

Building Trust

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Earning another person's trust is difficult in most circumstances, but it's even more challenging when it's your employees or reports you need to convince. Even if you generally have a friendly and reasonable character, your position as a leader means a clear power dynamic exists, where you have the authority. That can make for a complicated relationship.

Many people are naturally inclined not to trust their superiors. They tend to be wary because they know their future is somewhat in the hands of their superior. They also have to listen when the leader gives directives, reviews tasks, and gives feedback. There is a sense of control and demand that can limit the personal aspect of the relationship.

You need to find a balance between respect and trust. You will have expectations of your employee, but if they don't trust you, they won't be comfortable around you. They may follow your orders but not feel like they can ask questions, offer suggestions, or take the initiative.

Trust can be the difference between stalling and genuinely innovating. In an article for Haillo, Kristina Martic says:

Negative working atmosphere creates a highly stressful undesirable environment for everyone. Within such organizations, employees withhold their talents, creativity, energy, and passion. As a result, they lose productivity, their innovation capabilities, their competitive edge, and more.

So, hopefully, now you understand just how important trust is. But how do you build it up? Well, it's no easy task, but let's consider your approach.

One of the cornerstones of a trusting relationship is transparency. This boils down to your willingness to share information with your employees. You must try to be open and

honest about everything relating to the project. Many leaders have the mindset that they have no responsibility to keep their employees in the loop on everything.

It's understandable to an extent. You could make the case that a subordinate isn't entitled to know about the inner workings of the business. However, entrusting them with more information can make them feel more comfortable. They'll be more inclined to trust you if they feel like you trust them.

Jared Atchison outlined an approach to developing a more transparent workplace and made this suggestion:

Make sure your teammates have proper avenues for communication with one another and you, whether it's email or a chat software like Slack. It's crucial for your colleagues to have access to you and other colleagues. If an issue arises, it's easy to reach out and start searching for solutions.

Having these communication channels is a fantastic way to foster transparency. A Slack, Teams or equivalent app is a great idea. It gives you an easy solution to keeping those lines of communication open.

Another big part of great communication is "active listening". This involves showing genuine attention when listening to an employee, ensuring you understand what they're saying and retaining relevant information for later use. First and foremost, this will help your projects because you'll get more contributions from different perspectives. But it's also a great way to build trust and establish deeper relationships between you and your employees based on mutual respect and open communication. Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman analyzed workplace trust, focussing on three specific elements: relationships, judgement and consistency. They found that the most vital aspect of instilling trust was building and maintaining good relationships:

When relationships were low, and both judgement and consistency were high, trust went down 33 points. This may be because leaders are seen as occasionally inconsistent. We all intend to do things that don't get done, but once a relationship is damaged... it's difficult for people to trust.

Active listening will help develop and maintain relationships. Even if you cannot always be consistent or make misjudgements, people just want communication. If you show they're being listened to, they can forgive the occasional slip-up.

Put it into practice. When you have a team meeting where everyone shares their thoughts, make relevant notes and reflect on them afterwards. Then, in your next 1-1, follow up with people personally on those things you noted.

Something else you could do is make the process of offering feedback a two-way street. Being a leader means that you have to react to your employee's work and often

give them revisions or notes on how to alter their approach in the future. It's a part of business and can be uncomfortable for both leaders and employees.

This is because it makes people feel like they're being admonished for doing something wrong. It's tricky to deliver feedback in a way that sounds constructive and not overly critical. Remember - just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. In a blog post by Oohology, the author states that:

When pointing out shortcomings in someone's work, I try to call out a strength or two as well. It's not an everyone-gets-a-trophy philosophy, just good bedside manner.

This approach lets the employee know they have things to work on without completely sapping their confidence. They'll feel like you're relying on them because of their strengths and that you trust them to overcome those shortcomings.

Going back to the idea of feedback being a two-way street, you can also solicit feedback from your employees regarding your own performance. This shows that you aren't an authoritarian leader; you are accountable and responsible, too. Ask for insights from the employees, give them a chance to offer suggestions, and make sure you take some of these suggestions on. Don't argue back, either, or you'll never hear feedback from them again.

You don't have to act on all feedback, of course, but if you ask for suggestions regularly enough, you are guaranteed to get some good ones.

In a similar vein, you should always make time to offer congratulations for a job well done. Employees tend to associate their bosses with negativity because many don't hear from them unless it's a criticism or correction. If you only ever engage with your employees in those cases, they will be on guard whenever you speak to them.

It's crucial to let them know when you're pleased with what they've delivered. There are so many ways you can do this. You could just send them an email, talk to them on the phone, or give them some words of congratulations and appreciation in person. If they're the type to enjoy it, you could also celebrate their work in an all-hands meeting.

You could even have your own personal rewards system within your team. If possible, you could offer cash bonuses, vouchers for restaurants and bars, or maybe even a few extra days of paid leave. Joah Braaten, CEO and co-founder of Brandata, uses a 'corporate gamification system' which goes like this:

Each staff member could claim tasks of their choosing and would receive the point values associated with the tasks upon completion. These points could be redeemed by staff members at a corporate rewards portal for anything ranging from extra vacation and work-from-home days to company-paid continuing education.

What's great about a system like this is that it doesn't create competition among your employees. The points they receive upon completing tasks are exclusive to functions specifically assigned to them. So they're only competing with themselves to ensure they get their work done and reap the benefits.

If you could set something like this up, it would give your employees a new perspective on you as a leader. Trust is much more likely in a work environment based on rewards and appreciation than in one based on criticism.

To this point, we've discussed several examples of how leaders can build employee trust. We've discussed the idea of transparency and being open and honest with your employees about everything relating to the project. That led us to discuss working on better communication and the notion of "active listening", which involves being attentive and retaining relevant information when talking to employees.

We then covered better ways to deliver feedback to avoid making your employees feel uncomfortable or talked down to, as well as soliciting their feedback regarding your performance. We've discussed setting up some good ways to offer congratulations too, and maybe some rewards when you're happy with their work.

The most important thing about all this is that it should be genuine. Don't do this just because you want to trick your employees into trusting you so they'll be compliant, do it because they deserve your respect and appreciation.

Start this process by sitting down and working on a new communication environment for your team. Set up communication channels and meeting strategies to help you pursue the critical early stages of trust-building. And then take the next steps from there.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

Reading List:

- **[Article]** Trust in the Workplace: Why is it so Important Today, and How to Build it, Kristina Martic
- **[Article]** Four Ways to Create Transparency in the Workplace, Jared Atchison
- **[Article]** The Three Elements of Trust, Jack Zenger & Joseph Folkman
- **[Article]** The Gentle Art of Giving Constructive Feedback, The Foundry
- **[Article]** 19 Creative Ways to Show Employee Appreciation, Bennett Conlin