



# Belief: The Source of Authentic Leadership

**“Exceptional organizations are not merely defined by trust, but by a form of deep trust we call belief... belief, like respect, cannot be acquired, It can only be earned.”**

*~Chet Scott, Built to Lead*

Today, as the economy emerges from a tough recession, top leaders everywhere are searching for the keys to re-ignite growth and profits. Senior management of businesses of all types, and especially service-oriented firms, know that **performance improvement hinges on employee engagement**, the whole-hearted buy-in to and active support of your company's mission, purpose, and strategies. Companies with a "world-class" level of employee engagement enjoy a range of business performance advantages over organizations with lower employee engagement levels – for example, a 2.6-times rate of Earnings Per Share growth over competitors' EPS.

**Employee engagement is never a given.** And in the aftershocks of our widespread economic meltdown, fears can affect every employee's engagement. Those fears persist from past layoffs, ongoing personal concerns about job loss, and the burdens of covering the work of laid-off co-workers. Employee disengagement is only exacerbated by our recent economic environment.

Statistically, employees were not fully onboard with their companies prior to the recession either: for years, annual surveys by Gallup and other organizations clearly showed that, on average in the typical American company, **no more than 30% of employees are actively engaged**. 70% are either not engaged or were actively disengaged<sup>1</sup>!

Conversely, in world-class companies, 63% of employees were actively engaged<sup>2</sup>, and, by extension, were contributing significantly to their organizations' acknowledged excellence.

At the root of the problem of disengagement lies an active and growing mistrust of top leaders among employees. Recent studies show that **half or more of American workers do not have confidence in their leaders to "act with trust and integrity."**<sup>3</sup> That means that today's leaders face an immediate, potentially debilitating threat to the growth and success of their organizations from the very people they depend upon the most. In order to build performance, leaders must improve employee engagement.

According to leading Ohio-based performance transformation consultancy *Built to Lead*, **the way to effectively improve employee engagement is to address the issue of trust head-on.**

Much of the writing and research on organizational excellence describes exceptional leadership as mastery of several key principles such as:

**Vision:** defining why an organization exists, what its values are and what its direction should be

**Inspiration:** catching people's hearts on fire; guiding individuals whose personal values match the organizational vision, whose self interests match the firm's interests

**Alignment:** purposefully applying the vision and inspiration within systems that align around that organization's core focus

**Expectation:** establishing performance standards for the organization and all individuals within it

conviction  
confidence  
principle  
structure  
doubt  
trust  
motivation  
management  
organization  
effectiveness  
communication  
team  
trust  
confidence  
expectation  
suspect  
assume  
distrust  
question  
connect  
creed  
discuss  
value  
practice  
mistrust  
control  
guidance  
direction  
conduct  
development  
success  
performance  
growth  
matter  
assign  
reliance  
cynicism  
plan  
foundation  
faith  
doubt  
hope  
betrayal

What does it mean  
to you...?

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According to Chet Scott and the team of Builders at *Built to Lead*, at the heart of these – or any – effective guiding principles is *trust*. “Exceptional organizations are not merely defined by trust, but by a form of deep trust we call belief. Performance is always better within a deep-trust organization, where the entire team is aligned on a common mission and believes that everyone else is, too. Yet,” he cautions, **“belief, like respect, cannot be acquired. It can only be earned.”**

For the leaders he advises, Scott recommends a bit of necessary, albeit uncomfortable, self-assessment about deep trust. “Ask yourself a series of questions around the four distinct arenas of trust: Personal, Ethical, Situational and Strategic:

- “Do I trust myself? Do I have the self-awareness and self-discipline to affirmatively answer the question,  
***Would I follow Me?***
- “Do I keep my word? Am I transparent in saying what I intend to do, and then do I follow through?  
***Am I trustworthy?***
- “Do I have the common good at the center of my actions or am I following a personal agenda? Do I understand what my team is going through?  
***Do I care?***
- “Do I know what I am doing? Do I have the necessary knowledge, skill and experience to pull us forward and achieve our goals?  
***Do I believe in who, what and where I am leading?”***

Time spent assessing these four categories can help you, as a leader, begin to understand the nature of the deep trust – and gauge the degree of likely-present mistrust – that exists within your organization.

Fellow Builder Jim Sullivan adds, “We have examined thousands of individuals, teams, and leaders through our study of history, biography, and the leadership literature of the modern business media. All would-be leaders face three questions, whether consciously asked or not, from potential followers: ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Where are you taking us?’ and ‘Why?’ Here’s what we’ve found: *Most leaders today DO NOT KNOW the answers to these three questions.*

***Do You?***

<sup>1</sup> Gallup Management Journal Annual Surveys 2006-2008

<sup>2</sup> Gallup Consulting 2009 research publication: “Employee Engagement: What’s Your Engagement Ratio?”

<sup>3</sup> Survey of American Workers, “Work USA 2004/2005,” Watson Wyatt Worldwide

