FRONTLINE

SUPERVISOR

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Workplace Culture as Community:
the What, the Why, the How

"The concept of community has become more sophisticated due to the changing nature of business patterns and the fluidity of American culture. People work longer hours and move more often, making them more transient members of their residential neighborhoods. But people still look for community, and many get that feeling from non-traditional sources such as the workplace."
Austin Community Technology Center 4/2002

In today's workplace **a sense of community is the goal** if productivity, efficiency, teamwork, and success manifest the vision of a corporation, institution, government agency, or private business. There is nothing more antithetical to 'getting the work done' than workplace failure to create and inspire a sense of belonging in its employees from the ground up. 'Community' can refer to common interests, common identity, common locality, or other shared attributes.

One public health organization asked the public to define 'community.' The findings were summarized as **"a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties**, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings." In spite of how people define community, sadly, not everyone experiences it in a positive way.

In this series of four articles for 2007 we will explore key topic areas in building **a strong and respectful workplace community**: **trust—the keystone** of all community-building and workplace success; addressing **sex and gender issues**; **disability and ability changes**; and **diversity.**

Not only is **trust the keystone** of the corporate or workplace community, but, as author Stephen Covey writes, it is "the key factor in a global economy." He says that while trust is the "ultimate root" of one's influence, **low trust causes "hidden agendas, politics, interpersonal conflict, interdepartmental rivalries, win-lose thinking, defensive and protective communication."** When trust is low, the speed of productivity goes down. Low trust slows down decision-making, communication, and effort.

Examples of expressions of low trust are the following*: "I hate the politics at work. It seems like it is dog-eat-dog, everyone for himself."* Or, *"My organization is so frustratingly bureaucratic that I have to requisition paper for my printer."* Or, "*My boss is always looking over my shoulder, checking that I've dotted every 'i' and crossed every 't.' "*

According to Covey's research only 51% of employees trust senior management. Only 36% believe their leaders act with honesty and integrity. In the course of one year 76% of employees observed illegal or unethical conduct on the job which could violate public trust. All of this results in "mistrust doubling the cost of doing business," says Professor John Whitney of Columbia Business School.

The good news is: that trust is a reality that can be measured by high-speed delivery of goods or services and lowered cost. Trust can be created, and if lost it can be restored. Establishing trust with "the one establishes trust with the many."

Most importantly, **trust is a function of two things - character and competence**. While character includes your integrity, your motives and your intentions with regard to others, it will not inspire trust unless, as a supervisor, you also demonstrate capabilities, skills, results, and a great track record.

Covey outlines a **"5 Waves of Trust model"** in which trust builds from **self trust, to relationship trust, to organizational trust, to market trust to societal trust**. Like the proverbial stone dropped into water, the ripple effects of self-trust behavior flow outwards, in concentric rings, from the heart of the matter to the far-reaching shores of society at large. Managers and supervisors can benefit from identifying and promoting self and relationship trust attributes in themselves and their employees.

Evaluate Yourself on the Following Stephen Covey Concepts
Rate 1 – 5 (1 = low - 5 = high, statement fits 100%)

SELF-TRUST AND CREDIBILITY
Integrity: honesty, congruence, walking the talk

- *I am thoroughly honest in all interactions with others*
- *I say and do what I really think and feel*
- *I am clear on my values and stand up for them*
- *I am authentically open to new ideas and learning that may require rethinking*
- *I consistently make and keep commitments to myself and others*

Intent: straightforward motives and open agendas

- *I care about the well-being of others*
- *I am aware of my motives and make sure I do the right things for the right reasons*
- *I seek solutions that offer a "win" for everyone involved*
- *That I have others' best interests at heart is obvious to others*
- *I believe there is more than enough of everything to go around*

Capabilities: talents, attitudes, skills, knowledge and style

- *My talents match the opportunities in the work I do*
- *I have the knowledge and skills to do my job*
- *I consistently upgrade and increase my knowledge and skills*
- *I know my strengths and use them effectively*
- *I know how to establish, extend, develop and restore trust and work at it*

Results: track record, performance, getting the right things done

- *My track record gives others confidence*
- *I focus my efforts on delivering results*
- *I appropriately communicate my track record to others in order to inspire confidence*
- *I almost always finish something that I start*
- *I consistently get results in ways that inspire trust*

"The only way to build trust professional or personally is by being trustworthy."
—Gerard Arpey, CEO American Airlines

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