

# The One Thing

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*"Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."*

Vince Lombardi<sup>1</sup>

An organization is nothing more than a series of commitments people within it make to each other. It is the quality of these commitments that makes a company strong or weak; The very survival of an enterprise depends on this one thing.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Lombardi's contributions to the history of professional football, Lombardi is legendary for his coaching philosophy and motivational skills. Many of Lombardi's speeches continue to be quoted frequently today, and he is well known as being unequivocally committed to winning. One of his most famous maxims is "[Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing](#)", although he did not coin the phrase and the exact words he used are disputed. "Lombardi time" is the principle that one should arrive 10-15 minutes early, or else be considered late. (Source: wikipedia)

Addressing the management team of a well-known multinational company operating in a highly competitive and fast-growing industry, I asked, "What makes your company unique?" This is what I heard some say, "People," "Culture," "Technology," and "Empowerment." Everyone concluded that it was the human factor in organizations that made the real difference. I followed up with a comment and another question, "All organizations have people and therefore enjoy a unique culture; what makes them exceptionally successfully face the onslaught of competitive forces in the market?" One gentleman remarked spontaneously, "Trust!" And I, along with others, wholeheartedly agreed that trust between people is the one thing that matters the most.

Here lies the challenge, "The toughest thing about the power of trust is that it's very difficult to build and very easy to destroy. The essence of trust building is to emphasize the similarities between you and the customer," says Thomas J Watson.<sup>2</sup>

Other than focusing on similarities, trust is also built by repeatedly making commitments and fulfilling them - creating expectations and living up to them consistently, over time. For this you need discipline and organization. Beware of people who pretend they are with you on a project or assignment. Such people show commitment

verbally, but troubles begin as soon as they step out of meetings. They passively resist by not completing the work on time. They gossip about the project or you! This could be because they fear not being able to deliver on deadlines; they could be anxious that resources won't be available when required; they may be apprehensive about time commitments that could disrupt their family life.

What is important for you is to look out for signs of non-commitment. Body language says a lot...so listen with your eyes carefully! Create a climate of trust in which people feel safe to talk. Timing is often crucial in such confrontations. Some people do not like to speak out in meetings. They can be contacted later at a more convenient time and in a private space. By getting to know the different working styles of your colleagues you can adopt effective approaches that will yield the truth you need to hear. This will save you from heartaches later.

Your trust in people and their confidence in you is based on two dimensions: 1) competence and 2) integrity. Honoring your commitments unfailingly will contribute to your integrity while achieving agreed goals and solving problems reliably and effectively will demonstrate your managerial and technical competence.

True strength in your relationships comes from your perceived and real competence and integrity, which leads

to better revenues and profitability of your company.

According to Jack Welch, a legendary former CEO of GE, "When a company is strong, it not only pays taxes that provide for important services, it also builds world-class facilities that meet or exceed safety and environmental standards. Strong companies re-invest in their people and their facilities. Healthy companies provide good and secure jobs that give their employees the time, the spirit, and the resources to give back to their communities a thousand-fold."

Therefore, your primary social responsibility as a CEO is to assure financial success of your company. You can achieve this by building a corporate culture where the level of trust between people is high. How this is done will vary from company to company.

In some organizations people will be more accustomed to talking openly about their differences in meetings. Ideas will be attacked. Such candor only works where people trust each other and know where everyone stands. In others, such an approach may be seen as confrontational and embarrassing. Instead, they would prefer you came into a meeting having worked out the issues one-to-one beforehand so that there would be no surprises or hurt feelings. The latter approach can be viewed as intensely political, leading to backroom deals.

In the 90s, Motorola was more of the former having a truth-telling, trust-based culture, whereas IBM was more concerned with political correctness. The phenomenal growth of Motorola at the time endorses the view that corporate growth based on high trust is a sure recipe for high performance.

It is this one thing – trust. In a world where competitive forces are relentless, trust becomes the invisible yet powerful differentiator that propels organizations to enduring success.

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