Truth 36
Trust is a currency not easily earned, but easily spent

Former presidential candidate, Gary Hart, stated something to the effect of “do as I say, not what I do.” Charles Barkley, former professional basketball superstar, once claimed that he is “not a role model.” In our catholic churches, it is getting increasingly difficult to find an archdiocese not haunted by scandal.

In corporate America, despite or perhaps because of additional corporate governance, there has been a reported increase in the discovery and subsequent reporting of corner office misleading and misdoing. You need only to pick up the day’s newspaper to read who is now in trouble, claiming innocence as the handcuffs are being applied.

Unfortunately, we live in skeptical, if not pessimistic times when it comes to personal accountability and trust.

The good news is that it need not be that way.

Trust is the glue that holds together all relationships. It makes organizations “work.” It is the most significant predictor of individuals’ satisfaction with their organizations.

Trust is a character issue. You have direct control over it. If you want the trust of your team, you cannot delegate responsibility for or claim ignorance of values or ethics. You must, by example, and in all interactions, act and direct in a way that is consistent with the expected organizational values and norms for behavior, making the proper choices in ethical and moral matters. This is leadership personified.

There are only two ways to earn trust -- having congruence between your words and your actions, and showing that you care.

The only way that this trust can be earned is to lead by example. This is paramount as research tells us that most of us gain our understanding of the corporate world through upward observation. Your team is watching you!

There are many ways to lead by example.

- Never ask someone to do something that you would not do yourself; therefore, be sure to occasionally work or be in attendance for an off-shift or holiday.

- Set an example with your presence. Arrive early; stay a little later. Get to meetings on time and be prepared. Return phone calls on the same business day. Address everyone in a manner reflective of a business setting. Dress appropriately.

- If you work in a “staff” role, consider getting to occasional operations meeting, thereby enhancing your business knowledge, while keeping your team concurrently informed.

- Recognize that how and where you spend your time is important; pushing paper may endear you to a few, but not many. Face-to-face dialogue and exchange should be encouraged.

- Never let your guard down.

Reacting to a tragedy in which a groom-to-be was shot and killed by 51 bullets from the guns of New York City police officers in November 2006, Mayor Michael Bloomberg raised the observation that people should use restraint before rushing to judgment. In further commenting on
the matter -- in a seeming contradictory manner to his own advice, he also said that the number of shots seemed excessive.

He later clarified his “excessive” observation by stating that he was speaking not as mayor, but as a private citizen.

In the eyes of all of his constituents, Mayor Bloomberg is not and will never be a private citizen.

Whether you are at work, at a social gathering, a service award dinner, or the company’s holiday party, you are always a leader.

- Unless what you are being told jeopardizes someone’s safety, or violates the law or a company policy, you must safeguard confidences at all times.

- Show your vulnerabilities. Your team can help you develop professionally.

- Carry a sense of humor. It is important and it can be the needed organizational medicine. A manager should laugh first at himself or herself, and others thereafter.

- Admitting mistakes and learning from them is part of individual and collective growth and maturity. It also demonstrates confidence and humility, and it may also be a platform for renewed team unity. JetBlue’s CEO and founder, David Neeleman, is an example of this, taking the debacle of the 2007 Valentine’s Day storm that snarled air traffic for days, and turning it into an opportunity and pledge for better customer service going forward.

- Learn how to lose. You will mess-up. Learn from the experience, recover, and apply the new knowledge. It will not be the end of your career. Pick-up, brush-off, and move forward.

- Set standards for productivity and quality, and then walk the talk. If you want people to model their behavior after you -- and they will, you must practice what you preach.

- Take every opportunity to show that you care deeply about the well being of every employee, as well as for the long-term interests of the organization.

One cautionary note: the fastest to vanquish credibility and trust is to create a double standard around your words and actions. Some of the most “violated” examples of this organizational incongruity are in the cost-cutting area when “exceptions” are made to a hiring freeze or the elimination of consultants; a travel ban or the elimination of certain reimbursements; or new expense guidelines. It never seems to fail that the party making the exceptions is the one mandating the broader need for them.