

Building Trust

“You can’t have success without trust. The word trust embodies almost everything you can strive for that will help you to succeed. You tell me any human relationship that works without trust, whether it is a marriage or a friendship or a social interaction; in the long run, the same thing is true about business, especially businesses that deal with the public.” – Jim Burke, Former Chairman and CEO, Johnson & Johnson



The skill of opening up to others and creating an environment for others to open up in return, requires deep trust. Stephen Covey in *'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'* (1990) compares trust to an “Emotional Bank Account” which takes time to build up but can be spent quickly.

According to Rodas-Meeker and Meeker (2005, p89), “Absence of trust has an extremely negative impact on groups, and at a very high organisational cost. When trust is absent, negative emotions and actions, such as suspicion and blaming, can steal from an organisation’s productive energy and undermine the positive work that people should be attending to.”

“It takes years to build up trust, and only a few seconds to destroy it.”

What sort of practices BUILD trust?

- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Make decisions based on core values and principles rather than expediency or short term fixes which do not endure.
- Treat all people with courtesy, sincerity and respect, regardless of their status.
- Care about people, their well-being and be empathetic regardless of context.
- Avoid using people as instruments or stepping-stones for self-advancement.
- Be prepared to be vulnerable, willing to admit your own limitations & mistakes.
- Be accountable and assume responsibility for your decisions and actions. Be more concerned about your own accountability than your “rights.”
- Admit to and apologise for your mistakes.
- Be courageous - confront and take corrective actions when there is a problem.
- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Always follow through on your promises, no matter how insignificant.
- Always clarify and qualify your promises to make sure that you don't set up unrealistic or erroneous expectations.
- Take great care to maintain and nurture working relationships.
- Exercise self-control, and remember that an unkind word spoken in anger can cause irreparable damage to a relationship.
- Whenever a misunderstanding occurs, clear it up as soon as possible.

Building Trust (Cont'd)

- Give honest but constructive feedback.
- Trust people first until they prove themselves untrustworthy.
- Communicate openly and honestly, and explain your decisions.
- Earn people's trust by building a reputation for being competent & trustworthy.

Adapted from: 'Creating a Culture of Collaboration' IAF Handbook (2006, p243)

"If you want people to follow you, if you want people to work beside you, then they have to trust you." –
Perry Pascarella

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Recommended Reading:

"The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything" by Stephen M.R. Covey, Stephen R. Covey & Rebecca R. Merrill (2008)

"Building Trust: How to Get It! How to Keep It!" by Hyler Bracey (2003)