

Managing is a matter of trust



While any political candidate can attest just how hard it is to build trust with those they hope to lead, instilling a sense of trust with employees is worth the effort.

Unlike engagement, which can be hard to measure given that so much of it depends on employee's own self-reports, trust is easily assessed through simple observation.

Here are a few questions that Nan S. Russell, a former executive and author of more than four books on workplace culture and trust, suggests managers can apply to determine whether trust is present on the teams you manage, and how to work towards developing it further.

Do your employees own their mistakes?

A culture based on blaming vendors, other departments, leaders, competitors and co-workers is a telltale sign that employees don't have trust—in you as their leader, in one another or in their job security.

When employees hold themselves accountable for issues that may arise, they're communicating that they feel safe. They trust that you as their leader, and their co-workers, believe they did their best, despite the outcome.

Workers who own up to mistakes typically tend to be willing to put themselves on the line in other ways, too. They trust that they work in a place that will support them to take creative risks, to approach problems in new ways and to speak up when they see an opportunity to make improvements.

If you don't have a culture of accountability, start by instilling a "no blame" policy.

When you mess up, tell your employees outright where you went wrong, and what you learned from it. The more you assure employees that there are no consequences to innocent mistakes—only lessons—the more you'll build a culture where employees feel safe to thrive, despite the risks.

Does your team speak freely about their challenges?

Employees who don't trust their workplace will not speak up about the challenges they face in their jobs, or their personal lives.

Instead, they'll hide their stress, their dissatisfaction and their mistakes. Eventually, they'll leave to find a new job, or quit if the mistake they've hidden proves damaging enough.

Whatever the outcome, the consequences of employees who don't feel supported enough by their work

environment to be honest about their worries, fears and problems will eventually be felt by you as their manager, and your team.

Russell says transparency goes a long way in building a sense of trust. Be honest when employees ask you questions; ask them outright about their concerns and challenges.

Trust is built by listening, not assuming you know what a person wants, feels or thinks.

Are you the only cheerleader?

Teams who have high levels of trust in management, their jobs and co-workers tend to be naturally excited about the latest goals, objectives and initiatives the company as a whole works to support. They feel connected and perceive that their contribution matters.

Whether the company achieves success, has a bad quarter or changes direction in strategy, they're still on board with the bigger mission. If you feel like you're the only cheerleader for the corporate mission on your team, you may have a trust issue.

Managers can work to overcome trust issues with the "powers that be" in a company by giving employees a sense of who executives are, based on your interactions and experience with them.

Be transparent with employees about the nature of meetings you attend with executives, and share some of the key points addressed in them.

It may not be possible to personally introduce everyone on your team to top leadership, but you can instill a sense of trust by keeping your team informed about the viewpoints, attitudes and beliefs executive leadership have expressed; and pointing out how their work directly impacts the issues executives deem important.