behavioural competence means:

- being prepared to take possible consequences of your behaviour into consideration before you act,
- being able and willing to include alternative options in your plans, and
- being able and willing to take responsibility for what you do.

One thing is important above all other things: if you have behavioural competence, you are always capable of considering alternative options. This is how you remain open to learning. And: if you think along the lines of alternative options, you avoid getting trapped in a decision. Some people believe there is only one way to act in any particular situation. In believing this, however, they deprive themselves of the chance to realise that there is another way. That is the underlying idea behind the proverb "all roads lead to Rome". There is another advantage to considering alternative options, too: it is easier to detect mistakes before they are even made.

More than a few people refuse to consider alternative options. As reasons, we hear arguments such as: "If you try that, you will never come up with any decision at all", or "A bad decision is still better than no decision at all". - But are these arguments valid? They would be valid if looking for alternative options were all we did and thus we never came to an end. What the concepts of alternative options, however, means is that you do come to a decision. On the other hand, if you never consider alternative options and never minutely scrutinize your actions, then you deprive yourself of the chance of solving a problem with minimum cost while at the same time getting the best possible result.

Considering alternative options will always improve the quality of a solution. But there are some criteria that should be carefully noted. Ideally they should all be observed in the following sequence, because it is not good enough to just remember one of them:

- Choose the option that is or might be useful for more people, rather than fewer.
- Choose the option that is or might be detrimental to fewer people, rather than more.
- Choose the option that is likely to help the socially weak.
- Choose the option that is likely to do less harm to the environment.
- Choose the option that requires the least social, emotional and financial effort.
- Choose the option that will generate the least friction and thereby least cost of interaction.
- Choose the option that can be made to be understood with the least cost.
- Choose the option that is easiest to reverse in case of unexpected consequences.

The last criterion, in particular, makes it quite clear why considering alternative options is so important. After all, what good is a decision that cannot be reversed in case of detrimental effects? Then it would certainly have been better to consider another option that might have rendered the same result but could have been corrected if something went wrong.

Being qualified to weigh different options against advantages and disadvantages is what we call the competence to judge correctly. It, too, is a necessary requirement for trust to be built up. We will discuss it in our next instalment.