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Keeping It Real: Values Determine Trust in Leadership

There has been a long-standing debate about whether leaders are born or made. There have been many theories offered over the decades by renowned research psychologists and leadership gurus about what produces followership. A few things stand out that greatly impact trust in leadership.

As a few of these characteristics and competencies are described, think about your own experience with people who have been positive influences in your life.

- **Believable** – What makes a person believable? How do I determine if I can trust what someone is telling me?
 - What is their track record? Do they follow through? What is the perception of others that I trust regarding this person?
 - Do they have courage? Will they “go to bat” and speak up when something is out of sync with what we say is important?
 - Is the person an independent thinker who will listen to others, yet form their own opinion even when it may not make them as popular with the masses? Do they deliver their message in a respectfully assertive way?
 - Is the individual willing to explain why they make decisions; and do they show appreciation for other perspectives yet are willing to disagree to do what is best for the organization?
- **Humility/Humanness** – Does the leader have confidence, yet have an open mind to be influenced by new information?
 - Does the individual show vulnerability by admitting times when they are unsure, frustrated, and demonstrate how they have worked to improve so that others feel more comfortable in making mistakes and learning?
 - Does the person seek feedback from multiple sources (peers, supervisors, direct reports and “naysayers”) to understand their impact

on others? Can they be vulnerable enough to admit that they struggle the same as people at all levels?

- Is their openness and accessibility demonstrated? We can say we have an “open door” yet do we display that other people’s needs are very important by making time for people to express concerns? Listening is demonstrated by action.
- **Actions Match Words** – If we were to record what the leader is saying, would a video recording of what they do match what they are sharing verbally? Of all the areas of agreement, this is the one that stands out as the most important for people to assess whether someone is worthy of followership, credibility and trust.
 - In cases where there does not seem to be a match, can the person be approached to ask about this incongruence? What will the response be ... one of appreciation, or one of defensiveness?
 - What are we doing to make sure we understand how we are being perceived?

Every action, every word, every exchange is determining how each of our relationships progresses in the area of trust, integrity and potential for positive leadership. These competencies are sometimes called “soft”, yet they require more courage, energy and humility than any other area of focus for development.

The mission for leadership self-improvement is critical for individual, workgroup and organizational effectiveness. If you choose to accept the challenge, it will lead to increased productivity, higher engagement, physical and emotional retention, succession planning and personal/professional fulfillment.

Will you accept this challenge?