

The Most Pressing Question

Randy G. Pennington

Who do you trust? Or more specifically, who can you trust?

The importance of answering this question increases exponentially as uncertainty grows in our world. Your ability to earn and maintain the trust, credibility, and respect of followers will determine your ability to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities with which we are presented.

The headlines scream with examples of leaders in every walk of life who have failed to meet our standards. “Role models” find themselves as the lead stories for media outlets of all types as they prove that irresponsible behavior and self-sabotage show no limits of good taste, common sense, or morality.

You can write it off as “bad news sells” in a media-driven world that never sleeps and where anyone with a cell phone is a potential news outlet. You can blame it on the destruction of the nuclear family, declining moral values in the home, the failure of our education system, Wall Street greed, or which ever political party happens to be in power at the time.

Or, you can do something to influence the future and change the perception about today’s leaders. We trust leaders who demonstrate five principles:

- **Character:** Every discussion of leadership credibility begins here. Character defines our approach for dealing with others and ourselves. The philosopher Heraclites was correct, “Character is destiny.”
- **Competence:** Scandals must not divert us from the constant need to improve performance. Being an honest incompetent does not engender trust any more than dishonest competence.
- **Consistency:** Trust is diminished when behavior is confusing or indecisive. Followers rely on our consistency to determine their course of action in

- given situations. Confidence that a response will be in line with past experience frees others to address the challenges at hand and not worry about protecting themselves from an unpredictable response.
- **Communication:** Communication that builds trust is about openness and understanding. We tend to trust those who share information appropriate information willingly and appreciate our goals, struggles, joys and environment.
 - **Courage:** Challenges must be confronted head-on. True courage requires commitment and the willingness to accept personal risk. It fosters admiration and sets in motion a series of events that influence long-term success.

Charles Handy said, “A society without respect for its leaders is a society ready to disintegrate.” Extraordinary results occur when a leader earns the trust and respect of followers. That’s what it will take to tackle the challenges we face in the future. And, that is the most pressing question we face.

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Randy Pennington helps leaders create cultures focused on results, relationships, and accountability. He is author of *Results Rule! Build a Culture that Blows the Competition Away*, and *On My Honor, I Will: The Blueprint for INTEGRITY-DRIVEN® Leadership* which will be re-released in September 2009. For additional information contact via telephone at 972/980-9857; e-mail at Randy@penningtongroup.com or on the World Wide Web at <http://www.penningtongroup-cities.com> or <http://www.resultsrule.com>.

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