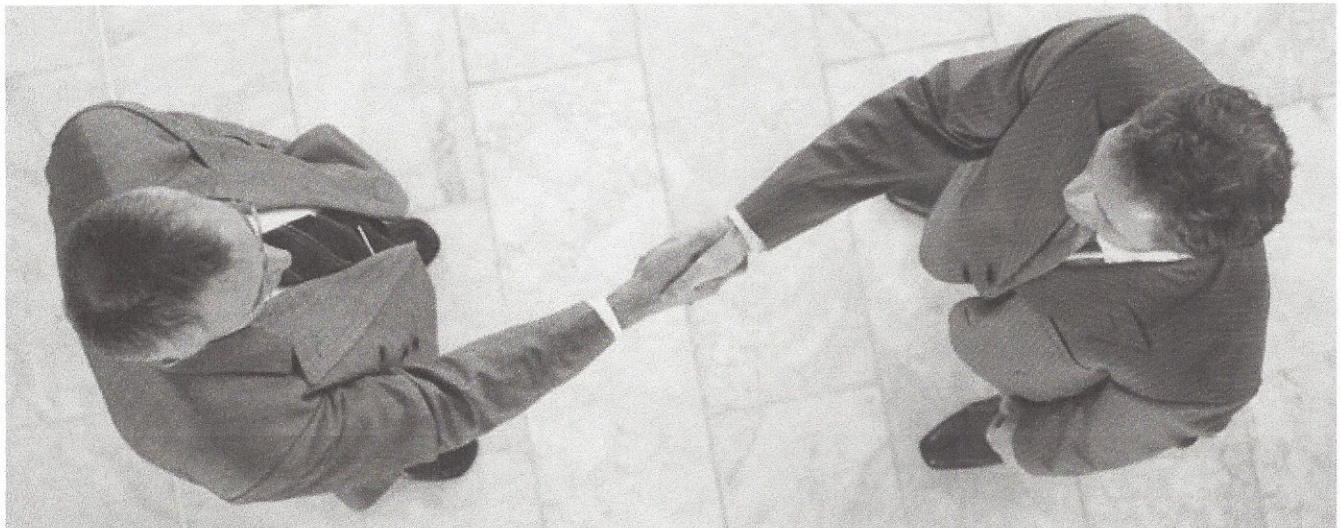


Culture of Trust

10 keys to creating one.

By Noreen Kelly



Leaders build trust by aligning behavior and with articulated mission, vision, values and goals; delivering consistent, credible messages with clarity so that every one is on the same page; and achieving buy-in of the business strategy.

Trust and communication are interwoven. At its core, trust is the basis of communication, and communication is key to building and maintaining trust.

Trust in communications is about relationships. Without a commitment to truth, openness and candor, solid relationships can't be formed. Trust—the essential element for collaboration and effective communication—is vital for creating more open, caring and ethical cultures. The better you communicate and trust, the better your ROI. Once you lose trust, you lose the ability to communicate and lead.

To create a culture of trust, leaders must keep high standards in their behavior and communication. For leaders, trust means doing the right thing and doing things right for the good of all shareholders through the strategic alignment of values with behavior, words, and actions.

Edgar Schein, former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, notes: "Communication is the bedrock of work and the basis of organizational effectiveness, and open communication depends on trust in a climate of giving and helping."

Trust matters in every interaction between managers and employees, customers and suppliers, coaches and team members, and one on one. The lack of authentic, honest and credible communication is why some leaders lose the trust of their employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders.

Organizational communication. Provide communication strategies and tactics that strengthen your reputation: articulating the mission, vision, goals and objectives and then taking action based on that direction; consistently and clearly stating values and delivering on their promises; building employee engagement and trusting relationships by improving your communication style, strategies and impact.

Personal trust. Organizational trust is based on interpersonal trust,

as trust works from the inside out. Erosion of trust can result not only from large scandals but also from daily breakdowns in relationships. Leaders can learn how to instill trust in their personal practices and create a culture that allows for honest, authentic conversations.

Change communications and transition management. Major change can happen only when the people involved trust the process. Timely, effective, consistent and regular communications is critical to building awareness, understanding and acceptance, changing behaviors, and improving results. A transition approach that honors the people side of change further builds trust.

Employee communication. Harmony in the workplace leads to success in the marketplace. Establishing trust can increase profitability, boost market value, add competitive advantage, lower costs, provide efficiencies, improve morale, and result in lower turnover, higher productivity, and increased job satisfaction. Open and honest communication creates mutual trust and understanding. Relationships built on trust enable us to get better, faster results with less stress.

Customer trust. Trust is a market asset and key to customer loyalty. Partnerships based on trust provide the greatest value to customers at the lowest cost. Distrust can result in refusal to buy or invest in a company's products or services. By seeing trust as a competitive asset, leaders can improve their bottom line and promote their highest good.

Knowledge sharing and collaboration. When we trust someone, we feel safe to share what is important to us, including our thoughts, ideas, efforts, hopes and concerns. Sharing of information in a climate of respect and collaboration leads to an increase in knowledge, understanding, and trust.

Public relations. Trust is an integral part of maintaining relationships with the media and public. Speaking the truth enhances your credibility and reputation. You need to create a unified message to the public, and ethically disseminate that message.

Principles and skills. Building trust in communications is in the process: listen to customers; talk directly to your people; show respect, concern and empathy; and reach audiences through clear, honest com-

munication. Practice consistency and alignment of written and verbal messages. Boost credibility with employees. Clarify and communicate the strategic direction with mission, vision, goals and objectives. Align messages with words and actions—do what you say you will do. Do the right thing. Say what you know when you know it. If you don't know, say so. If you can't tell, say so.

10 Actions for Leaders

Here are 10 actions that leaders can take to create a culture of trust:

1. Tell people what you know and don't know. Then tell them when you think you'll know more, and get back to them with that information.

2. Explain why. Explain why you or the company took a particular action, especially when communicating unpleasant or unwelcome information. If you don't do this, actions will be misinterpreted. If you announce a date or deadline and the date isn't met, explain why. Don't just ignore this—your credibility is on the line.

3. Be consistent. Repeating key messages reinforces them. Make sure your actions also reinforce those messages.

4 Don't spin. Don't try to spin bad news to make it look positive. People know when you're lying to them—and don't respect you for it. We handle the truth better than a lie or half-truth.

5. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Speak the truth with employees. Engage in open, honest conversations. Be forthcoming about the company's prospects and the future of their jobs. Have face-to-face interactions. Avoid *management speak*. Keep employees informed and address issues when you observe them. Provide timely feedback. Listen. Involve employees in the ownership of ideas and plans and at the grassroots of a project or decision when possible. Value people's input and opinions. Communicate the importance of ethics and integrity, along with shared vision and values. Provide clear and consistent communication to key stakeholders.

6. Be realistic. Don't over-promise and under-deliver.

7. Be accountable. Admit mistakes. Hold yourself accountable for your actions, words and decisions to your employees and customers.

8. Acknowledge and honor people's contributions, efforts, feelings and concerns. Respect the individual. Promote mutual trust. Be inclusive. Show empathy. Fairly reward employees.

9. Be authentic. Bring words and actions into alignment. Consistently live by clearly stated values.

10. Share information. Sharing of information within and between individuals and teams creates dialogue, promotes cooperation and helps build community over time.

Rate Yourself

Rate yourself on these trust imperatives:

Sharing & collaboration: Likely to share information and resources frequently and openly; Involve others in the ownership of ideas and plans. Promote collaboration.

Accountability: Accept responsibility for my actions, words and decisions. Admit mistakes. Hold myself accountable to the same standards set for others.

Authenticity: Engage in honest conversations. Demonstrate company's values through my thoughts, words, intentions and actions. Align words and actions.

Credibility: Am I trustworthy, believable. I walk the talk and inspire confidence through my actions and behavior.

Honesty/Transparency: Tell the truth. Communicate simply, straightforwardly and consistently across the entire audience. *Say what I know, when I know it. If I don't know, I say so. If I can't tell, I say so.*

Integrity. Follow through on commitments and promises. Practice

and promote alignment with the values. Take responsibility for my actions and act ethically.

Respect. Promote mutual trust and cooperation.

Inclusion. Acknowledge and honor people's feelings and concerns.



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Read Noreen's article "Restoring Trust in the Workplace"



"Trust and Communication Must Be Interwoven to Realize Successful Change"

Download the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer Executive Summary

Mind the Trust Gap

It is widening in today's workplace.

By Andrew Graham

Despite the fact that employees who trust the decisions of their boss are more loyal and engaged, leaders often fail to cultivate employee trust. We find a deep *trust gap*: while 90 percent of leaders and employees say that it's important for employees to trust their leaders, 65 percent of employees rate their level of trust in their leaders as moderate; 37 percent of employees say that they trust leaders less today; and 47 percent of leaders say that their employees trust them less. Only 8 percent of employees say they trust their leaders *to a great extent*. Leaders should place a premium on trust since we see a strong correlation between *trust in leaders* and *employee engagement*. Employees with a low level of trust are not nearly as engaged as those with high trust in their leaders.

What erodes trust? Bosses not owning up to their mistakes is a huge factor: 89 percent of leaders say that they either *always or often* apologize for their mistakes, but only 19 percent of employees agree. Indeed, 43 percent of employees surveyed say that their leaders *rarely or never* apologize for their errors.

The main reason that bosses don't apologize is that they're afraid of looking weak and incompetent, but fear of tarnishing their image sacrifices employee trust and loyalty.

Employees also named other boss behaviors that erode trust, including: lying, taking credit for others' ideas, blaming employees unfairly, gossiping, lack of clarity, and poor communication.

Trust is bolstered (and the trust gap narrowed) when leaders take these four steps: 1) listening to employees and understanding their concerns; 2) walking the talk—leaders doing as they say; 3) following through on commitments; and 4) encouraging employees to offer ideas and suggestions. LE



Andrew Graham is CEO of The Forum Corporation. Visit www.forum.com



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