

Establishing a Culture of Trust

READY TO PUT INTO ACTION IN 5m

“When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.” Stephen R. Covey

It is easier to lose trust than to gain it. For people to work well together there needs to be a culture of trust. Internal trust also creates trust with external clients and partners. Establishing that trust is a challenge – you don’t just call a meeting and announce that you are creating a culture of trust.

For a leader to increase trust there must be honest communication, consistent action, and proven loyalty.



STEP 1: TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOU

Start by analysing your colleagues' body language. You do not need to be an expert. You started learning to see and understand the unspoken meaning of other people's facial expressions etc. as a very young child.

Do people seem open, or closed-off? When people speak, do they do so freely, or are they trying to withhold something? True teamwork cannot exist in a negative or limiting environment.

Identify specific areas which can be improved through greater trust. For example, colleagues who are afraid to ask for help or training; what effect is this having on their current output? - Asking someone else for help is one of the most trusting things a person can do.

STEP 2: LISTEN CAREFULLY

Stay open-minded and do not interrupt; how a person says something is just as important as what they are saying. It will show you what it most important to them. Pay attention, show respect, do not rush people when they speak, and be aware of your own body language. Listening to a colleague is an affordable short-term investment with valuable long-term rewards.

Schedule regular meetings where colleagues can discuss issues, ideas, and new developments.

In group situations, it is important that everyone shares their views and feelings. Shy or quiet colleagues will need you to encourage them. Help them be heard. Creating fresh air will clear up most misunderstandings and complaints. Make time to address any bad feelings and repair relationships. (See prompt on Managing Conflict)

STEP 3: SPEAK CLEARLY

People are not mind-readers. Where do they fit in? Have you told them? You get to set the direction and the pace, but you need to communicate it with everyone else.

Your colleagues know you are not perfect, so hold your head up and be proud when you get things right, but hold your hand up and admit your mistakes when you get them wrong. A leader who admits the struggles required to keep a project on course creates an atmosphere of openness in which potential solutions are more forthcoming.

STEP 4: ACT HONOURABLY

You cannot always please everyone. Making a commitment, or letting someone believe that you did, just to make them happy, will have negative consequences unless you do what you say you will. Your word is your bond - colleagues need to trust you.

Even if circumstances change, people will still want to know why the boss failed to predict events. Keep everyone informed and updated to the best of your ability.

Think about how decisions affect every person involved. Using your power to make other people feel powerless is unhelpful, as well as just plain wrong. Junior colleagues may not be able to challenge you directly, but they can behave negatively and express their problems in other ways, and this could be damaging to the company.

STEP 5: THE TRUST CYCLE

As the founder and CEO of Trusted Advisors Associates, Charles H. Green works with clients of every shape and size. He believes in letting substance speak for itself, instead of spinning everything in a marketing-centred approach. "To advertise 'We are trusted advisors' is akin to saying 'We're winners of the most humble award.'""**

Green identifies four measures which a company can use to assess its own trustworthiness:

1. Client focus: Clients need to trust that your idea of success is not just getting them to give you money.
2. Collaborative: Everyone should have trust in the idea that they are a meaningful part of the team.
3. Transparency: Colleagues who feel excluded from important decisions will lose trust, as well as confidence, direction, and motivation.
4. Timeframe: Business is as much about ongoing relationships as single transactions. Remember long-term goals during your daily routine.

CONCLUSION

Establishing a culture of trust will benefit you as much as everyone else. Colleagues who believe in you, who know you will act honourably and fairly, and who are not afraid to speak openly, will help you achieve more in less time. Clients who trust your company will do repeat business with you, and external partners will work with you again.

FURTHER READING & FOOTNOTES

*Green, Charles H., 2014. Reports of Trusted Advisor's Demise are Greatly Exaggerated. trustedadvisor.com, [blog] 10 June. Available at: [/trustmatters/reports-trusted-advisors-demise-greatly-exaggerated](http://trustmatters/reports-trusted-advisors-demise-greatly-exaggerated) [Accessed 18 June 2014].

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