

How to Close the Trust Gap Between You and Your Team – 5 Strategies for Leaders

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PwC has been tracking trust within workplace settings for years, but their most recent 2024 survey reveals a larger trust disconnect between leaders and employees than in the past. While 86% of executives say they trust their people, just 60% of workers feel trusted by their organizations. That means that for every 10 employees you manage, four doubt that you honestly have their backs.

If this sounds alarming, you're paying attention. Trust is an essential tool that can hold a company together through the good and bad times. When you have a steady stream of trust throughout your company, you're poised to see higher performance levels and more creativity. Instead of playing it safe (which leads to playing it small), employees take pride in being trusted enough to innovate and think outside narrow job descriptions. With an added layer of trust, they can see the bigger vision and know their impact will be appreciated.

Unfortunately, you can't wave a magic wand and make trust appear. Trust isn't a commodity. It can't be bought or sold. It must be earned, and that means you need the courage to make some shifts in your leadership style to close any trust gaps between you and your team.

Related: Strong Leaders Use These 4 Strategies to Build Trust in Their Workplace

1. Retool your hiring process

First, do something that sounds simple but isn't: Take hiring seriously. The tighter your selection process for all positions, the easier it will be to develop trust with the people you onboard. It's exceptionally difficult to build trust with someone who is the wrong fit for your business goals or doesn't value people. By making your hiring process more robust, you send a message that your team is significant, select and special. That's a foundation for future trust.

As part of your revised hiring process, involve your team in the experience. The unknown is a big barrier to trust. Empowering your people to help make hiring decisions reduces the friction that can come when an "outsider" is brought into the mix. Have them conduct group and individual interviews, review resumes and participate in hiring simulations for final candidates. Ask for their input. In no time, you'll transform the "new person" into someone who's been invited to join the team **by** the team.

2. Invest time in building genuine relationships

After you've hired someone, kick off your relationship on a trust-building note. Sit down and talk about your expectations. As an executive, I've learned to ask specific questions to gain trust.

- How will we work together?
- What does trust and respect look like in a working relationship?
- What do you expect of me as your boss?
- How should we handle inevitable differences of opinion?

By asking these questions – and truly listening to the answers – you'll set the stage right away for free-flowing, authentic discussions built around mutual respect and understanding. It also makes it easier to share your expectations for how they show up at work.

This effort will pay off down the road, especially during rocky moments. In the past, I've had to let team members go. Rather than ignoring the elephant in the room, I sit everyone down together afterward. I find out how they're feeling. Usually, no one talks about those types of things. Our team can because we have strong relationships with each other, making it easier to take a pulse and hear everyone's perspectives.

Related: [How to Build and Sustain Deep, Meaningful Business Relationships \(and Why It's the Key to Long-Lasting Success\)](#)

3. Strengthen your leadership tendencies

All leaders can get better. The sooner you recognize any tendencies or habits you have that are leading others to distrust you, the sooner you can stop them. For instance, is your first reaction to a problem assuming control, micromanaging or taking over? Do you resist sharing information because you stress about freaking out your team? These are understandable reactions, but they're not going to foster trust.

Now, you may say that you're just "following orders" or that your company's hierarchy is militant and structured. That's not uncommon, although it's very old-school. However, when you keep people in the dark, you instill fear and inadvertently minimize people's potential contributions. Conversely, when you trust your team with the truth, you open the doors to better communication and a high-performing culture. And you

can do this regardless of what your company does, at least to a certain degree.

4. Use tech to grow – not destroy – trust

The latest tech tools can be used to both fuel and hinder trust. It all boils down to how, when and why you introduce and use them. For instance, I recommend talking with your team before bringing in any new tech. When you chat about it first, you're not just unilaterally forcing your team to use a tech they might not find beneficial. Ideally, tech should simplify everyone's work experience, not make their lives harder.

What about monitoring software? It's a losing battle. When you're monitoring folks, you're saying, "I don't trust you" and "I care more about time than outcomes." Your employees will resent this and may even find loopholes to game your monitoring system. I know of a remote worker who put her mouse in her pocket and did errands. The mouse jiggled as if she were at her desk, and her bosses never knew. Ingenious. If she was getting work done, why should she be monitored like a child? Ultimately, it all comes back to trusting your team members and giving them the room to do their jobs as expected.

Related: [The Biggest Obstacle Facing Leaders Is Distrust. Here's How to Build Confidence in Your Team.](#)

5. Rethink your assumptions about people

You can't do it all. No one can. You have to count on others, and that means you have to value and trust employees. It's okay if you wouldn't trust them to babysit your kids while you go on a date night. However, you must trust them to take pride in their work and perform their job well once fully trained.

Where to start? Try pushing responsibilities to your team.

In one of our workshops, a participant realized she was too “in the weeds” and didn’t have time to lead. When she returned to work, she pulled her small team into a meeting. She said, “These are the things that need to get done. I want you guys to work out how to make everything happen. Let me know what you’ll need from me.” Within a couple of hours, they had divided the work between them based on their aptitudes and preferences. From there, everything went smoothly. The leader was surprised (and relieved) by how well the experiment worked.

You may trust your team, but if you’re not filtering your actions through a trust filter, you’re probably missing major trust-building opportunities. By switching up a few of your leadership strategies, you can demonstrate your unwavering trust, which will help clear the way for your trust to be reciprocated.

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