

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

20

BUILDING TRUST

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PROLOGUE:

Possibly the ONE thing that everyone agrees all leaders must cultivate if they want to be successful in their roles is TRUST. Sadly, like many simple things, trust has been subverted and complicated the hell out of and made into being something it isn't - hard!

Trust is dead easy if you really CARE: and if you are GENUINE in your endeavours. Of course, you CAN'T fake it - nor can you 'just do it' - and therein lies the complication. It IS easy: but it IS hard also: because when we talk about TRUST inside an organisation, the professional and the personal elements are both irrevocably interlinked: which is why it is often misunderstood to be complicated...

Trust truly is the cornerstone for any work-based relationship - and unless you are able to cultivate it fast: and cultivate it right - chances are you build a reputation as 'untrustworthy' which becomes tough to repair as time goes by. The sad reality is this: there are countless ways to destroy the trust that is so carefully built as well. Repairing trust is tough - though not impossible: and most don't quite want to go through the pain of truly making things right which is essential for rebuilding trust that is broken.

Teams, more than anything else, depend on being able to trust their leaders to be able to bring in superlative results, regularly. Without being able to trust their teams, leaders also suffer paranoia and lead extremely stressful times at work. Trust goes both ways: always...
So does mistrust....

In this little booklet what we hoped to instill is how to build trust as a leader: and how to be able to do the things that matter the most in helping others trust you...

Remember - no matter how skilled or competent you are, without trust, you will always have sub-optimal team performances... Also remember that without trust you will never have the fulfilment that ought to be yours as a leader of a team...

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Chapter 1

Trust? I thought that was a given.

WHY is trust something we shouldn't really take for granted? After all - isn't trust the most fundamental building block of any relationship? Shouldn't it be common sense to give trust to gain trust: and shouldn't any interaction START with trust: rather than doubt and mistrust? Bottom line is, that TRUST is not as common or as easy as one would like to think - or care to admit. It is possibly a lot more common to have a certain sense of ambivalence when we meet people for the first time: specially in organizational settings.

So, learn to understand the pivotal role trust plays: especially when you are in leadership positions, and specially as you go higher in the organizational hierarchy...

WHY should someone trust you simply because you are the boss?

Professional Trust Vs. Personal Trust

One of the BIGGEST questions you need to ask is simply WHY someone should trust you? Simply because you are the 'boss' does not automatically make you trustworthy material. Also, remember that 'reputations' generally precede you: and also, different people WILL have different stories about you: so, never take it for granted that you are trusted.

Also, appreciate that personal trust and professional trust are two different things. It is QUITE POSSIBLE that people LIKE you as a person, and therefore, possibly trust you at a personal level. However, your WORK itself may not have developed a confidence in others - and you may not be seen as a thought leader, subject matter expert, coach of others etc. - which erodes your professional trust.

BOTH personal and professional trust is important. Generally, personal trust hinges on their appreciation of your intentions: and professional trust hinges on your perceived capability, results and 'reputation' to be someone who 'makes things happen.'

So, ask yourself whether you have a track record of being a person of your word, someone others can rely on, someone who will not have 'agendas' or someone whose actions are different to their words. Be honest to yourself: are you DESERVING of trust: and if the answer is no, do something about it...

Earning the right to be trusted

Many say you need to give trust to get trust. This is true: especially when you are a leader. However, it is rather naive to assume that everyone else will simply give trust. Many times, the majority of people working within organizations take a jaded view of leaders and managers - because they have been let down, lied to, abused, made use of, treated with contempt and made to feel like shit. So, don't fault them for looking at you with the same lens: it is a fair defence mechanism to have: and to ensure you are not let down all over again: 'once bitten twice shy' as the age old saying goes...

So, EARN their trust...

- Talk to them often: and be open and honest
- Encourage conversations - not monologues
- ASK them about what YOU can do for THEM - and get it done
 - BE there - especially when the 'chips are down'
 - NEVER hide behind 'company policy' - give solutions
- NEVER talk behind their back - say what you need to say 'to the face'

Giving trust to get trust

As a leader - who wants to build a culture of trust in a team or an organisation, learn to give trust first. You need to trust your peers, trust your team, and also, trust others: to do what they have been assigned to do. The bottom line is this: there is no other way to truly BUILD trust. Unless you give it first, you almost always create a sense of distrust and caution. Also, remember that trust is about being responsible also - and ensuring they have been given every possibility to succeed: rather than merely 'trusting' blindly and then feeling 'betrayed' when work is not done... So, by giving trust, we certainly don't mean merely giving a task and then hoping it is all done as per your expectations...

- When assigning tasks - be specific, be clear, encourage them to ask questions and clarify
- Ensure the team has all the resources required: and have an open dialogue about challenges
 - Give constant feedback (as opposed to micro managing)
- If things are going South, intervene but after the 'crisis' is averted, back off again and allow them to 'get on with it';
- Coach and Mentor - and enable them to learn from their mistakes.

Be clear that you trust them: and be sincere about it. You must be able to KNOW they will not willingly let you down: and that they will do all it takes to make things a success. When things don't go according to plan: don't resort to rants and angry outbursts: this will always break the trust established and make people 'go into a shell'

Willingness to NOT be in control

See: you really are NEVER in control of everything. So, the key is to understand this - and be ok with it. You must be able to trust the team - and also, trust the processes you have put in place. Trusting people without having a solid process in place is just 'hoping for the best' which generally never ends well. So, take the time to sit with the teams and establish protocols and processes to follow through on - rather than merely tasking work on the team and hoping for the best. This thorough and detailed approach will also establish credibility and professional regard and respect apart from trust...

Chapter 2

The Little Things

Too often, it is the simplest things that destroys trust: and sadly, they are also, often, the easiest things to fix: provided we are aware of them. Never take for granted the 'little things' - they DO matter!

Being true to your word

One of the sure-fire ways of losing trust is not to keep your word. Sounds blatantly simple: but bloody hard to do all the time. Keeping to your word on 'important' things is something we are often conscious of:

but the little things like getting back to a person, calling back as promised, replying a mail on time, doing that nagging appraisal on the due date and also, giving that day off as promised generally doesn't constitute 'important'! So, be wary and cautious about the 'promises' you make to the team: and ensure you 'stick to your word': or, if you can't, explain why you can't.

A quick tip: have a small book (or if you are fully digitalized, a notepad/excel) where you jot all the discussion points you randomly have with the team: and regularly visit them and update them. This way, you will never 'miss' something you had promised to do.

Having their back

When things go wrong is when you need to be there for the team the most. The simple rule to follow is this: take the blame personally - and never leave your team to face the music. After all, you ARE the boss - and this is YOUR responsibility - so, take it... Specially with regards to the 'rest of the organisation' make sure you are not seen to make the 'sacrificial lamb' of your team - because this will certainly erode any trust you have thus far amassed.

This is NOT to say pass the buck to anyone else either. Take the ownership as their leader: and if you want to reprimand them for the mistake do so privately, and 'civilly': rather than blowing your top.

It is absolutely essential that you don't abandon your team - in word or deed - when the going gets tough...

Encouragement

Be the person who constantly encourages and cheers the team on. NEVER do this as one of those passing 'good job guys' comments. Be sincere. Be honest. SHOW you care - as much as you say so... Praise often and publicly. Praise needs to be deserved too please: otherwise, it becomes useless!

A solid kick up the rear

Here is something you don't hear often: a proper 'telling off' is also required to build trust. You see, trust is NOT built by being 'passive' or being a 'nice guy.' As a leader you need to be firm and assertive when you need to, without being derogatory or rude. Unless you correct your team when required, or if you are seen to 'overlook' having tough conversations or evading the 'difficult situations' then what you have is a reputation of being a 'wuss' rather than a leader. Sure, you may be 'liked' as a 'really nice guy' but you will NOT gain trust as a leader.

Chapter 3

The Little Big Things

Some things are not so obvious. Neither are they the simplest of things to do... In building trust, as it is in leading in general, it is important to understand the things that make a difference: but may not be obvious at first glance. Omit or ignore these at your own peril...

Questioning, probing and then allowing them to connect the dots

NEVER just take things on face value. Question, probe and ensure you understand the ins and outs. TRUST is built, specially, on a professional note, based on the fact that you are thorough and conscientious and also, 'sharp' as a leader. If your team, and others, see you as ONLY a 'big picture' kind of person who does not care about the 'details', chances are you will not be trusted to truly deliver: and worse still, maybe mistaken for a 'sucker'

Being thorough and being picky are two very different things. Don't be pedantic: but DO ask the poignant question or two that demonstrates that you understand, and in fact, you CARE about the details. So, make sure you are able to ask the right questions, and also, connect the dots. Make sure you are able to spot the 'little things' they may have missed that 'makes all the difference': after all, that is WHY you are there as their boss : to be able to guide them... Do so with professionalism and deep appreciation for the tasks - rather than 'gloss over'

Understanding that people are different - but the rule book remaining the same

To win trust at a personal level you need to understand that people are different: and treat them as such. There really is no 'one size fits all' approach to dealing with people: and genuinely, you need to establish one-on-one connections with each one of those who report through to you/work with you.

However, the 'rule book' remains the same. This is a paradox many never quite appreciate. The 'rules' are the 'rules' for everybody: NEVER make an exception. The moment you do, it causes dissent and also, cries of 'favoritism.' Most never actually have a problem with a 'tough' boss: what they have a problem is that the boss is 'tough only on some.' So, make sure you are able to treat people the same when it comes to the 'rule books' but personalize your approach of managing them...

- When assigning work, make sure the 'load' is evened out - rather than overloading some and underloading others. If someone 'cannot' do what is being asked or is 'incapable' of it, either train them, coach them, improve them or get rid of them. It is a mortal sin to have someone else do their work!
- Make sure performance appraisals are transparent and completely unbiased. Remember 'performance' is a black and white thing - BEHAVIOR is what is grey - never mistake the two (we have an entire book on managing performance - read this for more details)
- Be sympathetic towards people's circumstances - but never make the mistake of 'excusing' bad performance because of personal circumstances
- NEVER CUT SLACK simply because you like someone - or because you believe the person is a much more loyal person than others

Accepting mistakes you make - and making that public apology

We will ALL make those massive blunders and omissions as leaders: it is only a matter of time. And, when this happens, we often have the opportunity to actually hide behind many covers - including ensuring no one finds out in the first place. However, if you WANT TRUST - then, honesty is definitely the best policy.

Make that public apology: and accept your fault: and also, outline what you will do to rectify it: including what penalties you will put on yourself as 'penance.' This sets the tone for your team about how one needs to own up to mistakes - and truly builds deep loyalties and trust towards a leader. You need to ensure you hold yourself to the high ideals and expectations you have of your team and others - and when people see you demonstrate it with action, trust comes naturally.

Taking the time to explain things - even when they are unpleasant

Most of the trust issues take place because of misinformation and often times, fake news, which organizations are bound by! So, take the time to ensure that you explain things - and remember - there is no such thing as overcommunicating. So, no matter how unpleasant the conversation - never shy away from it - have it - openly - honestly - unflinchingly. Remember - no matter how bad the news, your team will rather have it coming from you rather than some unknown third party or through the grapevine. Take the time to take people through situations, issues and also, possible scenarios that will play itself out in the future. Take the time to prepare for tough times: and rather than sugarcoating things, get brutally honest: and here is the trick - then, sit down and see how best you can work together to avert any of the negatives that are foreseen.

Accommodating failures - and 'honest' mistakes

Always make the distinction between honest mistakes and negligence. Be patient with honest mistakes: and have zero tolerance towards negligence. Failures are normal - and whenever the team or a team member fails, take the time to sit down and analyze the failure - rather than making a person feel like a failure. Being able to fail without being made to feel a failure ensures you will build solid trust...

Chapter 4

The Big Things

There are obvious things: and they are generally 'big'' things...

They are obvious: but we tend to be blindsided by them because they are obvious. Some are common sensical - but others actually are counter intuitive: but they all really really matter...

Tough Love

Love is important - tough love more so. Most of the times leaders who love their teams 'spoil' their teams (as much as well-meaning parents cripple children by smothering them with love but never correcting them when required, building a false sense of identity and entitlement that becomes counterproductive as an adult). Tough Love means being able to take the harshest stances and vet out the severest punishments BECAUSE you love someone - and take them through the punishment and be able to ensure the 'lessons' are learnt, rather than abandoning them to obscurity.

Tough love is about building teams that are resilient, competent, progressive and battle hardened: rather than shielding them, making them incompetent to brave the REAL world. Those who are able to do this become TRUSTED because teams understand that you are one to never take the easy way out: and that being with you will result in a better team being created: and you will naturally attract the best talent to you...

Helping individuals grow (even at your cost)

Often, making a sacrifice or two on behalf of the team or a truly deserving individual makes all the difference in demonstrating your TRULY CARE - and that is often the foundation of trust. When you can put someone else before you and your needs that becomes a clear beacon of leadership and selflessness that everyone resonates with. Being able to help - even at a personal cost (provided they deserve it of course) builds a trust that becomes ironclad and builds a bond that is often for a lifetime...

Following through on that threat

As much as being loved and respected, you must also be one 'not to be messed with.' This is not really about creating fear: but enabling teams and colleagues understand you are no doormat either.

The simple mantra is this: if you make a threat: execute it: or don't make it at all...

If you are not going to execute the threat, you create a counterproductive persona about you: and most times - it is to your detriment. Thus far - but no further is something everyone must understand...

Working with those whom you personally dislike

Often you may have those you may not 'like' and that will become clear to all concerned as people do have a 'sixth sense' to notice whether they are liked or not. Sometimes, being human, we cannot help not liking someone - but whether we are professional, civil and willing to work with them is a conscious choice we make - unlike the unconscious impulse of like and dislike. So, be willing to work with those who you make not LIKE - especially if they are really good and integral to the work you do. This level of professionalism and being able to work with anyone helps build a truly binding trust with everyone you work with.

Being willing to be reverse mentored

The other way of building trust that matters a hell of a lot when working across the generation gap is to be able to learn from anyone - even from the most junior team member. Being able to be reverse mentored, and truly immersing in learning, from anyone and everyone creates a culture of learning within the team, and enables your team to trust you to not play hierarchies and seniorities which are often impediments to truly coming together as a team.

Not playing favourites: and being transparent

One of the BIGGEST reasons for trust to be broken is because of leaders 'playing favorites' or actually, at times, perceived to be playing favorites. The reason for 'corridor talk' about the 'blue-eyed boys' and 'favorites' is because the appraisal process, promotion process, increment and bonus processes are not really understood - and often, unclear...

So:

- Make sure the objectives are set transparently: and can be objectively assessed by data (as opposed to opinions)
 - Make sure there is a clear process to do promotions within the team/organisation
- Ensure everyone understands how increments and bonuses are given - and that they are merit based
 - Make sure you have clear listing of competencies required for promotions - and have a system of assessing them regularly - and by others as well as you - rather than you being the sole purveyor of their behaviour

Being WITH the team in times of crisis

Crisis times are when trust and loyalties are tested the most. So, if you abandon the team at the first sign of crisis, chances are whatever you say will mean absolutely nothing afterwards. There are of course times when the job cuts are inevitable - but you must know, hand on heart, that you did absolutely everything you can possibly do to ensure it was averted. Having done all you could, if the axe still has to fall:

- Try and find alternative jobs
 - Look at helping them start out on their own
 - Talk and coach them through the difficult exit
- Refer them to counsellors or someone who can help them emotionally
 - Have chats with the families - and talk through options ahead
- BE THERE even after they are fired - and support them through this difficult time

Chapter 5

What matters the most

At the end of the day, it all boils down to two things. Sincerity and I mean genuine sincerity in everything that we do. the other is, for whatever unforeseen circumstances the trust is broken, then all effort must be put into mending that broken trust.

Sincerity: Genuinely wanting your team to succeed and meaning well - Knowing they can talk to you at any point: and you will listen.

In every aspect of dealing with your team, you need to ensure that sincere genuineness is at the core of your dealing with them. It cannot be an 'act', you genuinely need to believe and support them to succeed.

This requires you to make the effort to understand each individual within your team. Know their challenges, strengths and weaknesses. Understand their ambitions, passion and drive. Work with them on a plan to build them upwards, towards overcoming their challenges and developing them along the way. Not to 'tell' them' what to do, but to 'show' them how to do it and allow them to succeed.

Be there for them always and make sure you let them know that. They need to trust you enough to know that they can approach you at any given time and that you will not judge them, instead help them rationalise and see the pros and cons of the choices they make. Sometimes they just need a listening ear...and you need make sure you are there at that point!

Mending trust when it is broken

When the trust is broken within the working environment, with your boss or peers, it will have an impact on the overall efficiency of the organisation. It will not allow you to have that open conversation. You may feel like you will be judged or maybe even shouted at. You will begin to avoid that individual to a point you may not want to have in interaction with that individual.

This choice of behaviour will only become detrimental to the working relationship you have with your boss and your peer and it will negatively impact the team that you work with, which in turn will impact the overall organisation.

It is therefore imperative that you that you resolve the issue and mend that broken fence. Here are some recommended steps that may help you along the way:

- Understand that there is an issue and identify why it happened
 - Understand the issue from the other person's perspective
 - Start the conversation to mend that fence...take the initiative
- Always speak to the other person in a respectful manner and not in any derogatory way
- Expect a reaction and ensure you are always calm, not being sarcastic or aggressive
 - Don't think that one conversation will give you a magic result - be patient - be prepared for more open conversations
- Offer solutions and do not be selfish in that choice either...be ok with doing 'what is right', even though your initial suggestion is not 'wrong'

Mending that broken trust will not only strengthen the professional relationship but will also teach you, as an individual, valuable lessons in life about being a better person. Someone who is in control of his or her emotions and understands their own strengths and weaknesses.

EPILOGUE

TRUST is the foundation upon which all relationships are built – both professional and personal.

This is also a topic that is overrated for all the wrong reasons. The pre-requisite is to be genuine and really care about the other person.

Some may argue that this is 'easier said than done'. On the contrary it is dead easy to start. 'How?' you may ask.

In the word of Ernest Hemingway: "The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them."

In a day and age where many spend more time in the office than at home, building strong relationships are critical.

Always be open, transparent and genuinely care...everything else will just flow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



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