

## How To Build Trust In The Workplace

**Author: Tatenda Sayenda . August 2020**

When it comes to the issue of employee performance in an organization creating a sense of trust is one of the key factors to be considered. Trust forms the basis of all relationships and interactions. It is just as important in professional relationships as it is in personal ones. A company that can create a strong sense of trust in the workplace is better able to weather the storms thrown up by the competition and have a clearer vision of what the company stands for. According to Harvard Business Review, trust is often talked about as the ‘bedrock of a company’s success’. Trust within the organization is important: Your employees must believe in each other. When they don’t, communication, teamwork, and performance inevitably suffer.

Trust is an “evolving thing that ebbs and flows,” says David DeSteno, a professor of psychology at Northeastern University and the author of *The Truth About Trust*. And yet it’s essential to boosting employee engagement, motivation, and candor. Employees are more likely to follow through on goals set by a manager they trust and to be more forthcoming about the challenges they see on their level. According to Jim Dougherty, a senior lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management and veteran software CEO, “Managers will never learn the truth about a company unless they have employees’ trust.” Lack of trust in the workplace is evidence of toxic work culture. Trust is both a cause and an effect of company culture. The trust that employees and management have in each other informs how companies operate, and the way the team operates encourages trust.

Stephen Covey makes a business case for trust:

- Individuals who trust each other don’t expend as much of their time and energy watching their backs. They often redirect that energy towards productivity and innovation for the company.
- When individuals are given the trust to execute, they are more likely to become engaged with the company and align more with its mission. A team with high trust motivates its members to retain that trust through excellence.
- Managers who don’t trust their reports spend a lot of time on processes, reviews, and sanctions. Employees respond to this stifling environment with apathy and reduced productivity. In environments of trust, managers can instead spend their time finding and clearing roadblocks from their team, inspiring employees to share more, and work together to identify and solve pain points.

### **Why is trust important in the workplace?**

Successful businesses are built on relationships. Relationships between employers and employees, staff and customers, internal stakeholders, and external stakeholders. At the foundation of all relationships is trust. There may be times where some people may not see eye to eye, but if people treat each other fairly and can get their ideas across without feeling belittled or discriminated against, then trust can be built

within the workplace.

“When you don’t have trust, you can’t respond as quickly as you need to with the fast pace of change that we’re seeing in today’s market,” says Amanda Setili, a strategy consultant and author of *Fearless Growth* (Career Press, 2017). Numerous studies conducted by the *Great Place To Work Institute* and elsewhere have found that companies with high-trust cultures have greater financial success than those that do not. “A lack of trust is the biggest expense in organizations,” says David Horsager, Chief Executive Officer of *Trust Edge Leadership Institute*. Every problem that leaders think they have whether it is a leadership issue, a sales issue, an engagement issue, or some other issue—boils down to trust, he contends.

According to SHRM the following are some common mistakes that destroy trust:

- **Avoiding conflict.** When you discourage disagreement, open discussions can’t occur. Decisions don’t get made, or they are based on incomplete information. “The more you can almost relish conflict, encourage dialogue and debate, you’re going to build trust,” Setili says. Create a psychologically safe place for people to bring up the downsides of a plan. You may stir up conflict, but it’s far healthier in the end, she says.
- **Breaking promises.** When you tell your employees that you’re going to do something but don’t follow through, trust is lost. Why should employees believe you the next time?
- **Focusing on compliance.** “The world is changing so fast, the boss can’t anticipate everything. We’ve got to give our employees more leeway,” Setili says. Instead of implementing layers of rigid rules, share the end goal, and trust workers to use their common sense.
- **Failing to communicate.** You might be reluctant to share bad news, but it’s always better, to tell the truth than to be silent. Employees appreciate honesty, she says.
- **Assuming trust.** A trusting relationship doesn’t happen on its own. “You have to explicitly think about trust, work on trust, build trust and check to be sure that trust is there,” Setili says.

## How is trust built in the workplace?

Trust is built through actions, not words. As a Manager or Leader in an organization, you can’t just say you “trust” a particular employee or team, you need to show that you do through the actions you take daily. The following are ways in which leaders can build trust:

### 1. Make a connection

According to the Harvard Business Review, one of the most effective trust-building strategies is to create a personal connection. That’s especially true for managers. “As a person’s power increases, their perceived trustworthiness goes down,” says DeSteno; they seem less reliant on others and therefore less trustworthy. Counteract this view by getting to know the people on your team, and letting them get to

know you. This might involve chatting about how you share a hometown or like the same sports team.

## **1. Review Handbook and Policies**

Another way to build trust in your culture is to review your employee handbook and policies. Most organizations have way too many picky rules and punishments embedded in their cultures by way of the employee handbook. Your employees are not wayward children. They are qualified, creative adults, and value creators. Honor them, and don't pester them with grade-school rules.

### **1. Stop blaming and give credit**

Step away from the philosophy of blaming and shaming employees for mistakes. Every mistake is a learning opportunity. If you track your employees' mistakes but say nothing about their triumphs, you are begging for the best people to leave and only the most fearful ones to stay. "The best way to get people to behave well is to give credit," says Dougherty. That reinforces the sense that people are working toward shared goals rather than simply for a boss's agenda.

### **1. Align company values with actions**

Another important step in building trust in the workplace is ensuring that your company aligns its statements with its actions, according to Karen Cates, an assistant professor of executive education. For example, if a company says it welcomes new ideas, then its leaders need to be genuinely open to listening to them, Cates says. Even seemingly minor details are important. For instance, imagine a company that claims its greatest asset is its people yet fails to mention employees anywhere on its website. Research by Kellogg School professor Paola Sapienza finds, there are economic benefits as well: when companies are perceived by their employees to have cultures of integrity, they show higher profits.

### **1. Take time to reflect**

As a leader, to build trust you must take time to reflect on your values. Harry Kraemer, the former *CEO of Baxter International* and now a clinical professor of leadership at *Kellogg* has thought a lot about what leaders can do to be seen as trustworthy. He suggests the following 4 ways:

- As a leader, you need to be self-reflective. You need to start to think about, "What are my values? What do I stand for? What's my purpose? What matters?"
- Focus on developing a balanced perspective. A value-based leader takes the time to understand all sides of the story. They establish trust because they demonstrate they care about what each person has to say.
- A value-based leader focuses on what he refers to as "true self-confidence." They know what they know; they admit what they don't know; they're a learning person.
- A value-based leader has genuine humility. In genuine humility, you realize every single person matters. If you want to establish trust in an organization, you don't take the view, "Well, I'm a director-level now. Well, these people are below me." No, nobody's below you.

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The more that managers uphold their promises and commitments, the more trust your employees will have in you. There is no higher priority for any leadership team or individual leader than to build trust in his or her team.

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