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The Shopkeeper and The Chicken

I recently heard a story that illustrated a key principle of leadership. The story goes like this:

It was nearing the end of the day in a small country store when a woman came in to ask the shopkeeper if he had any chickens left. Now you need to realize that this was before refrigeration, so the cleaned chickens were kept in a wooden barrel filled with cold water. The shopkeeper had one chicken left and replied: “why, yes I do.” He reached into the barrel and pulled out the chicken and quoted the price of \$1.35. The woman replied, “it looks a little small, do you have a bigger one?” Without flinching, he reached back into the barrel, sloshed around in the cold water pulled the chicken back out and said: “well, here is a bigger one, the price is \$1.85.” Pleased with what the shopkeeper found, she replied: “I’ll take both.” A cute little story that brings a smile to our face, but in reality, this could easily be a scenario that is played out daily in our organizations.

Stephen Covey said “Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.” Without trust you can’t lead people because leadership is based on building secure, trusting, and collaborative relationships with those you lead. Covey went on to say “A High Trust Leader is an individual who has **unquestionably strong personal credibility**, has the **ability to create and grow trust** with others interpersonally, and who is then able to extend that trust organizationally.” Unquestionably strong personal credibility. Wow, now that’s a high standard! It is, and those of us who desire to be leaders must ascribe to that high of a standard. It may not be easy, but it is very doable if we work on it daily. Let’s look at a couple of examples:

- **Tell the truth.** I know that sounds simplistic but just tell the truth. Our shopkeeper didn’t tell the truth, and it certainly cost him plenty. For sure the woman will not be coming back, and she will probably tell many people of the shopkeeper’s dishonesty. But you might say “I would never tell a lie like that,” and I believe you. But do you always tell the truth? Telling the truth goes much deeper than simply not telling a lie. Do you let people know where you stand? Do you call things as you see them? Do you bend the facts a bit to push your agenda? Do you knowingly leave people with a false impression by not correcting the situation? They may not be lies, but are you telling the truth?
- **Live a life of transparency.** Do you tell the truth in a way that can be easily verified? Please allow me to give you an example: You are in a meeting, and someone says “Several people are upset about the decision to change this process.” Oh, really. How many are several? Who are the people? What are they upset about? This type of a statement may very well be true, but leads to distrust because it is too vague. Add specifics whenever possible, which will illustrate that you are open and genuine. Take the time to speak with clarity and completeness.

When we ask people to join our organization and follow us, we are asking them to invest a priceless and limited resource. We are asking them to invest their time with us. Are we worthy of such an investment? Are we living and leading in a way that they will gladly make that investment? It’s completely up to you. Lead well!