

TRUST! Would you work for free?

"To be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved."

With the unusually tough market place seeing people like British Airways asking staff to work for FREE for a month, it will put a huge weight on the trust between people and the business. The trust required to work for free, in the hope of being treated fairly in the long run is huge. Get it right, and BA could pull off a masterstroke. Get it wrong and the whole BA world could be tumbling down or at the very least cause enormous bad feeling, resistance and you guessed it – strikes.

Want to rant about a flight delay or ask for more coffee? Tread carefully as your airline's staff may just be working for free. British Airways recently asked its 40,000 employees to consider flying the flag for nothing for up to one month. "Colleagues are being urged to help the airline's cash-saving drive by signing up for unpaid leave or unpaid work," read an article in BA News, their in-house newspaper. Chief executive Willie Walsh, who has pledged to forgo his \$100,000 monthly salary in July, said the airline was caught in a "fight for survival." So is it a genuine fight for survival or a cruel way of bullying staff? Many of whom will be on low wages and terrified at the thought of losing jobs. Without all the information and the capacity to understand if it is a genuine call for help, staff will have to trust Mr Walsh.

We know its turbulent times, the signs are everywhere. One upmarket hotel chain is chasing down costs at every opportunity including blatantly cheap loo paper that is more primary school than country house quality. Many firms have gone to town on staff costs in recent months, from salary cuts to mandatory unpaid leaves. But BA is going further. Volunteers can sacrifice between a week and one month's worth of salary, or else spread the pain by taking a reduced salary for three to six months. Union officials have scoffed at the proposal. "Willie Walsh can afford to work a month for free," says a spokesman for Unite, BA's biggest union. "Our members can't."

So if some members cannot financially afford to support the company initiative but find themselves in a 'one choice' situation, what will be the long term costs in the trust and relationships? Stephen Covey (The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People) uses the metaphor of Emotional Bank Account to describe "the amount of trust that's been built up in a relationship". Trust is needed for a relationship to thrive. "Without trust, we may manage to accommodate and endure another person, however, it cannot be mutually satisfying in the long run." Apply that to people in a business. Imagine trying to drive a car with the hand brake on; it will work but it will be costly, slow and inefficient – it's like driving a business with no trust.

Unclear expectations can undermine our communication and trust. "The cause of almost all relationship difficulties is rooted in conflicting or ambiguous expectations around roles and goals." So what are BA's goals and expectations and importantly what are the corresponding needs and expectations of BA's greatest asset, their people? How well this communication is managed and how much trust is created could well affect the long term success of the business.



Showing appreciation is a big part of building up deposits in the Emotional Bank Account, so how can BA show appreciation to their staff without any cash to pay their wages? What will their staff expect and can BA meet those expectations – expressed and unexpressed?

If trust is the glue that holds teams together and those teams fly millions of people around the world at 30,000 feet, I sure hope Mr Walsh is good at (life) giving appreciation and will honour the trust he is asking his people to give to BA.

BA may be trying to save their financial Bank Account from being decimated, but at what cost to the Emotional Bank accounts with all their people? And who will pay the interest? Will it be BA paying out big bonuses to staff when times are good, or will it be us suffering poorer customer service, no extra coffee and fewer ears open to our needs?

Want to know how to build up the trust in your business? Have a look at my website!

PJ Stevens