

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT WHIPPLE

“THE TRUST AMBASSADOR”

Barbara: Tell us a bit about your background, qualifications and expertise. What have been some of the highlights of your career? Please list the books you have written.

Robert: I worked as a manager in a major manufacturing firm for over 30 years. My focus was always on how to improve leadership. I spent 10 years as a senior corporate leader learning the art from the front lines and from great mentors. My current role is helping grow leaders for the future in organizations and university settings.

My personal specialty is in helping organizations build higher levels of trust: my brands reveal the passion. My company is called "Leadergrow Inc." because my mission in life is to grow as many leaders as possible during the time I have on earth. My speaking brand, "The Trust Ambassador" indicates my focus and international reputation is on the topic of trust. I have written three books on leadership and trust. Links to the books are at the end of the interview.

- ***The Trust Factor: Advanced leadership for Professionals*** - focuses on trust as a strategic driver of performance.
- ***Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*** - How all professionals can improve their communications and build trust by understanding what is between the lines in online communication. This is a one-of-a-kind book that has received international attention.
- ***Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*** - A new model for building higher trust in organizations. This book has won me recognition as one of the top 100 thought leaders in the country on leadership development.

Barbara: Trust Across America’s mission is to rebuild trustworthy behavior in America, starting with public companies. How would you generally define trustworthy behavior?

Robert: There are numerous definitions for Trust. Most of them center on things like personal integrity: the ability to follow through and actually do what you say. Personally, my favorite definition of trust is the belief that the other person will always do what he or she thinks is in my best interest, even if I do not particularly like it at the time.

Barbara: What are some of the specific components of trustworthy behavior in your opinion?

Robert: The Leadergrow model of building trust focuses on three dimensions:

- ***Table Stakes*** – These items are intuitive and must be fully in play if a leader is to have a chance of building an environment of trust. They are called “table stakes” after the phenomenon in poker where a player must have a level of investment to even be in the game. Leaders who cannot meet the minimum standards of honesty and integrity should

get out of the leadership game and hit the showers. Example of table stakes include: being open, honest, ethical, consistent, communicating well, and several other basic characteristics.

- **Enabling Actions** - These items are important ingredients to building an environment of trust. The Leadergrow model lists 10 examples such as: advocating well, reinforcing right behavior, admitting mistakes, follow through, explaining paradoxes, etc. In the real world there are numerous additional items that constitute enabling actions. Having these items in play helps foster the right kind of culture where trust can grow and endure. The more these elements are present, the greater the ability for the leader to withstand trust withdrawals that happen as a result of ill advised decisions or unfortunate circumstances.
- **The Heart of Trust** – Reinforcing Candor is what makes the Leadergrow model unique. Reinforcing candor takes center stage because the concept goes far beyond honesty. It is the magic that most leaders find difficult to accomplish, but if done well, it makes a huge difference in trust. Reinforcing Candor is the ability to make people glad they brought up an observation of a leader’s inconsistency. In most organizations, people are punished in some way for bringing forward a problem with the leader’s actions. Where the highest levels of trust are present, the leader has the ability to set aside his or her ego and reinforce the person who challenges an action. Doing so creates a large trust deposit and allows for future trust building exchanges. Without this critical element, the table stakes and enabling actions are not sufficient because candor is extinguished. People hide their true feelings and do not feel empowered to challenge the leader, hence real trust is hard to maintain regardless of the effort to do so. Leaders who consistently reinforce candor build an environment where trust continually grows and deepens.

Barbara: We all know that the erosion of trust is a big problem in corporate America. What are companies doing to combat this, and is it enough?

Robert: Wise companies are continually making investments in their culture. Leaders who know how to constantly reinforce the kind of environment where trust grows obtain huge returns on their investments. Unfortunately, when times are tough, most organizations retreat into a kind of "bunker mentality" where investments in people are shut off. This only exacerbates their plight.

Barbara: Is the “trust” climate in corporate America improving or worsening? What actions will turn things around?

Robert: Global measures show the trust level in 2009 rebounded from the depths that occurred in the last quarter of 2008. The main reasons for the improvement were cited as, (source, Edelman 2010 Trust Barometer)

- Business leaders starting to treat employees better
- Improved candor and transparency
- Increased social responsibility (like the green movement and employee health initiatives)

- A willingness to engage all stakeholders as opposed to just stockholders
- A firming up of the market as opposed to the freefall doomsday scenario in 2008.

The overriding comment on the improvement is that trust is very fragile at this time, and we can slip back quickly from the gains made last year, in fact many people believe we already have slipped again.

Barbara: Can you provide a few examples of companies that are doing the “right” thing in your opinion? What’s different about the corporate culture of these companies?

Robert: Companies that "get it" stand out dramatically because they are so starkly different from most organizations who continue to struggle. Look at the list of the top 100 companies to work for in America and you will see organizations that continue to invest in the development of people. These organizations are often led by "Level 5 Leaders" who understand the power of reinforcement and are humble, servant leaders rather than puffed up windbags.

We have a local grocery chain named Wegmans that is world class at providing an excellent culture. They believe they are saving about \$300 million each year because their employee retention is so high. Their profit margin is typically 30% higher than the competition because they have the ability to keep costs low yet still provide excellent products and services at rock bottom prices. Numbers do not lie, but it is the culture that enables the numbers.

Barbara: Any other comments or thoughts?

Robert: I applaud the work you are doing at "Trust Across America." We are all the champions of the new way that has to take hold for America to regain the losses of the past decade and build cultures that are viable and rich with promise for current and future generations.

Barbara: Robert. Thank you for your insightful responses. If you would like to contact Robert, here is how:

Robert Whipple: MBA CPLP

"The Trust Ambassador"

bwhipple@leadergrow.com

585-392-7763



CEO Leadergrow Inc.