

6 TRUST-BUILDING HABITS OF LEADERS

Effective leaders know that building trust is the key to their effectiveness. By building trust, leaders enhance productivity, motivation, and engagement, and at the same time reduce stress and turnover.

Here are six practices that successful leaders use to build trust:

1. Align people around a set of operating principles.

Operating principles are a way of creating consistency in the way that people communicate. For example: "Bad news is not like wine; it does not get better with age. We owe it to each other to communicate news that affects our business as soon as possible." We encourage all teams to develop operating principles. By including everyone in the development of these principles, you can build ownership. Once articulated, you should review these expectations for the team on a regular basis and identify areas where slippage is occurring. Every team – and every team leader – should continually talk about the team's operating principles.

2. Sharpen the focus.

You build trust by giving people a sense of direction, of something to focus on beyond their day-to-day routines. This starts with the leader setting a vision for the organization or the team and identifying achievable goals and reasonable time frames for getting there. In articulating goals, aim for two or three at a time. Then give people opportunities to work together and determine how to achieve the goals. Remember that people can handle only 2-3 change initiatives at one time. Setting challenging yet achievable goals is an excellent way to build teamwork and trust.

3. Lead through others.

Trust is based on feeling safe, feeling respected, and feeling valued. Our brains are wired to continually monitor for signals of whether we trust other people – and whether they trust us. You build trust by getting to know people and encouraging people to take time to know each other. Trust rises when people feel safe, feel valued and appreciated, and feel they are treated equally. People are keenly aware of whether you treat them equally. This means giving people equal talk time, equal listening time. Avoid playing favorites among people who report to you. You need to display integrity in all your actions and maintain a clear professional line. Only by demonstrating your commitment to trust-building can you expect to hold other people to high standards of behavior.

4. Delegate effectively.

A key aspect of leading through others is delegating effectively. Only by delegating are you providing people opportunities to grow and learn. Delegating effectively means being very clear about expectations in terms of "deliverables" and deadlines. There are three levels of delegation: An "A" level delegation means I'm delegating to you the responsibility to develop a recommendation or proposal for how to move forward, but I reserve the right to make the final call. A "B" level delegation includes everything in "A" plus I'm delegating you the authority to make the call. However, I expect to be updated regularly and, if circumstances change, I may

change the level of delegation. A “C” level delegation is everything in “B” plus I don’t need to be kept in the loop. It’s routine and I fully trust that you can handle it.

5. Provide appreciative feedback.

Part of leading through others is providing frequent appreciative feedback. Recognize people when they do something well. Recognize them for being effective communicators and relationship-builders. Rewarding people with appreciative feedback enables people to see that you value them, which builds trust and builds the foundation needed to have successful constructive performance discussions. We stress the importance of giving appreciative feedback 1:1. When you give appreciative feedback in a group setting, you run the risk of appearing to be unfair.

6. Provide effective coaching.

Part of building trust is also providing specific, timely, direct constructive feedback. Find the courage to have the difficult conversation right away. Make it a coaching conversation, not a threatening one. Be clear about the mistake or the problem. Is it behavioral? Is it about work performance? Say you want the recipient to be successful. State what happened and why it didn’t work. Often the biggest factor in change is helping people become aware of the impact of their actions or behaviors. Ask the person if they are aware of it. Ask how they might have handled it better. If they’re at a loss, provide them specific ideas on how to handle it next time. Tell them that you want to support them. The biggest factor in changing behaviors is helping people see when it is happening. Give people the big picture – “here’s how these behaviors are going to impact your career.”