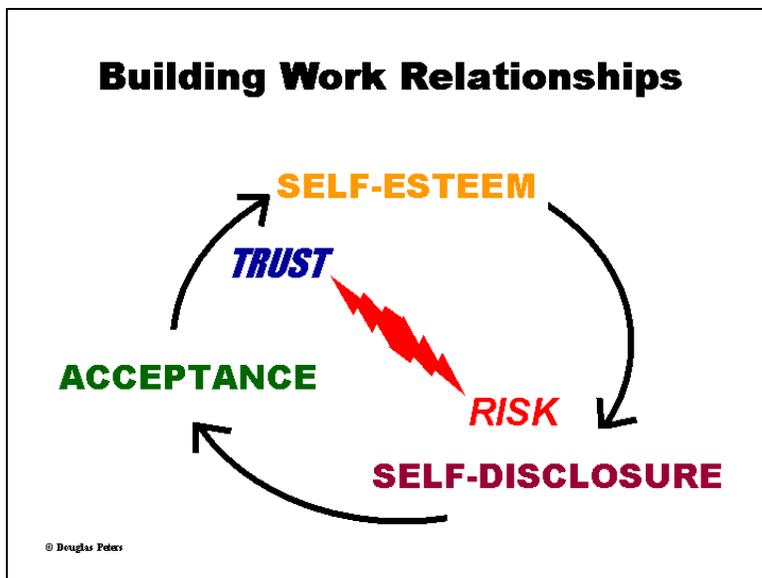


BUILDING WORK RELATIONSHIPS (BWR)

This model anchors our workshop on Building Work Relationships. The workshop gets people working together better to efficiently and effectively build work relationships based on trust and personal risk taking. Increased risk taking drives action on complex and difficult issues. Increased trust builds strong personal networks that encourage openness and honesty when dealing with complex and emotional issues. High levels of trust and personal risk create an information rich environment for determining the right things to do and for doing those things right the first time.

Elements of Relationships

There are five key elements that are critical to building work relationships - self-esteem, self-disclosure, acceptance, trust, and risk taking.



Self-Esteem is our evaluation of who we are as a person. In my workshops I ask people what it means when I say that I hold somebody in high esteem? They typically reply it means that I respect them, I have confidence in them, and I trust them. *Self-Esteem* is the respect, confidence and trust you have in your self.

Self-Esteem is critical to relationship building

because it determines how and what we communicate to other people. Think of somebody you know who has low self-esteem - they lack self-confidence, self-respect and trust in themselves. Now image they work with you and do not like the way you are treating them; how would they let you know? People with low self-esteem typically would not say anything to you directly – they are more likely to ignore you or talk about you to others. And if they do talk to you it will most likely be in some type of emotional outburst that seems out of proportion to the situation.

Now think about someone you know that has high self-esteem; they have self-confidence, self-respect and trust in themselves. Image they work with you and don't like the way you are treating them; how would they let you know. People with high self-esteem can avoid you, talk about you and get angry at you; but they also have the option of talking directly too you in a calm and rationale way. Self-esteem controls how and what we communicate to others.

By controlling how and what we communicate to others, self-esteem ends up controlling how we approach each of the other elements in the relationship building process. It control how and what we self-disclose and how and what we accept. Therefore self-esteem is the controlling factor on how fast and how well we build work relationships.

Self-disclosure is sharing information about yourself to help others understand you in the moment and any relevant information that will help others understand where you are coming from. Self-Disclosure is how people get to know you.

If you give people a choice of working with someone they have a good working relationships with, someone they have a bad working relationship with, or a total stranger, people typically chose the person they have a good relationship with. If you ask them why, they will say because they know them; if their trustworthy, how they operate, their abilities and limitations, etc. If you ask them how they got to know all of these things about this person they will tell you - it took a long time.

Self-Disclosure is how we get to know each other more quickly. I was working with a new product team that had an interesting experience in relationship building. The team had to travel from Minneapolis to Chicago to conduct some business. Instead of flying they decided to rent a van and drive. They asked each team member to bring one of their favorite CD's to play. When you are trapped in a van for nine hours, you can only talk about business for so long. Soon the conversation turned to personal topics that lead to a great deal of self-disclosure. When the adventures was over the team felt their time and the van had been the best teambuilding experience anyone had ever experienced.

Self-Disclosure is an extremely powerful tool because it causes us to relate to each other as people. I was watching an old movie one time about World War I. The movie started with battles raging and French and German soldiers killing each other. Shortly into the movie the plot unfolded where a German and French soldier were trapped in a situation where they could not kill each other, but could not get away. Over the course of the movie they shared pictures of their family, shared cigarettes and matches, and began to see each other as people not soldiers. In the final part of the movie the two were thrown back into combat where they had to fight to the death – exposing mans inhumanity towards man. How did the soldiers get from the glory of war at the beginning of the movie to “mans inhumanity to man” at the end of the movie. They built a relationship with each other. It is hard to kill people you know and like.

While war may seem a little extreme, people in business often complain about “back stabbing” and “turf wars” that cause “career damage”. Typically this happens most often when people do not know each other very well. It is hard to “stab someone in the back” that you know and like.

Risk is an inherent part of relationship building. Self- Disclosure is risky; because sometimes people use this information against you. Self-Disclosure can result in someone getting hurt, angry or rejected. I was working with a business team where the team leader disclosed that leading a successful team would be a real boast to his career; if the team

went well he expected to get a promotion. Several team members took this comment to mean the team leader was going to take credit for the work of the team. These members viewed the leader with suspicion and challenged all of his actions. When the leader got tired of the constant challenges and responded with frustration and anger, the team members began to actively work against the team leader. In this case the team leaders self-disclosure, and how others accepted it, resulted in damage to work relationships and team dynamics.

Because of the risk associated with self-disclosure some believe the safest thing to do is not self-disclose anything. But not self-disclosing presents even greater risk of hurt, anger and rejection. Making judgments about other people is critical to our success in life – we must do it everyday. When people are unwilling to self-disclose we are forced to make these judgments on superficial information such as level of authority, race, gender, dress, religion, age, or physical characteristics. This leads to stereotyping of individuals and increases the likelihood of someone getting hurt, anger and rejected.

Most minorities in business understand the risk of not self-disclosing. I was working with a group of high talent new hire engineers in an organization, all of whom were minorities. One of the black engineers noted the lack of black people in the company, and in the surrounding community. He wisely noted that if he did not tell people about himself they would judge him by what they know about blacks, and since most people had no personal experience with blacks, they would judge him by they stereotypical black gangsters they saw on television. He noted with pride, “I may be rejected for who I am’ but I would rather be rejected for who I am than for something I am not”!

Acceptance, another critical element of relationship building, is how you treat people’s self-disclosures. People are more willing to self-disclose when it is met with acceptance. Acceptance does not necessarily mean agreement or approval; it simply means that your disclosure has been understood and valued – i.e. “I understand you dislike doing detailed work, and I value that you shared that with me, but I still need you to pay more attention to detail so we can avoid so many mistakes”.

Over time acceptance leads to trust. If you are consistently accepting of others, people learn they can trust sharing things with you, even things you may disagree with. The more people trust you, the more they are willing to disclose things to you.

Trust is like a bank account. When you first meet people, and no little about them, there is limited trust. The first time a disclosure is met with trust, it results in a deposit in the trust account. Over time the trust account gets bigger and bigger. Having a large trust account is critical in difficult times. A boss, for example, who has a large trust account will find his staff will trust him even when he does things they do not like or agree with. Because of the trust they know “that’s just not like him, there must be something else going on that he just can’t share right now”.

BWR Process

Building work relationships is a process. It is not something you do once and it is done, it is always a work in process. Understanding this process allows you to assess your relationships, intervene to accelerate their development, and to make repairs when necessary.

Self-esteem is the controlling element in how you approach the process of relationship building; the greater your self-esteem, the greater your willingness to risk self-disclosure. Therefore maintaining and enhancing self-esteem is a critical first step in the relationship building process.

You can build self-esteem in others by providing them with *personal, positive recognition*. Giving compliments, praise, “warm fuzzies”, promotions, recognition, rewards, and active listening all send a message to people that you have confidence in them, respect them, and trust them.

You can encourage self-disclosure by taking the risk to self-disclose first. The more you self-disclose, the more opportunity people have to understand and value you. Disclosing relevant information from your past helps people know where you are coming from. Disclosing your reaction to things in the moment lets people know where you are; and disclosing your intentions lets people know where you are going. When people understand where you are coming from, where you are, and where you are going, they understand a lot about you.

You can be accepting of others by simply listening their ideas, seeking out their opinion and finding something positive in what they say and do.

Greater self-esteem leads to greater self-disclosures. Greater self-disclosure leads to greater acceptance. Greater acceptance leads to greater self-esteem.

The Relationship Dilemma

Building work relationships creates a classic dilemma for people. People do not like to take risks (self-disclosure) with people they do not trust. But you cannot build trust, without taking a risk to learn if people are trustworthy. Risk is an inherent part of life; it cannot be avoided. In the world of relationships, the more you avoid taking risks, the more risk you create for yourself

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