

Building Trust – Stage Three, Openness

Having identified the common goal and implemented responsibility with authority it is necessary to be able to hold open, frank and unemotional dialogue. Openness is not about free access to the Profit & Loss account or the strategic plan it's about letting people know how you feel about something.

For example, twenty minutes into a board meeting one of the directors held up his hand and brought the meeting to a stop; he then addressed a fellow director with the view that what had just been said had upset him. The second director asked what message had been given, accepted he had communicated badly, very quickly cleared the misunderstanding, gained full agreement for the point made and the meeting then continued.

Had this not happened, the first director would have deliberated on the unintentional insult, not contributed well to the rest of the meeting and brooded on it until some time later accosted the second director who would be in blissful ignorance that everything had been fine – a scenario for generating more heat than light.

So why don't we get openness?

Openness demands acknowledging that there are things you might not fully understand and, in that admission, might be open to potential conflict, disagreement or ridicule. In a corporate or political world where every point scored moves you a bit further up the ladder, it is quite normal to be closed and protective as it is a survival mechanism.

Additionally, responsibility with authority can be a rare commodity because the common goal may be hidden, ambiguous or badly articulated; it needs to be there to provide the bedrock to openness by providing the basis to explain, amplify or even change a decision.

So how might openness be developed?

Openness demands confidence in the common objective and the strength to allow others to work unsupervised towards a common end. It also requires the individual to leave their ego behind and join the 'common body' that is the business or the project. Openness with others encourages them to have the objectivity and confidence to be open with you.

Some of the world's greatest inspirations have been humble and open; some of the worst have been unapproachable and feigning infallibility.

Openness demands the strength to challenge and to be challenged whilst recognising that others have strengths and weaknesses which can complement a team; it should not be used as a stepping stone to personal advancement.