

Connectors

Liz Dow 02 January 2011

So often the difference between a "Yes!" and a "No!" is a matter of trust. As Oprah once said, "In the end, all you have is your reputation." Trust moves mountains with investors, colleagues, and staff. The lack of it costs you transaction costs, transaction time, lost productivity, and the loss of good employees.

If you were to ask professionals in Philadelphia to list the local role models for trust and integrity, the name Charisse Lillie would be near or at the top of most lists. An attorney by trade, Charisse worked in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and at Community Legal Services, taught at Villanova University School of Law, served as Philadelphia's City Solicitor, and was a partner and Chair of Litigation at Ballard Spahr before joining Comcast's corporate staff, working with fellow Connector and former Ballard partner David L. Cohen. She is a former chair of the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and has played a leadership role on many nonprofit boards, including those of LEADERSHIP Philadelphia, the Juvenile Law Center, Friends Select School, and Howard University.

With Charisse, what you see is what you get. She wears no corporate mask. The Charisse you meet at Comcast is the Charisse you see at home. Both commanding and

warm, Charisse has the presence and wit of her fellow Texan, the late State Senator and member of Congress Barbara Jordan, who was also known for her integrity. Charisse is very approachable, and her gentle, logical approach overlies a fierce intellect and long-standing commitment to diversity.

When asked about her accomplishments, Charisse mentioned the increased diversity in her firm and in the local legal community. Her integrity and effective approach helped to put this issue into national debate.

When asked about specific Connector behaviors, Charisse said that she is:

- Optimistic and attuned to others
- A student of human persistence
- Honest and trustworthy
- Eager to hear the truth, even if it hurts
- Quick to trust—but if lied to, it's a long road back
- Very attached to her friends, including friends from first grade
- Careful to send hand-written notes and birthday cards
- Committed to philanthropy and gives back to her institutions in order to stay connected
- Actively engaged in mentoring and serving as a role model

This committed executive has succeeded in modeling

integrity and trustworthiness to the colleagues and community members who share the good fortune of working with and knowing her.

Trust can be built at work, at home, and in the community by:

- Sharing information and keeping stakeholders informed
- Spending time with employees and listening to their concerns
- Keeping confidences and resisting the temptation to share gossip
- Being fully present to your family when you are home—create a BlackBerry-free zone or timeframe
- Teaching, modeling, and reinforcing trust and integrity with your children
- Honoring time commitments with family—show up on time and do as promised
- Standing up for a cause and let others know why
- Broadening your perspective to learn to accept views that differ from your own

Trustworthy executives keep their word, demonstrate integrity, and stay true to their values. Their behavior is consistent and reliable over time so that those around them can count on their judgment, discretion, and results. Others find comfort in their integrity, reliability, and accountability, so they often seek them out for advice in times of crisis.

For social innovators whose reputations are entwined with their organization's brand, trust is a fundamental ingredient for success.

Liz Dow, CEO of LEADERSHIP Philadelphia, has played an active role on several boards and civic initiatives and is the author of *Six Degrees of Connection*.