

## Good Morning Pinocchio..., Uh, Uh, Uh, I Mean Mr. Smith...

### Rebuilding Trust After A Pinocchio Predicament

By Kendall C. Wright, President of Entelechy Training and Development, Inc.

*The moment there is suspicion about a person's motives, everything he does becomes tainted.*

- Mahatma Gandhi

While the title is provocative, and it should be, it also serves as an alarm – so don't hit the snooze button.

In very much the same way that so many people keep hitting that snooze button; too many leaders are snoozing on the importance of honesty in the workplace - and the consequences of its absence.

If you were to pass a direct report in the corridor and you heard them say, "Good morning Pinocchio, uh, uh, uh I mean Mr. Smith..." how would you react?

It stands to reason that for many leaders something very similar to the above exchange happens daily – either verbally or nonverbally. It would also stand to reason that many leaders aren't catching it. But they should, because it is costing them dearly.

The fictional character, Pinocchio, is possibly best known for his nose and the consequences of his telling lies. That would include telling white lies, half-truths, even face savers, any form of mistruth resulted in his nose lengthening.

Because the story and the character are so well known, either because of books or movies, the Pinocchio character has come to represent anyone who wrestles (and loses) with honesty and candor. As such, direct reports may privately refer to a leader they don't trust as - Pinocchio. If you've noticed an increase in the number of Pinocchio screen savers, posters, or even Pinocchio themed birthday parties in your work group, well, that may not be just a simple coincidence.

Numerous studies over the last several decades, such as those by the Hudson Institute, USAF, the Manchester Group, and others, indicate that the level of trust in the workplace, independent of industry, is declining. This decline is especially accelerated between direct reports and leaders. One study reported that only 36% of employees believe their leaders act with honesty and integrity. With that said, if your direct reports don't trust that you are a leader of honesty and integrity, they surely will not accept your assessment of the state of the business nor your recommended course of action during a crisis. The experts agree that with a precipitous decline in trust comes a dizzying escalation in the cost of doing business.

While it may seem unfair, it is nonetheless true, once a leader is labeled a "fudger" of the facts, he or she will face an obstacle laden future. Now, of course, in any business, there are those need-to-know-limitations on "enterprise or corporate intel," and most direct reports understand that. But, to be lied to as a tool of manipulation, now that is not easily understood and will immediately undermine any leadership relationship. When the relationships go south, so do the results and revenues.

If you find yourself in a Pinocchio Predicament, it is better to address the issue head on than to just hope it will pass over. As a very wise person once said, "Hope is not a strategy."

Here are five strategies to assist any leader in regaining the trust of his or her associates:

**Candor:** The rebuilding process begins with candor. You must speak openly and honestly about the misstep, and dispel any rumors and exaggerations. Don't try to sugarcoat your actions or interject mitigating circumstances.

**Atonement:** Simply acknowledging that you know the actions were wrong and that you regret the animosity, apprehension, and alienation you created is powerful. Inform your team that you apologize for misleading them in the matter and ask for their renewed trust in you.

**Personal Commitment:** This statement of personal commitment needs to be expressed, not merely implied. Your associates are listening for your commitment not to repeat this mishap or anything of a similar nature. This is not the time to get cute or pretty with your words. Your goal is to be straight, succinct, and simple.

**Clarification of Boundaries:** You will need to reiterate the policies regarding clearances, classifications, and need-to-know information as they apply to your team and your freedom to share information. Revisiting boundaries keeps everyone, and their expectations, on the same page.

**Congruence:** Perhaps most important, is that you do what you say you are going to do. Congruence is the antidote to doubt and distrust.

There are many fictional characters any leader could aspire to emulate, but Pinocchio shouldn't be on that list. In the real world we know things happen. But if there is any elongation of your nose, it should be due to genetics, not circumstances.

If you find yourself in a Pinocchio Predicament, following the strategies outlined above will help move you down the road toward restoration. But, don't become impatient, the restoration process takes time. You must still contend with the consequences of your choices, but things can get back to normal, if not better.

Good Morning Mr. Smith...

**Leadership Lesson:** "Good morning Pinocchio, uh, uh, uh I mean Mr. Smith...." Just in case you didn't know, that is probably not a compliment. Your reputation as an honest leader is priceless, and you need to safeguard it at all cost. If you've noticed an increase in the number of Pinocchio screen savers, posters, or even Pinocchio themed birthday parties in your work group, well, that may not be just a simple coincidence.

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Kendall C. Wright, "The Actualizer," CEO of Entelechy T&D, Inc., helps business leaders -at all levels- fulfill the hard parts of their job descriptions. He is the author of *Affirming and Confirming SuccessFUL Living* and most recently released *Conversations On Success*, featuring insights from Les Brown, James Kouzes and other top tier international speakers. Find free resources at [www.EntelechyCan.com](http://www.EntelechyCan.com). Contact us at [Kendall@EntelechyCan.com](mailto:Kendall@EntelechyCan.com) or 513.860.4934.