



## The Three Dimensions of Leadership Trust

By David A. O'Brien

Clarity and purpose are among the key drivers of mission-driven organizations both large and small. Not surprisingly, those nonprofits that are able to thrive during these challenging times are able to harness these key drivers to create value for all of their stakeholders. Another key driver of this important outcome is the senior leaders' capacity to fully utilize the mission to guide the organization through the turbulent waters of today's nonprofit environment. The list of high priority issues confronting most nonprofit leaders today is by all accounts long and growing: Competition, Funding, Accreditation, Succession Planning, Stakeholder Value, Revenue Growth, Employee Engagement and on and on the list goes. While all of these and more are very real in most organizations, the common denominator influencing a successful response may very well be trust – leadership trust to be specific. Sure there are other factors at play here but absent trust in your leadership, your capacity to turn these “front burner” issues into opportunities may be limited.

Consider your greatest success of the past year. Was it possible to achieve this success without others? More than likely it was not. There were no doubt a wide range of people who played a supporting role in your success: your team, peers, boss, customers, vendors and possibly your Board. Trust is the vital element that allows two or more people who work together to know that they can rely on each other implicitly. It is in no small way the driver of collaboration and synergy at its deepest and most powerful level.

Today's changing landscape of work coupled with the overall state of the economy

has created both a need and an opportunity for leaders to examine the power of trust and its countless rewards. To be sure, there are as many definitions or interpretations of the word trust as there are people on your team or in your organization. In an effort to build clarity and a framework for consideration, I present what I refer to as the three dimensions of leadership trust.

The first dimension encompasses trust in your skill and capacity to achieve success in your specific role. In this dimension, all of your stakeholders trust that you not only know what you are doing but also that you know where you are going and how you are going to get there. Even more than this, they trust that it is the right direction.

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The second dimension of trust encompasses character. In this dimension, your stakeholders trust that everything you do is done with integrity and consistency and that your actions are aligned with the greater good of the organization. This dimension, by my estimation, may be the most important, as character and integrity represent fundamental elements of true leadership. Beyond these factors, your stakeholders trust that you honor your commitments by consistently doing what you say you will do.

A third dimension that warrants consideration is leadership intention. In this dimension, your stakeholders trust that all that you do is not just good for the organization but also good for each member of the team. It is often that unspoken support that you give to your team that assures them that you are in their corner doing what it takes to help them succeed. It also encompasses fairness and transparency. Like leadership character, leadership intention often serves as a guidepost for not only finding the path to true leadership but also being able to stay there.

Building and maintaining your leadership trust capacity is no small task. It is by all accounts a worthy goal that must be pursued with clarity and purpose. Truly

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investing the time to explore the impact of your leadership trust may very well be the first step in not only making sense of your "front burner" issues but also being able to tackle the list with a clear outcome in sight as you guide your mission-driven organization.

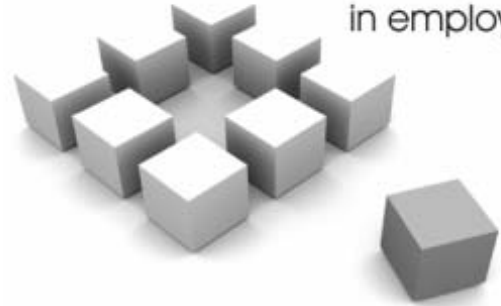
Five more things that you can do now:

1. Give yourself permission to take a 10 minute "time-out" from your hectic schedule and consider how the three dimensions apply to you in your role as a leader.
2. Initiate a conversation with your peer group or a trusted mentor about the scope and impact of leadership trust and its connection to employee engagement and organizational success.
3. Try to identify other dimensions of leadership trust and look for their connection to leadership excellence.
4. Seek input from your team and other key stakeholders about what leadership trust means to them and look for ways to expand your leadership trust capacity.
5. Invest 3 minutes to complete the free Leadership Trust Inventory at [www.workchoicesolutions.com](http://www.workchoicesolutions.com) (key words: Learning Resources / Leadership Assessments). ■

*David O'Brien is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a nationally recognized provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting services with a long history of adding value. He works with a wide range of corporate and nonprofit clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. To learn more, please visit [www.workchoicesolutions.com](http://www.workchoicesolutions.com).*



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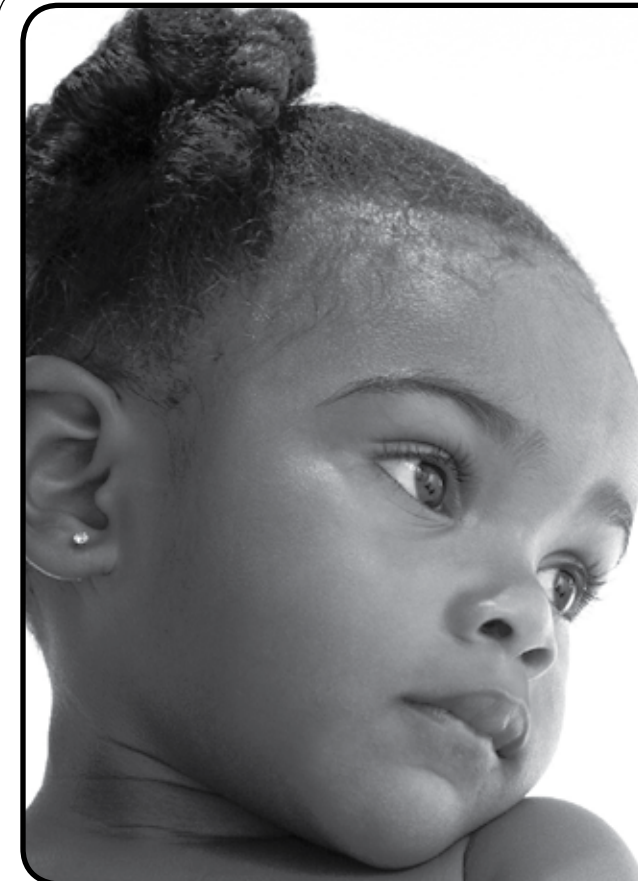
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