



Leadership letter

Enjoying a climate of trust?

I have had the privilege of involvement in some wonderful teams over the years where there has been a solid set of positive values and beliefs that were lived out. Teams where there was the opportunity of sharing opinions and making decisions together. Teams where I was believed in and trusted and where it was safe enough to fail and know that it wouldn't be the end of the world! We all want to live and work in a team where we know we are valued and cared for. I am painfully aware that we haven't all had this privilege.

Recently, I have been talking with some individuals about their teams and hearing stories that corroborate Patrick Lencioni's principle that *'the foundation of any dysfunction starts with the lack of trust.'* At the heart of collaboration is trust. Kouzes & Posner in their book, *'the leadership challenge'*, believe that *'without trust you cannot lead.'* Individuals who are unable to trust others fail to become leaders, precisely because they can't bear to be dependent on the words and work of others. Either they end up doing all the work themselves or they supervise work so closely that they become overcontrolling. Their obvious lack of trust in others results in others' lack of trust in them. Others who struggle in competence for the task themselves find it difficult to trust others due to their insecurity or sense of being threatened by others on the team. Both these situations with a lack of a trust environment result in the ministry plateauing, being ineffectiveness and declining.

Several major research studies support the trust building actions taken by exemplary leaders. For example, in a PricewaterhouseCoopers study on corporate innovation in companies listed on the financial times 100, trust was the number one differentiator between the top 20% of companies surveyed and the bottom 20%. Psychologists have also found that people who are trusting are more likely to be happy and psychologically adjusted than are those who view the world with suspicion and disrespect. Thus the most effective leadership situations are those in which each member of the team trusts the others.

Tom Marshall in his book, *'right relationships'*, shares that trust is the most fragile of qualities. It is easily broken and takes time to develop strength. On top of that, we can't tell people they have to trust us. We can't tell people they must come up with big vision. We can't demand that people will even cooperate. These are results that come from a team that feels safe with each other and has developed close relationships. So for every team leader, a key task is to create a trust environment where team effectiveness can grow.

I would like to pass on some more thoughts from a book I referred to some time ago – *'Leaders eat last.'* A study was carried out among those who hated their jobs and those who were jobless. It turns out that having a job we hate is as bad for our health and perhaps worse than not having a job at all. Levels of depression, anxiety and stress were higher for those in the workplace where they weren't receiving encouragement, were not valued and not given trust and responsibility. Living in this kind of environment causes people to not feel in control of their lives. Sadly, there are too many leaders who believe that they will increase productivity

and best motivate people by continually putting the big picture in front of people and creating internal urgency and pressure. As Lencioni points out, where there is an absence of trust, it leads to a fear of conflict, a lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and finally inattention to details which means a lack of results. It means that no one is owning the goal, passion is lost, the team dynamic is missing and no one really cares.

There's another side of trust, where it is placed wrongly in a leader. A trust that is too loyal, too blind and can cause damage to ourselves and others. When I was studying psychology I read about the Milgram experiment. After the 2nd world war, those involved in the systematic genocide were rounded up and put on trial. The common defence that they offered was, 'we had no choice, we were just following orders.' So Milgram carried out an experiment with volunteers. One played the role of teacher and the other would play the role of the student. The volunteer was asked to pick a piece of paper out of a hat that indicated if they would be the teacher or the student. In fact both pieces of paper said teacher on them. The person who played the student was another scientist involved in the experiment.

Each teacher volunteer had a series of questions to ask and if the student got it wrong or refused to answer, the teacher was to flip a switch to administer an electric shock. These shocks increased with each wrong answer from 15 volts up to 450 volts, marked from mild, to moderate, to strong, intense and dangerous. (actually only 15 volts were given). The situations varied from the teacher sitting right next to the student, to being in the same room, to being outside the room seeing and hearing and being outside without seeing or hearing. As expected the teachers expressed concern when they realised they were causing pain but the scientist would say, please continue, the next time concern was expressed, the teacher responded— the experiment requires you to continue, the next time – it is absolutely essential that you continue, the fourth time – you have no other choice you must go on. The experiment stopped on the fifth request.

The result was that 70% of the teachers being in the same room and placing the student's hand on the shock plate, quit without going very far. But when they could neither see the students in pain nor hear their cries only 35% refused to continue. In some measure this happens every day in the workplace whenever there is pain of any sort. In YWAM, it would be more emotional, spiritual, mental fatigue, frustration, rejection, loneliness, etc. The real question is, 'Are we aware of people that are struggling and in pain or do we say – the experiment, the mission, the task, the outreach must go on? As leaders it is so easy for us to cause pain in our followers through a lack of listening, a lack of awareness, a strength of opinion and vision that pushes through to see results but has no regard for the people involved. Where there is a high turn over of staff or difficulty in recruiting staff, some questions need to be asked.

Another element to add into this scenario is the power distance in nations. Cultures that endorse low power distance expect and accept power relations that are more consultative or democratic. Cultures that endorse high power distance expect and accept power relations that are more authoritative and direct. Highest on the power distance index is Malaysia with 104, and countries like Philippines, Mexico, China and the Arab nations are not far behind. The lowest on the index is Austria with a score of 11 and the UK at 35 and USA at 40. So

leaders working in cultures with high power distance may have the following issues with team members:

- They may be reluctant to approach you with a problem or disagreement.
- They will never confront you but may use other means to get the message across.
- They may expect you to make decisions for them.
- They may expect you to use a directive approach in leading.
- There will be a tendency for them to always defer to your opinion.

This then creates a barrier for building trust relationships and so the leader has to work hard to create a climate that is safe, open and conducive for close relationships and trust to develop. This requires us in YWAM to create a sub culture where there can be not a national but biblical approach to relationships and team. Here are a few ways of lessening the power distance in our teams:

- Spend time building relationships with your team in informal settings, eating meals together, having fun activities, relating as peers.
- Resist making decisions for them. Invite team members into decision making processes and receive their input first. Make it safe for them to share openly.
- Resist allowing people to constantly put you in a privileged position. As leaders we need to step down from any pedestal people put us on, avoid any wrong status given and be careful how we share our desires. There is always a place for respect but leadership is simply a function and doesn't hold a special value with it.
- Create a climate for evaluation and feedback for everyone including you as the leader. The 'don't touch the Lord's anointed' has been taken to a point where leaders are untouchable and can do no wrong' and we know that isn't the case!
- Learn about implicit communication in the culture you're working in. As leaders we need to be observant of the body language and cues that are given that may be saying the exact opposite of the words that are spoken. If you don't pick these up as a leader, get yourself an interpreter.
- And perhaps the most important of all - be honest, open and vulnerable yourself and lead the way in sharing in the team.

Trust involves not only following through on tasks, being teachable and vulnerable in the team but also knowing when to break any guidelines or rules that you have agreed on. One experienced traffic controller decided to break the rules. The pilot reported smoke pouring into the cockpit and the need to descend immediately. But there was another flight 2000 feet directly below and in restricted zones due to military exercises. However, by breaking the codes, he saved 126 people's lives. We don't only trust people to obey the rules, we also trust that they know when to break them. The rules are there for normal operations. We can find bureaucrats infuriating. They simply default to the rules with no consideration for the people those rules were designed to help or protect. In weak organisations, without oversight, too many people will break the rules for personal gain. That's what makes the organisations weak. In strong organisations, people will break the rules because it is the right thing to do for others.

I am about to go into dangerous ground here but I need to say it. In YWAM we have structures, systems and guidelines set up for how our bases and teams run. It makes it easy for registrars for schools if there is a formula of who you accept and who you reject. How many times have we prayed about a situation and the Holy Spirit asks us to do something that

goes against the guidelines? Some of the best people in my teams on paper perhaps shouldn't be here! (Don't ask, is it me?!) When we have no time to communicate with one another, there are times we have to trust each other to break the rules.

How do we build trust in our teams?

1. Face to face. Social media is good to a point but will never develop strong bonds of trust with people like real human contact can. Email and texting is flat communication and can easily be misunderstood and taken the wrong way because it doesn't contain the inflection in the voice or body language as it is being said.

2. Numbers are important. There are optimum sizes for community and leadership teams in order to create climates of trust where people are really able to connect and don't feel on the periphery. I have been in varying size communities and schools from a few to a few hundred. In the LDC we have kept our community size to around 40-50 and this seems ideal. You get to know everyone to a certain level, have conversations with everyone in different process and break out groups, and can create a safe environment where everyone is able to share. Get much larger and you start to have some feeling left out or cliques and separate groups forming. (of course cliques can happen in very small groups without any structural and relational helps.) Leadership teams can either be too small with 3 or too large with 12. Sometimes we have larger teams of 20ish but then need a core team of 4 or 5. I have found 9ish a great number to work with.

3. Be the first to trust. Building trust is a process that begins when one party is willing to risk being the first to open up, being the first to show vulnerability and being the first to let go of control. Demonstrate your trust in others before asking for trust from them. Trust means keeping confidences, carrying out assignments, following through on promises and commitments, supporting others when they need support, giving both honest, positive feedback and helpful constructive feedback, being present at team meetings, being available to help other team members...

4. Self disclosure. This is one way of going first. Letting others know what you stand for, what you value, what you want, what you hope for and what you're willing and not willing to do means disclosing information about yourself. That can be risky. You can't be certain that other people will appreciate your candor, agree with your aspirations, want to enrol, or interpret your words and actions in the way you intend. But once you take the risk of being open, others are more likely to take a similar risk and take the next step necessary to build interpersonal trust.

5. Give personal time not just money or agenda time. Imagine you are moving to a new house. To help you out, one of your friends pays for the moving company – a very act. Another friend comes to your house and helps you pack the boxes, load the truck, travel with you to the new house, unload and unpack the boxes. Two weeks later, both friends need a favour from you on the same day. Which would you feel more inclined to help, the one who gave money or the one who committed time and energy? If we get involved with our team in practical ways and show how we value them, it's worth so much more than time spent on a team in meetings.

6. It takes time. A guy went on a first date with a woman recently. It was an amazing first date. They spent nearly eight hours together. They went for brunch and strolled

around the city and then went to a museum and out for dinner. They talked and talked the whole time. As a result of that amazing first date, they've decided to get married. Needless to say they are both very excited.

You flinched a bit when you read that last two sentences didn't you. Its normal. Our immediate reaction is 'that's crazy.' The fact is, we instinctively know that the strong bond of human trust cannot be formed after one date or even after one week. In contrast if he told you he's been dating the same woman for seven years and they're not married yet, you might think, "what's wrong then?"

I don't know exactly how long it takes to feel like we trust someone. I know it takes more than seven days and I know it takes fewer than seven years. I know it is quicker for some and slower for others. No one knows exactly how long it takes, but it takes patience.

7. Building trust takes intentionality. As a leader, it doesn't happen by default. There will be a climate you create that encourages it and actions and words that you speak that will either enhance it or cause it to dwindle. Relationships of every kind take energy and effort in order for them to continue to grow – so lets ask the Lord what steps we can take.

Until next month
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