

# How High Is Your Trust Level?

## 5 Steps to Creating a High-Trust Organization

By Kevin Scheid and Carl Dodrill



“Trust me, there will be no more layoffs,” said the CEO. “This time we have it fixed.” What is it about a statement like this that makes you skeptical? Can managers build and maintain trust in an organization when it seems we all have a predisposition to distrust management?

Of course, this is just an academic question for Christians, right? Isn't the word “trust” synonymous with “Christian?” After all, your organization is run by Christians, your peers are Christians, and everyone who works for you is Christian. So, of course, Christian organizations have high levels of trust! Right?

We surveyed employees in Christian organizations to discover the answer to this question. *Christianity Today's Best Christian Places to Work* program (see April 2003 issue of

*Christian Management Report*) is a project sponsored by *Christianity Today*, Best Christian Workplaces Institute and Christian Management Association. Last spring, 85 Christian organizations participated, with more than 8,700 employees completing surveys by answering 56 multiple choice and three open-ended questions.

The survey results represented the attitudes and perceptions of more than 15,000 employees at a statistically significant and high level of confidence. Unfortunately, the results show that simply being a Christian organization doesn't mean immunity from low trust levels.

To be fair, Christian organizations did better than similar secular organizations on the employee survey for overall workplace satisfaction and trust. Some Christian workplaces

| High-Trust Christian Organizations (Over 100 Employees) |   |                     |                  |      |
|---|---|---------------------|------------------|------|
|   | Name                                      | Location            | President        | Emp. |
| 1   | Multnomah Bible College and Seminary      | Portland, Ore.      | Daniel Lockwood  | 175  |
| 2   | Coalition for Christian Outreach          | Pittsburgh, Pa.     | Daniel Dupee     | 150  |
| 3   | Tyndale House Publishers                  | Carol Stream, Ill.  | Mark Taylor      | 276  |
| 4   | SIM U.S.A.                                | Charlotte, N.C.     | Steve Strauss    | 119  |
| 5   | Dallas Theological Seminary               | Dallas, Texas       | Mark Bailey      | 248  |
| 6   | Evangelical Christian Credit Union (ECCU) | Brea, Calif.        | Mark Holbrook    | 233  |
| 7   | Whitworth College                         | Spokane, Wash.      | William Robinson | 355  |
| 8   | Zondervan Publishing                      | Grand Rapids, Mich. | Bruce Ryskamp    | 320  |
| 9   | Western Baptist College                   | Salem, Ore.         | Reno Hoff        | 120  |
| 10  | Group Publishing                          | Loveland, Colo.     | Thom Schultz     | 275  |

| High-Trust Christian Organizations (Less Than 100 Employees) |   |                    |                  |      |
|--|---|--------------------|------------------|------|
|  | Name                                    | Location           | President        | Emp. |
| 1  | Covenant Christian High School          | Indianapolis, Ind. | Brian Hudson     | 36   |
| 2  | Paraclete Press                         | Orleans, Mass.     | Lillian Miao     | 41   |
| 3  | The DeMoss Group                        | Duluth, Ga.        | Mark DeMoss      | 18   |
| 4  | Christian Heritage Academy              | Northfield, Ill.   | Nancy Goodman    | 36   |
| 5  | Christian Medical & Dental Associations | Bristol, Tenn.     | David L. Stevens | 62   |
| 6  | New Mission Systems International       | Fort Myers, Fla.   | Phil Hudson      | 26   |
| 7  | Medical Ambassadors, International      | Modesto, Calif.    | Paul Calhoun     | 50   |
| 8  | King's Way Christian School             | Vancouver, Wash.   | Stephen Jensen   | 52   |

\*Rank based on the employee survey responses to *Christianity Today's Best Christian Places to Work*, a project of *Christianity Today* and Best Christian Workplaces Institute. This ranking is based on the employee responses to the question: “There is a high level of trust in my organization between senior management and employees.” The number of employees indicates U.S. employees only.

came very close to the ideal. When asked what they liked about their organization, employees from high-trust organizations made statements such as:

■ “The people I work with all love the Lord, and are committed to his vision for our school!!! My workplace is home away from home!” (Covenant Christian High School).

■ “Our company is an apostolate of a Christian community, so all my fellow employees are also fellow pilgrims in our shared life together. It’s a privilege to work in a company where all employees share in our common life” (Paraclete Press).

■ “The ultimate goal in this company, to minister to the spiritual needs of people,

These are just four of the hundreds of similar statements made by employees in high-trust organizations. It’s great to read these comments, creating the desire in us to examine what these organizations are doing, package it, and send it out to managers all over the world.

Unfortunately, not all Christian organizations elicit glowing comments.

# Unfortunately,

## the results of the survey show that simply being a Christian organization doesn’t mean immunity from low trust levels.

■ “Our leaders have outstanding integrity which earns them tremendous respect from faculty and staff” (Multnomah Bible College and Biblical Seminary).

primarily through literature consistent with biblical principles, is apparent in every department, from the performance of those working in the warehouse to those leading our company” (Tyndale House).

In fact, some of the comments from employees of low-trust organizations paint a picture of unhappy people unable to trust management.

### Trust Research

According to Dr. Edwards Deming, the father of statistical process control, modern Japanese management, and total quality management, 93 percent of all organizational problems are caused by management, so possibly only seven percent of the low-trust level can be attributed to employees. It raises the question as to what managers do differently in high-trust organizations from those in low-trust organizations.

Statistical analysis of the data from the Best Christian Places to Work survey gives us revealing insights into the world of trust. The statement, “There is a high level of trust in my organization between senior management and employees,” was answered with a strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. The answers are highly correlated to overall workplace satisfaction, coming in only slightly behind how well the organization is managed.

To determine the key elements of trust, we completed a multiple regression analysis, finding the top five elements that account for 65 percent of the variance of the trust question. The five statements starting with the highest cor-

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relation are: 1) my organization conducts its activities openly and honestly; 2) my organization is well-managed; 3) my organization's leaders demonstrate compassion for people at all levels; 4) my organization involves employees in decisions that affect them; 5) my organization values diversity of cultural backgrounds, personal styles and ideas among our employees.

**Other Studies**

This model is very similar to one derived from a study completed by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), *Measuring Organizational Trust, Cross-Cultural Survey and Index, 2000*. This research is based on the results from 4,000 employees representing 52 organizations, ranging in size from 100 to 146,000 employees around the world.

The purpose of the study was to identify specific organizational attitudes, norms and values that influence organizational trust. The five key factors discovered in order of significance were: 1) concern for employees; 2) openness and honesty; 3) identification; 4) reliability; and 5) competence.

Additionally, we find some similarities in the model presented in a book by Robert Bruce Shaw, *Trust in the Balance, Building Successful Organizations on Results, Integrity and Concern*. Shaw identified three trust imperatives: 1) achieving results by following through on business commitments; 2) acting with integrity by behaving in a consistent manner; and 3) demonstrating concern by respecting the well-being of others.

The similarity among the three independent research projects is striking. When comparing the BCWI and IABC results, we see openness and honesty at the top of both surveys. Compassion and concern for employees are nearly identical and, when we add elements of concern for employees, we see diversity fits into this category as well. IABC divided the management issue into reliability and competence, causing these issues to match nicely. The identification issue with IABC includes some aspect of involving employees in decisions. Allowing employees input in the company increases their sense of ownership and commitment.

IABC's identification factor also has a large component related to employees identifying with the mission, vision and goals of the organization. For Christian organizations, this is more of a prerequisite for work than for trust. Our sense from the survey is that few people work in Christian organizations for the money; most feel called to the work.

Similarly, Shaw's model is nearly identical with the top three issues: results, integrity and concern. However,

it leaves out mission identification, diversity and employee involvement.


**Biblical Principles of Trust**

The Bible presents a model that reinforces the BCWI model.

■ **Openness and honesty.** There are proscriptions against lying throughout the Bible. Of course it's plainly stated in the Ten Commandments: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." This covers the honesty issue, and

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|  <p><b>ANSWER:</b><br/> <b>Thrivent Financial for Lutherans</b><br/>         Appleton, WI</p> <p><b>Zion Management Services Company</b><br/>         Salt Lake City, UT</p> <p><b>AARP</b><br/>         Lakewood, CA</p> |  <p><b>ANSWER:</b><br/> <b>World Vision, Inc.</b><br/>         Federal Way, WA</p> <p><b>Marshfield Clinic Network</b><br/>         Marshfield, WI</p>              |



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one could also argue, this principle is consistent with openness. It's harder for people to be dishonest when they're open and transparent.

■ **Compassion or concern.** This is linked with a common theme throughout the Bible, to love one another. The second greatest commandment, said Jesus, is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>2</sup>

We think it's fair to say, if a manager were to follow this commandment and love the people working for and with him or her, it would also demonstrate the compassion dimension. In fact, the acceptance and inclusion of diversity in the workplace is also covered by this commandment. It would be a contradiction to say you're obeying this commandment and still be prejudiced or biased. Taking this one step further, it would be difficult to exclude employees from decisions that affect them and still love them.

■ **Competence.** Although there isn't an overt commandment to be competent, there's a formula for how the Body of Christ should function. We see in Ephesians 4:11-12 that we should serve according to our God-given gifts. This formula, having people serve in the areas

of their gifts and talents, is guaranteed to build competence in an organization.

The recent best seller, *First, Break All the Rules*, by Marcus Buckingham, has turned modern management on its ear by re-discovering this fact. The major finding presented in this book, after millions of hours of research by the Gallup organization, is to hire, place and promote people based on their *talent*, not their experience, skill or intelligence.

**Five Steps to High Trust**

Therefore, using the BCWI model backed up with Biblical truth, we come to a description of how high-trust organizations look and feel at the working level.

**1. Be open and honest.** This dimension involves not only the amount and accuracy of information that is shared, but also how sincerely and appropriately it's communicated. There are two aspects: 1) a culture that promotes open communications; and 2) structural elements that promote and facilitate communications (newsletters, meetings to pass information, assemblies, etc.). When asked what was good about their organization, employees in high-trust organizations commented as follows:

■ "Respect for individual employees'

needs in the working environment to help them thrive and do their best work. A great facility to work in, and open and honest co-employees, which includes top management" (Zondervan).

■ "Godly leaders who are open and honest about what happens or could occur at the college" (Westminster Baptist College).

■ "I appreciate the integrity, openness and honesty of those in leadership. My supervisor is very open, easy to talk to and very encouraging!" (Coalition for Christian Outreach).

■ "Openness, honesty. Motivation to live and work by high standards. Unity through love for Christ and each other" (New Mission Systems International).

**2. Be well-managed.** This was the topic in the June 2003 issue of *Christian Management Report*, so we won't repeat the information. Suffice it to say that management and trust are directly connected and it's very difficult to have one without the other.

**3. Show compassion to all your employees.** Showing compassion doesn't mean giving large quantities of time off, extremely generous benefits, or exorbitant pay raises and promotions (our statistics show no Christian organization had any of these). You must also provide employees with the training to do their jobs successfully, give them opportunities to increase their knowledge and responsibility, hold them accountable, and give them meaningful work.

■ "One of the things I appreciate most about my workplace and the department leadership is their concern for the employees as people, not just employees under their supervision" (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.).

■ "The administration consistently expresses encouragement and a caring atmosphere to all the staff, which the staff in turn reflects" (Christian Heritage Academy).

■ "They are caring about each person as an individual" (King's Way Christian School).

■ "We are mission driven and that mission is shared widely from the top to the bottom of our institution. We have great employees who love to serve our students. I enjoy the people I work with and find it difficult to think of an environment I would enjoy more than what I experience here" (Whitworth College).

| Leadership Dashboard   |                 |                 |                         |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Management Index   | ABC Ministries* | BCPW Finalists* | Variance % of Finalists |
| There's a <b>high trust level</b> in my organization between senior management and employees             | 69%             | 84%             | 15%                     |
| Key Drivers in Rank Order  |                 |                 |                         |
| My organization conducts its activities openly and honestly.   | 91%             | 90%             | -1%                     |
| My organization is well-managed.   | 78%             | 84%             | 6%                      |
| My organization's leaders demonstrate compassion for people at all levels.                               | 78%             | 87%             | 9%                      |
| My organization involves employees in decisions that affect them.  | 63%             | 72%             | 9%                      |
| My organization values diversity of cultural backgrounds, personal styles and ideas among our employees. | 89%             | 85%             | -4%                     |

\*Indicates percentage giving it a favorable rating.

This is an example of one of several similar charts provided to each organization participating in the Best Christian Places to Work survey. The trust index chart shows how each participant stacks up with the top 40 finalists. This is part of the Leadership Dashboard providing a gauge of where participants can focus to improve organizational trust.

There's no  
magic  
formula  
for creating trust  
in an  
organization,  
but there are  
a million ways to  
destroy  
it.

**4. Involve employees in decisions that affect them.** Involving employees in decisions isn't always easy. It means managers have to sacrifice making decisions autocratically. Involving employees is a more effective approach. Trust overlaps good management by aligning the authority to make decisions with the responsibility for the outcome. Again we can gain some insights from employees of high-trust organizations:

■ "The opportunity to be creative and involved in the shaping of my company's goals and its decision-making responsibilities, even though I'm not in a management position" (Paraclete Press).

■ "My supervisor is always helpful. He's not a micromanager, which I really appreciate. He allows me to make decisions I'm capable of, and trusts me to ask him if I need his input. Also, I really like and enjoy the other employees in our department" (Dallas Theological Seminary).

■ "It's run by godly people who consult and pray together as decisions are

made" (The DeMoss Group).

**5. Value diversity.** If employees have the same race, size, gender, education level, attitudes, and are gifted in the same way, a perception is created that everybody must fit the mold to be included. Others would feel like outsiders and eventually develop low trust. Generally, it's harder to trust people who are biased, even if you happen to fall in the select group.

■ "There's a great feeling of unity and direction in this organization. Even though there's diversity of opinions, potential problem areas are handled with prayer. This promotes understanding, showing love and care to all involved" (SIM-USA).

■ "The staff in our office is like a family. We work well together, pray for each other and support each other. We also have an ethnically diverse staff and both genders are well-represented" (Dallas Theological Seminary).

■ "Excellent training and respect for diverse opinions, learning and ministry styles" (Coalition for Christian Outreach).

Building and maintaining environments of high trust is difficult and often misunderstood. It has an emotional and spiritual element. It depends on what you say, how you say it, when you say it, and what happens before and after you say it. It can be killed by gossip, selfishness, pride or a moment of indiscretion.

There's no magic formula for creating trust in an organization, but there are a million ways to destroy it. It's much like leadership; some are born with it, some have to work at it, and some will never get it.

Regardless of how difficult or complex, it's essential for leaders to model the five areas mentioned above. But paying strict attention to it is often not enough. Managers need a reference check once in a while to measure the level of trust in their organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:15

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 29:39

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