



Trust Accelerates “Approval”

A customer service representative at CRA recently told me that in accordance to the privacy act they could not disclose my HST/PST number to me. They insisted that they were just “following the rules.” I thanked them for their time, hung up, and called back to the same department. The second customer service rep gave me the information I needed without hesitation.

Whether an employee or a customer, I’ll bet you’ve heard these statements (excuses) or used them yourself more than once.

- I need to get approval to do (or say) that.
- I need to clear this through compliance.
- I need permission before you can quote me.
- I can’t help you without approval.
- I’m just following the rules.
- I apologize for your frustration.

Perhaps it’s time for business leaders to take a few minutes to understand the relationship between trust and approval.

Merriam-Webster provides the following definitions of approval:

Definition #1: The belief that something or someone is good or acceptable: a good opinion of someone or something.

Definition #2: Permission to do something: acceptance of an idea, action, plan, etc.

Focusing now on Definition #2, how many employees are constrained by “permission” in your organization? Have you considered how this impact?

- Speed of innovation
- Decision-making
- Employee engagement
- Cost

Every time an employee needs approval to say or do something, the “approval” process impedes the outcome. In fact, the process may be so daunting, that employees

choose to take the “easy” road, never creating anything new or suggesting a novel idea; or as in the story above, checking with someone else when they clearly do not understand the organization’s daunting “rules.”

As a leader, have you considered how your customers are impacted by the “approval process” in your organization, or how the organization’s actions:

- Waste customer AND employee time
- Create hard feelings
- Lower customer retention
- Damage reputation and elevate risk
- Raise costs

As a leader, what if your focus shifted from “approval” or rule enforcement to elevating stakeholder trust?

The most progressive and successful CEOs and their Boards have redirected their attention to crafting long-term vision and values statements and/or Codes of Conduct, not driven by legal and compliance, but by their two most important stakeholders, their employees and their customers. (The “credo” etched into the wall at corporate headquarters does not even begin to satisfy this requirement.) The entire staff, beginning with the Board and CEO, must vow to live their values every day, and ensure that employees understand that any “values violation” will result in immediate termination. Just imagine the innovation, speed of decision-making and empowerment that would result from this cultural transformation, not to mention the ultimate cost savings and impact on profitability.

If organizations spent more time building values instead of layers of legal teams and compliance departments, the word “approval” would start to look more like Merriam-Webster’s first definition:

And “approval” would be replaced with trust.