People Make The Difference whitepaper
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Do you have a trustworthy team environment?

Walter Mischel's marshmallow test showed us how self-control can be an indicator of productivity levels, but it also revealed how trustworthy environments can affect the behaviour of individuals.

Within the test, there was a small percentage of children who ate their treat immediately after their instructor left the room, simply because they didn't trust their instructor to come back with the second treat. There might be fewer lollies involved in our teams and organisations, but the results can be devastating for teams and leaders alike.

What happens when employees don't trust their environment or their leaders?

The most common result of an untrustworthy environment is for team members to simply stop communicating. A lack of trust usually makes people feel unsafe and when people feel unsafe, they tend not to want to speak up when something goes wrong, for fear of backlash. Not only are they scared of retaliation; they don't feel like their opinion will be valued either, so they close up and stop contributing altogether.

As we saw with the kids and the marshmallows, when employees don't trust their leaders, they start doing their own thing – like diving in and eating the marshmallow straight away – even when it's not in their own, or their team's, best interests to do so. Cohesive teams rely on all the team member's being on the same page; when there's a lack of trust and they start to go off in different directions, it only harms the team's unity.

What does a trustworthy team look like?

- Everybody trusts each other's ability to work together despite differences. They also know that in a diverse team, there will be different opinions but these opinions deserve to be heard without judgement.
- Everybody recognises their fellow team members' talents and abilities – nobody questions why anyone else is there and everyone knows that the team is strongest when they work together to achieve a goal.
- Everybody will keep lines of communication open. All team members are encouraged to ask for help, raise issues and contribute ideas. Keeping communication at the forefront of the team's mind means that everyone is always informed so they can perform their job to the best of their ability.

Trustworthy team environments don't just happen on their own, they are the effort of everyone in the team and are lead by reliable leaders.

What does a reliable leader look like?

- They are consistent – this doesn't mean that they're always likeable! They don't just do what you want them to do, they do what is needed and they do what is right. Making decisions using consistent ethics means that you can always count on them, regardless of the situation.
- They don't rush into things. They think things out thoroughly and completely, but without procrastinating, so that they don't send their team hurtling into the unknown. They know what is going on and they make sure they communicate all necessary information to their team.
- They have routines, processes and procedures. Every team member knows exactly where they stand and how things work in day-to-day team operations. When there's a problem, they know the steps they need to take and who to report to. This makes sure that things run smoothly and team members never feel left behind.

Perhaps you read through those traits of teams and leaders and you can tick off every one. Unfortunately, more often than not, both teams and leaders aren't up to scratch on every single one of those traits. If you're ready to create a trustworthy team environment and become a strong, reliable leader, People Make The Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peoplemakethedifference.com.au.