

TRUSTING LEADERSHIP

“Love ... always protects, always trusts...” – I Corinthians 13

Trust lets you have an attitude of openness and sharing toward others.

When you create healthy, trusting relationships, you are more likely to have a workplace that is productive and enjoyable. You can develop this trusting attitude by opening up with others, sharing decision-making authority, and helping others grow as they take on more responsibility.

Trusting doesn't mean you are naive and let other people take advantage of you; it means you confidently share more of yourself so you can build better relationships and get more done.

Key Actions for Being Trusting

- **Open up, and show vulnerability and humanity with others.**

Diplomatically let others know what you are thinking and feeling.

No one wants to wonder about where the leader stands on a work-related issue, so don't be evasive unless you haven't made up your mind. You can build trust by sharing your thoughts and feelings, while also diplomatically allowing space for others to share theirs. Consider these tips:

- Express your ideas without attaching “ownership” to them, and invite others to do the same. In most cases, the best ideas are developed collaboratively, with input from all involved. You can disagree without being disagreeable.
- Describe your criteria for judging ideas and making decisions, and invite others to share theirs. This helps others understand your values and motivations so you can more easily find common ground.
- Tell people if you haven't made up your mind, or are still formulating what to say. This helps them see that you are not holding back. (*EXAMPLE: “I need a moment, I'm still processing.”*)
- If you are feeling something, say so by labeling your emotions as you express yourself. People will trust you more when you show you are self-aware and responsible.

When sharing your personal side, be authentic without overexposing.

Vulnerability means sharing a bit of your heart, and leaders are more influential when others feel connected to them. *But how much is enough?* Share too little and you may be seen as mysterious and guarded. Share too much, and you risk awkward overexposure. Somewhere in the middle, there is a balance that lets you be seen as approachable. Consider these tips:

- Share safe facts about your history that almost anyone could relate to – where you grew up, funny stories from your early family life, moments that led to important life lessons.
- Explain how your previous experiences helped you become the person you are today.
- Do share stories from your past about how you faced a fear or overcame a challenge. Avoid revealing more about yourself than what others need or want to know.

Key Actions for Being Trusting (continued)

- **Solicit others' opinions on decisions that may affect them.**

Recognize when a decision will impact the people around you.

Some leaders assert their power and carry out decisions without consulting others. Their philosophy is simple: *I trust my own instincts, why should I consult with anyone else?* This approach may work on some low stakes decisions, but is not recommended when the decision is likely to create a significant change for one person, a number of people, or possibly the entire organization. In these cases, it is best to consult with the people who will play a role in the decision you are about to make.

As you approach a significant decision, ask:

- *Who has the authority to make the decision?*

You may have the sole authority, or you may share the authority with others.

- *Who will have to execute the decision?*

The decision may require only one person to carry it out. Sometimes, entire departments of people will be enlisted to do the work associated with the decision.

- *Who will be impacted by the decision, either positively or negatively?*

It's necessary to consult the people who will be affected by the decision. They may be in other departments or branches of the organization, but consulting with them ensures you are building trust.

Ask key stakeholders to share their input on decisions.

You may not have time to consult with every single person involved in the decision, but the quality and effectiveness of your decision will be enhanced by understanding the points of view of everyone involved. Asking for input needs to come from genuine interest; it should not be used as a device to “rubber stamp” decisions you have already made.

Contact key leaders or stakeholders and ask them to share what they think by guiding them through these questions.

- Here is the problem we have identified, and how it is impacting other areas. What is your perception of this? How is this problem impacting you or your team?
- How do you think we can solve this? What are your ideas?
- What do you think of these options? How would you evaluate them?
- What role could you and your team play in the implementation of a solution? What resources would you need to feel confident in that implementation?
- Thanks for your input.

Key Actions for Being Trusting (continued)

- Encourage employees to handle important work decisions on their own.

Delegate responsibility and decision-making authority.

Employees are not here to take orders and do everything your way. That would mean they exist to serve you, and the opposite is true – you’re here to serve them. A good way to show you trust them is to let them take on more responsibility, and to get things done with less of your supervision. To help employees develop their abilities, consider working through these levels leading to the highest level of trust between a leader and an employee – delegation. To determine which level of trust is appropriate for each employee, you will need to work with your employee to determine how competent they are at performing the job, and how confident and self-motivated they are to do it on their own.

Directing: When an employee is new on the job, they need someone to show them how it is done, and to watch them closely to ensure they become competent. Employees in this stage are looking for the leader to provide clear direction, but they are usually highly engaged in the learning and ready to follow your lead.

“I will show you and tell you exactly how it should be done, and then supervise you as you do it.”

Coaching: When the employee has shown some competence, they are probably ready for you to coach them. This means that you ask them to share how they would do the job and to offer their ideas, but you still make the decisions about how things are done. At this level, you provide plenty of feedback, praise, and encouragement.

“I will let you show and tell me how you’d like to do it, but I will decide how it gets done while giving you feedback and praise.”

Supporting: At this level, the employee has enough competence and confidence that they can do the job on their own with little supervision. But as a way of supporting them, you have them check in with you regularly to share updates on progress and to let you know if they need any help. You continue to provide feedback, praise, and encouragement.

“I will let you do it on your own, and you will check in with me regularly to let me know how it is going and to ask me for help if it is needed.”

Delegating: When the employee has shown a high level of competence and confidence, the job can be delegated to them. This means that you trust them to get the job done, and you don’t need to supervise or get regular updates on their progress. The employee is expected to come to you only when they need help or your input on a decision. Delegating jobs to others shows the highest level of trust.

“I will let you do it on your own and I will trust that it gets done; you will check in with me only if you need my help.”

