

Building Trust

Most people do not pay attention to the issue of trust in their organization until it is broken. But by then the damage is done: people withhold facts and information, managers set convoluted goals, management is not available, people talk behind each others' backs—the list goes on and on.

What causes trust to be broken in an organization? Some prevalent “trust busters” include broken promises, unethical behaviors, unfair practices (e.g., unearned promotions), not getting good results, miscommunication, no communication, no recognition, no feedback, and misrepresenting an area of expertise according to Cynthia Olmstead, organizational change expert and co-author of The Ken Blanchard Companies' *Building Trust* program.

The good news is that trust can be regained.

“But it is a long drawn and costly process,” says Anand Pillai, VP & Global Head of Talent Transformation for HCL Technologies. “This has to start from the top with the key people walking the extra mile to lead by example and build back the lost trust by adhering to even the small promises and commitments.”

If your organization is looking for ways to evaluate the level of trust currently present in your organization, or is thinking about how to enhance the trust between people in your company, here are eight places to begin.

- 1. Demonstrating Trust**—If you want to create a trusting work environment, you have to begin by demonstrating trust. Establishing rules, policies, and procedures to protect against a few bad apples sends the wrong message to the vast majority of people in your organization who need and deserve to be trusted.
- 2. Sharing Information**—Information is power. One of the best ways to build a sense of trust in people is by sharing information. Sharing information sometimes means disclosing information that is considered privileged, including sensitive and important topics such as the competition's activities, future business plans and strategies, financial data, industry issues or problem areas, competitor's best practices, the way group activities contribute to organizational goals, and performance feedback. Providing people with more complete information communicates trust and a sense

of “we're in this together.” It helps people think more broadly about the organization and the inter-relationships of various groups, resources, and goals.

- 3. Telling it Straight**—Study after study has indicated that the number one quality that people want in a leader is integrity. People want to follow someone they trust. Business leaders who tell it straight, who are open and honest even about bad news, develop the trust essential for strong, long-term relationships—inside and outside the company.
- 4. Providing Opportunities for Everyone to Win**—Do you want your people to work together or to compete against each other? When people within an organization are forced to compete against one another, you lose everyone's trust. Now all people are concerned about is looking out for number one.
- 5. Providing Feedback**—Make sure leaders schedule and hold regular progress-check meetings with their direct reports. This will allow managers to catch problems before they become major issues and significantly increase the chances that a direct report's performance will meet expectations when it's time for their performance review.
- 6. Resolving Concerns Head On**—Resolve concerns head on by putting challenges on the table and giving people an opportunity to influence the process. When leaders expand people's involvement and influence, there is more buy-in because people are less likely to feel they are being controlled. This builds trust and increases the credibility of the leader.
- 7. Admitting Mistakes**—An apology can be an effective way to correct a mistake and restore the trust needed for a good relationship. But in many organizations employees and managers are conditioned to hide mistakes because it's not acceptable to make them. And that leads to bigger problems. Leaders who admit mistakes when they are wrong are not seen as weak—they are seen as having integrity and being trustworthy.
- 8. Walking the Talk**—A leader, above all, has to be a walking example of the vision and values of the organization. The key to leadership is being able to develop a trusting relationship with others. Without trust, it is impossible for an organization to function effectively. Trust between leaders and the people they lead is essential for working together. If leaders say one thing and do another, people will question their trustworthiness.

As trust expert Cynthia Olmstead reminds us, “We must all treat trust as a precious gem that must be highly valued and treasured. It needs to be viewed as if it were a delicate egg; when treated roughly it will fall and shatter. Trust is an extremely important commodity to any relationship, personally or organizationally.”