

## Building trust in the workplace

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When it comes to the issue of employee performance in an organisation, 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.

*Building trust* as a leader and throughout your workforce is an ongoing process, and when trust is strong, employees thrive and so does business. As a leader, it is essential that you establish trust and then continue to nurture that trust, most especially through times of change and growth.

## The importance of trust in the workplace

Trust is requisite in the workplace so that everyone feels they are there for the right reasons, working toward shared goals with a sense of purpose. According to a survey conducted by [Officevibe data](#) (2018), 19% of employees do not feel that their organization trusts them to contribute to its mission. When team members trust one another, they feel safe to share their ideas and [conflict becomes productive](#).

Trust between employees and their managers leads to improved performance and strengths-based [employee development](#). And ultimately, with a workforce that trusts in your leadership, everyone is better aligned around a shared mission, common goals, and the strategy that will take you there.

[Harvard Business Review](#) (2019) finds that employees working in high-trust environments report:

- 74% less stress,
- 50% higher productivity,
- 76% more engagement, and
- 70% more alignment with their companies' purpose compared to employees in low-trust environments.

According to the 2016 Edelman [Trust Barometer report](#), almost a third of employees do not trust their employer. That is a big chunk of the workforce, and its impact cannot be ignored. Employees with low trust are typically sceptical, disengaged, and less productive.

## How to build trust in the workplace

People want to feel that they are a part of something bigger than they are, and your employees depend on you to establish a clear vision, mission, and direction to align around. If you want your employees to get on board with new initiatives and produce meaningful work, you need to be heading in the same direction.

A key to success is to ensure that your leadership teams are aligned, and you are all speaking the same language. Your managers are the ones helping your teams turn the vision into action, and action into output, so make sure they are [well equipped](#) with not just a mission statement, but a breakdown of how that translates to their team goals and objectives.

## **1. Transparency**

Transparency goes hand in hand with [effective communication](#). It does not simply mean sharing everything, all the time; it is about communicating the most pertinent information at the right time and making information easily accessible across your teams.

Employees do not want to feel like they are the last to know about big changes or shifts in direction. While you have likely had multiple conversations, brainstorming, and prioritization meetings with your leadership team leading up to launching a new initiative, your workforce does not have the same context. Keep them up-to-date with developments in real-time—even better; solicit their feedback as you go.

## **2. Build relationships throughout your workforce**

Trust is a natural byproduct of relationship building, and encouraging employees to develop those genuine connections nurtures the [psychological safety](#) of your teams. Do not dismiss this idea as fluff too quickly—this feeling of safety enables employees to give and receive constructive feedback, share new ideas, have [difficult conversations](#), raise flags, and challenge the status quo. Each of these factors helps build an environment of continuous learning and development that sparks the kind of creativity and innovation that will set your business apart.

## **3. Own mistakes and failures**

The thing about mistakes is that they are inevitable. Being a [great leader](#) does not mean you are immune to failure, but it does mean understanding the power of facing failures head-on. Acknowledging the problem and coming together with your workforce to find solutions and learn through the process is the best way to ensure mistakes do not repeat themselves, and others are avoided in the future ([Attfield 2020](#)). Taking responsibility shows that you are just as human as the rest of the team and that there is always room for improvement.

## **4. Be open and honest.**

Credibility is an important leadership trait for building trust. In the Edelman survey (2016), respondents indicated that peers and other employees were more credible than leaders in their organization.

Overcome this by being open and honest in all aspects of your words, attitude, and behavior. Honesty ranked as the most desirable character trait of trustworthy leaders in the survey.

## **5. Be highly ethical.**

Closely related to honesty is ethical behavior. Survey respondents were asked if ethical behavior demonstrates integrity (Edelman 2016). Of those who agreed with this statement, more than half felt their leaders did not act ethically. Have integrity and conduct yourself in a way that sets a high standard for ethical behavior to earn the trust of those around you.

## **6. Build accountability**

When you and other leaders acknowledge your mistakes as well as successes, employees see you as credible and will follow your lead. You can encourage honest [dialogue](#) and foster accountability by building in processes that become parts of the culture, such as an evaluation of every project (positives, negatives, things to change) or a status report and next steps in each meeting agenda (tracking deadlines and milestones).

Organizations that have high levels of trust have high levels of employee commitment, advocacy, and retention. They have a highly functioning culture and robust employee engagement. An organization with [leaders who build trust](#) has strength, resilience, and quality of work that becomes a powerful competitive advantage. If you want employees who strive, who are engaged, and who are improving both themselves and your business, building trust is essential. As a leader, you have the power to make this happen.

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