

Workplace trust hard to gain

Fox Valley business managers say transparency at top levels critical to a productive staff



Post-Crescent illustration by Jim Rosandick

“Trust is built when people do understand that what they see is what they get.”

STEPHEN ARPS, vice president, general manager of North Shore Bank, Appleton

By Pete Bach

Post-Crescent staff writer

Fostering an atmosphere of trust at work unquestionably leads to a more productive and satisfied work force.

But instilling trust and keeping it present an ongoing challenge to employers.

“Most of them realize it, but not all of them understand what it takes to get there and stay there,” said Tom Wiltzius, senior vice president at the Grand Chute office of Right Management Consultants.

“You have to have transparency,” he said. “People have to see what’s going on. People don’t anticipate every-



thing should be wide open. There has to be accessible confidentiality. But people that want to have high performing relationships have those relationships predicated on trust.”

Wiltzius said ample studies have explored the issue showing a positive correlation between trust and productivity at work, including those by the Washington, D.C.-based

Ways to build trust at work

- Translate corporate values into behaviors and train all employees on those behaviors
- Ensure that leaders behave consistently with core values and communicate in ways that support them
- Ensure employees feel they’re involved in decisions
- Measure employee perceptions of their leaders’ integrity

Source: Society for Human Resource Management

Society for Human Resource Management, which has a chapter in the Fox Cities.

An article in SHRM’s June issue quoted a 2005 study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide. It found that firms with high integrity produced financial returns double those of companies with corporate structures deemed to be of lower integrity.

The SHRM piece said one of the keys is consistency.

Top managers’ behaviors must “align with core values and to employees’ perceptions of how fairly those managers treat the workforce,” the article said.

Trust is vital in any work setting, but that’s especially so in professions where clients have come to demand it, like

banking.

North Shore Bank’s Stephen Arps said it’s rooted in honesty and “transparency. Trust is built when people do understand that what they see is what they get. That whether a situation is positive or negative they’re going to hear the truth about what’s going on.”

If energy is diverted to determine what the true agenda might be, effort is wasted. Conversely, misplaced trust is possibly as bad as a work setting lacking it, said Arps, vice president and general manager of the Northland Avenue branch in Appleton.

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"I actually think with newer employees there should be an expectation it's going to take time to build trust," Arps said. "Trust is something that needs to be earned in the workplace. ... we need to not be taken back by the fact as managers we need to justify our positions and spend time talking through the important issues of our business to help employees gain enough of a feel for it so they can make a good ed-

ucated decision."

Wiltzius said a 2004 study by the Harvard Business Review pointed out that culture, leadership and talent management all factor into the trust equation.

"And if you look at the nuances within those three things, (they) have to do with deep and rich communication transparency and inclusion," he said.

Pete Bach can be reached at 920-993-1000, ext. 430, or at pbach@postcrescent.com.