



The **12** Dimensions of

TRUST

Trust is a 2-way street. Learn how to be trusting
AND trustworthy in 12 different ways.

by Deb Calvert

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An Introduction to The 12 Dimensions of Trust

Trust. It's a loaded word, a misunderstood construct, and a necessity in the workplace. Without recognizing all 12 dimensions of trust, we all run the risk of inadvertently breaching others' trust. Similarly, we operate on vague feelings of mistrust that are often unfounded. For something as fragile as trust, these complications only make it harder to form strong bonds and collaborate effectively.

When you think of trust, you probably associate it with honesty and integrity. Don't stop there! With 11 additional dimensions, trust involves so much more. Throughout this handy guide, we'll break it down so you can solidly build 2-way trust with your colleagues.

Let's start with the dictionary definition of trust.

- Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc. of a person or thing; confidence
- Confident expectation of something
- To rely upon or place confidence in someone or something
- Assurance or confidence that invokes a feeling of security
- Unquestioning belief in and reliance upon someone or something



What causes us to have confidence in someone or something?

That's what the 12 Dimensions of Trust address.

The word "trust" was originally derived from a German cognate "trost" which meant "comfort." When trust is strong, we are more comfortable with others. We can take comfort in the words and actions of those we trust. Without trust, relationships and outcomes are compromised and leave us feeling less secure and less confident.

Unfortunately, there are times when we don't know why we're unable to trust others or why they don't entirely trust us. Knowing about all 12 Dimensions of Trust will help you work through those uncertainties, establish stronger bonds of trust, restore any relationships harmed by inadvertent breaches of trust, and maintain higher levels of trust with others.

What Are the 12 Dimensions of Trust?

Chapter by chapter, we'll break these down so you can get a more complete picture of what each dimension entails. We'll examine ways that people inadvertently breach trust in each dimension and look at the behaviors that will help you shore up your trustworthiness in each dimension, too.

The 12 Dimensions of Trust that enable us to have confidence in someone are:

1. Integrity (including honesty)
2. Competence
3. Consistency
4. Loyalty
5. Availability
6. Fairness
7. Decision Making
8. Follow Through
9. Openness
10. Discreteness
11. Constructive Intent
12. Accurate Self-Assessment

Knowing the 12 Dimensions of Trust Will Make You More Trustworthy

You may consider yourself to be trustworthy because you operate with integrity and are an honest person. You don't lie, cheat, steal, or make self-serving decisions. You may believe that you are above reproach or blameless in relationships where trust has been broken.

Feeling that way is often the result of thinking too narrowly about what it takes for others to fully trust you. Many people who display honesty and integrity fail to realize that they're doing other things that make them less trustworthy.

Take, for example, a colleague who is reserved and a bit guarded. She's honest and has good integrity. But she's closed off, seldom engages, and doesn't readily share information about herself or her views. As a result, others aren't able to fully trust her. She's inadvertently breaching trust because she's not displaying the dimensions of availability and openness.

Here's another example. A manager who is honest and open and full of integrity seems to attack others with candid feedback and harsh criticism. The manager is well-intended, but others don't understand that the criticism is meant to be helpful. To them, it just feels like bullying. They don't trust the manager because the dimension of constructive intent is not apparent.

Style dimensions like these require self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and an understanding of how they affect others' abilities to trust you.

Knowing all 12 Dimensions of Trust, honestly assessing yourself in them, and deliberately working to be solid in all 12 will make it easier for others to trust you.

Knowing the 12 Dimensions of Trust Will Make It Easier to Trust Others

Ever have a vague feeling that you can't trust a certain person? We think of it as "gut instinct" instead of pinpointing what's keeping us from more fully trusting them. Because we don't trust them, we inhibit the growth of that relationship and interact with them cautiously. Soon, they are not able to trust us either because we're not displaying availability, fairness, or openness with them.

It's not fair to them (or to us) to let that non-specific feeling linger and impair our ability to collaborate and count on each other. Using the 12 Dimensions of Trust as a diagnostic tool can help you identify what's keeping you from trusting the other person. Once you know, you can have a frank discussion and re-establish trust.

As you work with this tool, you'll soon discover that certain dimensions of trust are more important to you than others are. You'll notice that what's a big deal to you is less important to some others.

A classic case of having different trust priorities relates to the dimension of follow through. For some, this is a BIG deal. When others don't follow through on promises and commitments, there's a lingering doubt or suspicion that colors the relationship. For others, that lack of follow through is tolerable and easily overlooked. The second type might consider the first to be uptight and rigid... Nonetheless, the first type won't trust the folks who fail to follow through.

In the workplace, teams who work through the 12 Dimensions learn to identify their trust triggers and to respect others. Most teams can immediately begin the work of rebuilding trust once team members understand that others didn't mean to violate their trust, that different trust priorities lead to different actions, and that open dialogue about the 12 Dimensions offers an easy reset.



Huh? Honesty and Integrity Aren't Enough?!?

Do you consider yourself to be trustworthy?

Why?

If you're like most people, you believe others should trust you because you're honest (usually) and because you're of good moral character.

You may define trustworthy as being honest and/or showing integrity. Although those are important aspects of trustworthiness, there are 11 other dimensions of trust. We'll be examining those throughout this booklet.

Since this is the dimension most often associated with trustworthiness, we'll start with honesty and integrity.

What Does Integrity Really Mean?

Ask ten people what the word integrity means, and you'll get ten different answers. Here's the dictionary definition:

- Adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty.
- The state of being whole, entire, or undiminished; Unity, wholeness.
- A sound, unimpaired, or perfect condition.

The word "integrity" comes from the Latin word "integritas" meaning "untouched, undivided, whole, fresh." It originates from the same root word as integer, meaning "whole number" or a complete entity.

To get a complete understanding of what it means to have integrity, don't stop at the first bullet point. Instead, think about this notion of wholeness because it's the part that people are trying to define when they attempt to describe integrity.



With wholeness, you become easier to understand. Your actions are more predictable and make sense to others. With unity in your words and actions, you'll consistently adhere to professed values and principles.

Wholeness creates workplace bonds. When people know they can rely on you and anticipate your responses, interpersonal relationships improve.

Being whole, undiminished, and adhering to principles inspires trust because it leaves little room for doubt about your motives. People are less likely to suspect you have a self-serving hidden agenda when they have context and understanding (the whole picture).

As you evaluate your own integrity, think about it from others' perspectives. You may have integrity, but can they see it in your words and actions? Do they know what you believe in and stand for? Are you consistent and transparent in the decisions you make and actions you display?

If not, you may be inadvertently causing others to mistrust you. They don't have enough information to conclude that you are a person of integrity.

How Are Honesty and Integrity Related?

The link between honesty and integrity is found in another word, one that's less known and seldom used. Probity means "integrity and uprightness; honesty." It comes from the Latin words "probitas" meaning honesty and "probus" meaning virtuous.

Additionally, honesty is part of the primary definition for integrity and is generally considered to be part of a sound, moral character.

Portions of the definitions for integrity and honesty overlap. For example, one of the dictionary definitions for honesty is "genuine or unadulterated." That's similar to integrity's definition of "being whole, entire, undiminished" and "unimpaired, perfect condition."

Honesty also means:

- Honorable in principles, intentions, and actions; upright and fair
- Sincere; frank
- Not given to lying, cheating, stealing, etc.; trustworthy
- Not false or misleading; genuine
- Without pretensions or artificial traits

Before you check the box on honesty, take a moment to be honest with yourself.

According to an article in Psychology Today, deception is rampant. Bella DePaulo, Ph.D., conducted a study with people ages 18-71. The subjects journaled daily about the falsehoods they told. They excluded mindless pleasantries (like “I’m fine”) to assess the frequency of lying. The findings of this and other studies include:

- On average, people lie 1-2 times every day.
- In social exchanges lasting 10+ minutes, people lie in 20% of those conversations.
- Each week, people deceive about 30% of those they interact with one-to-one.
- Social lubricant lying (being falsely positive with compliments, etc.) are 10 times more frequent than lies that exaggerate something negative.
- Men and women lie with equal frequency.
- People who are extroverted and sociable are slightly more prone to lying.
- Lies are more frequently told in interactions that are not face-to-face.
- Only about 20% of lies are detected by the person being told the falsehood.
- 75% of people report that they would tell the lie again if put in the same situation.
- Some psychiatrists believe that certain amount of deception, including some self-deception, may actually be healthy.

In other words, people lie frequently enough that “little white lies” and half-truths are commonplace. We may justify our own lie-telling and accept others’ deceptions by accepting that “everyone lies.”

Here’s the problem. Once you’re caught in a lie, it will be difficult for others to believe you even when you’re telling the truth. Remember Aesop’s Fable about The Boy Who Cried Wolf?

It may not be fair, but we hold others to a higher standard than the one we hold ourselves to when it comes to honesty. We excuse our own dishonesty, rationalizing that it’s necessary or harmless. But we take great offense when others lie to us. They do the same. If someone else catches you lying, they will judge you as dishonest and untrustworthy (just as you would judge them).

Worse yet, you may never know when someone thinks you’ve lied. People in the workplace are often too uncomfortable to confront. This allows the lie (or even the perception of a lie) to remain as a barrier between two people.

Here’s where integrity comes back into the mix. Oftentimes, the perception of a lie is the result of people seeing incongruence. Two things don’t match: *Yesterday you said _____, but today you’re saying _____*. Or your actions don’t match your words. The mismatch diminishes the wholeness or integrity, leaving ample room for doubt about your intentions and trustworthiness.

Being honest with yourself is part of developing and displaying integrity. Intellectual honesty requires self-awareness so you can be more objective and less inclined to yield to your own unconscious biases. Keeping an open mind, not pretending to have all the answers, pursuing truth over needing to be right, and looking for the complete picture all demonstrate elements of integrity.

What If Others Don't Understand the Importance of Being Trustworthy?

Throughout this guide, we'll look at trust as a 2-way street. Making sure that you're trustworthy in all 12 Dimensions of Trust is only half the equation. The other half is finding ways for you to more fully trust others. No matter who has breached trust, the aim is to restore it.

When it comes to honesty and integrity, others likely fall into one of these groups.

- **Group one** (the majority) are like the people mentioned in the studies above. They lie occasionally for convenience, to avoid pain, to spare others' feelings, and to expedite conversations. They mean no harm and believe their lies to be inconsequential. Sometimes, people in this group aren't lying. It just looks that way because there's a gap in the interpretation of what they've said or done.
- **Group two** (a small number of people!) lie for personal gain and/or to injure others. Their lies are more frequent and more egregious than the ones told by the folks in group one. They lie without remorse and without caring about the impact on others.

When you're attempting to rebuild trust with people in group one, start with the assumption that there was not a lie and that there was good intent. Give them the same grace you would give yourself. Have a conversation about your misunderstanding and seek to get more information that explains the situation differently. Don't make accusations. Seek clarity instead. Open with a statement like *"I'm a little confused because _____, and that seemed different from _____ . I'm just looking to get a better understanding of the situation."*

If you think you might be dealing with someone from group two, start with a gut check. Do you feel this way because there are other issues? Or do you have indisputable evidence that lies have been told and that those lies were for personal gain and/or to injure others?

If you're not certain, proceed initially as you would with someone in group one. Keep an open mind until you're sure that this individual is in group two.

Once sure, be candid. Describe the specific examples of lies you were told. Explain the impact these lies have on your ability to trust this individual. Talk about the importance of being able to trust each other and share that you'd like to restore 2-way trust but need honesty going

forward. Throughout this conversation, there's no need for name calling, shame or blame. A simple, objective, dispassionate recap of the examples will suffice.

The key here is in explaining why it's so crucial for the team to be trustworthy and to be honest with each other. To make behavioral changes, people need to know WHY it matters.

Following that difficult conversation, reiterate that this was offered in the spirit of support and concern. Don't take this public or make it a permanent indictment of someone's character. Allow for behavior change to be demonstrated. When it is, acknowledge and appreciate it.



Competence is a Strong Foundation for Building Trust

When you first meet a new colleague, you have little foundation for trust. Even so, working together effectively requires that you put your faith into the other person. Typically, while we're building trust for the long term, we rely on one dimension of trust for the short term.

We rely on the other person's **competence**. We count on them because they are, presumably, competent in their own area of expertise.

We do this in all sorts of non-workplace transactions, too. We trust ER doctors (complete strangers!) to diagnose and treat injuries and illnesses. We trust plumbers, electricians, hair stylists, mechanics, and experts in every discipline even though we do not know them. When we check their references, we primarily check their credentials and competence.

Building trust takes time. We invest that time in people who make it past that initial screening and prove their competence.

In the workplace, when someone lacks competence, we don't bother to build trust in the other 11 dimensions. That makes competence a "price of admission" dimension of trust.

The Top Four Most-Admired Characteristics of Leaders Include Two Related to Trust

Thirty years of research by leadership experts Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner reveal the top four, most-admired characteristics of leaders. In ongoing studies, people are asked to select which characteristics are most essential in the leaders they follow and admire.

Not surprisingly, two that rank at the top are related to trust.

1. **Honesty** consistently tops the list. We examined this dimension of trust in a previous chapter, starting there because most people immediately associate honesty and integrity with trust. It's no surprise that we prefer leaders who tell the truth and do not attempt to deceive us.
2. **Competence** also appears near the top of the list. We want leaders who are capable and will make informed decisions based on their knowledge and abilities.



Both honesty and competence are essential characteristics in leadership. In fact, because these are such vital dimensions of trust, **honesty and competence are essential characteristics in any workplace relationship.**

In leadership, we also look for people who are inspiring and forward-looking. Though not directly related to trust, these characteristics give us the “why” of our work. We can believe in future vision and be buoyed by it when the people sharing these messages are both honest and competent.

Conversely, if we don’t believe in a leader we won’t believe in their message. The ability to inspire others is gravely diminished if you are not trustworthy. Hying a future vision when you’ve failed to live up to past promises won’t inspire people. Instead, they’ll think of you as a charlatan and resist changes you hope to implement.

Note: this is not about senior managers. For our purposes, the word “leader” refers to any one at any level who is rallying a group or driving an initiative or championing a cause. You don’t have to be “in charge” to be a leader. In all circles, there are informal leaders who others look to as an example. Typically, the person we look to is someone we view as honest and competent.

Building Trust Takes Time. Competence Precedes Other Dimensions.

People will know whether or not you’re competent before they discover whether or not you’re honest.

Incompetence is difficult to hide for long. In the workplace, others know whether or not you’re competent based on your work output, the questions you ask, the answers you provide, the language you use, the decisions you make, and the priorities you choose. Incompetence is easily exposed.

What’s more, competence is usually demonstrated prior to hiring. Your resume, references, background check, interview, and onboarding screen for competence. That’s why people will start with the assumption that you are, indeed, capable of doing the job or quickly learning how to do it. They will tentatively trust you because of your competence until you violate that trust by displaying incompetence.

Meanwhile, with that fragile and nascent trust in place, you’ll be building trust in other ways (or not!).

For example, while entrusting technical work to you because of your competence, people will be gauging whether or not you are honest and operate with integrity. They'll make determinations about your trustworthiness based on their interactions with you. This takes time and can't be rushed.

What to Do When You're Not Yet Competent

Fake it 'til you make it is NOT a good strategy for building trust. Pretending to be competent is a surefire way to be seen as dishonest. You'll impair trust rather than building it if you try to fool others into believing you're competent when you're not.

The better option is to acknowledge what you aren't able to do. Show a willingness to learn and grow. Ask for help and take advice humbly and openly. Don't make excuses or become defensive. There's no shame in not knowing how to do everything!

One of the dimensions of trust that we'll explore in a later chapter is accurate self-assessment. You'll be building trust when you openly admit what you don't know or aren't entirely competent in doing. The interplay between all 12 dimensions of trust is important to consider. You don't have to put all your eggs in one basket here!

As you and members of your team continue building, rebuilding, and shoring up trust, use the 12 Dimensions of Trust to open up meaningful dialogue and to support each other.

Consistency Can Be Your Secret Weapon for Building Trust

Most folks are surprised to learn that there's more than honesty and integrity required to build trust in the workplace. We opened with the obvious dimensions of trust: honesty and integrity plus competence. As we proceed, some dimensions will be like secret weapons – you'll know their importance and can leverage their impact while others are still focused too narrowly on too few dimensions.

Why Trust Is So Fragile

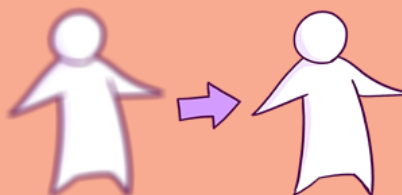
You've probably heard that it takes a long time for trust to be established but only a single incident can fracture trust that took years to build.

Trust is, indeed, fragile. It's easily broken. A single sentence or act can shatter trust and make you question everything you believed about someone you trusted. Even when we allow for restoration of trust, the past incident will keep us on guard and fearful of it being broken again.

Our disappointments carry over from one situation to another and from one relationship to another. *Once burned, twice shy.* The more our trust has been violated, the harder it is to extend that trust to others. Based on past experiences, we may also be quicker to mistrust even when there is insufficient cause.

When we trust, we are vulnerable. We believe, when trusting, that we are safe and can count on someone else. Violations of trust leave us feeling suckered and, in the workplace, may also leave us in precarious positions where work is not completed or commitments cannot be met. When we rely on others, our ability to perform rests partly in their performance.

After suffering a breach of trust, we're more likely to go it alone than to rely on others again. Rather than being vulnerable and at risk of underperformance, we become more self-reliant (even to the point of overworking, not delegating, getting burned out, etc.).



Displaying a lack of trust in others creates barriers. Others won't trust you either. Trust is reciprocal. The more you withhold trust, the less you'll be trusted. The more you're expecting people to violate your trust, the sooner they will because you're pushing them in that direction.

In the workplace, there are pressures that mount and impair our ability to trust each other. Competing priorities, hasty meetings, KPIs, unrealistic expectations of others, heavy workloads, and barely having time to get acquainted with colleagues... the list is endless. It's difficult to build trust when you are at odds with or don't really know the other party. The default response is to remain guarded and mistrust others.

All of this boils down to a misguided sense of self-protection. **Trust is fragile because we are fragile.**

Trust In the Workplace Isn't Automatic

In the workplace, trust is not automatically given. At first, we earn trust by demonstrating competence. Over time, we prove our honesty and integrity. Those dimensions of trust are absolute. There is no room for exceptions. There aren't many second chances available here.

If we take time to get acquainted with colleagues, we also respond to other characteristics and behaviors. Subconsciously, we trust people who display the 12 Dimensions of Trust more frequently.

When someone is reliable, steady, predictable, and consistent in their choices and positions, you begin to believe you can count on them. You know where they stand and how they'll respond. Their consistency fosters trust.

This is true even when someone is consistent in displaying negative behaviors. You'll trust the guardian of the status quo, for example, who always resists change and lives by the motto "*if it ain't broke, don't fix it.*" You may not agree or like the guardian's stance, but you can rely on it and, therefore, know how to respond to and anticipate it.

You're less likely to trust someone who displays erratic behavior or who vacillates in their opinions. When people are unpredictable and inconsistent, the natural response for others is to remain guarded. Trusting this unpredictable person makes us feel too vulnerable.

Consistency is the third Dimension of Trust. We take comfort in consistency, in knowing what to expect, and in not feeling like the rug could be pulled out from under us at any moment.

In the workplace, consistent performance is valued more than performance that swings between extreme highs and lows. In workplace relationships, stability and steadiness matter. Feeling safe is linked to feeling like you know what to expect and won't be blindsided by unpredictable interactions.

Because trust is not automatically bestowed, being mindful of the behaviors that build trust (and the ones that impair trust) is essential.

Behaviors that Demonstrate Consistency and Predictability

To create a feeling of safety and to nurture trust, check your behaviors. Are they predictable from one day to the next? Are you consistent enough that people know and understand you? Here's the 1-2-3 formula for this dimension of trust that ultimately improves team effectiveness.

1. **Be consistent.** Know what you want, what your values are, and what your priorities are. Make decisions that reflect your values, help you reach your goals, and keep you on track with your priorities. Don't be like a rudderless ship that aimlessly floats whichever way the wind blows.

With clarity about your own goals, values, and priorities, you'll become more predictable. You won't be trying to please other people all the time, bouncing from one position to another or from one task to another.

2. **Be knowable.** Knowing yourself is the best place to start. Once you know your goals, values, and priorities, share what they are, where they came from, and why they matter to you. This will provide context for others so they can better understand and predict your decisions and actions.

Letting others know you also helps them trust you and become less guarded with you. Good, old-fashioned, human-to-human connections count.

3. **Create clarity.** Once you have clarity about yourself and share that with others, you're setting an example. Others can create clarity for themselves. Teams can do the same type of work to collaborate more effectively where there are overlapping goals, values and priorities.

The impact of clarity is that there won't be big surprises. People know what to expect. They know what's expected. They can deliver more consistently. Clarity yields consistency, and consistency enables trust.



Loyalty Isn't What It Used to Be

Once upon a time, people found jobs with a company and stayed in that organization for their entire career. Trusting others in the organization was easy because there were norms and practices that everyone understood. The employer/employee relationship was founded in mutual trust and loyalty.

But things changed. In waves of consolidations, globalization, outsourcing, and economic declines, employers changed the norms. Employees responded in kind, no longer tethering themselves for life to a single organization or occupation.

It's commonplace now for employees to change jobs frequently and to be constantly on the lookout for better opportunities. Employers compete for talent by offering higher wages, better benefits, and creative perks.

What's missing, for everyone involved, is the pride of affiliation and the sense of security that came with there were stronger bonds between employees and employers. In its place, people are more guarded and less willing to be "all in" with their trust and commitment.

Loyalty is in short supply.

Trusting Others at Work Requires Loyalty and Starts at the Top

A Davis Associates trust survey found that 57% of employees have little or no trust in management. The reasons for such low trust rates include:

- A lack of quality and frequency in communication
- A lack of honesty and transparency in communication
- A lack of relationships where people genuinely know and understand each other
- A lack of connection between work done and its higher meaning and purpose
- A lack of management credibility and competence
- A lack of fairness (or perception of it)
- A lack of growth and development opportunities

When you add up the bulleted items that explain low trust in management, another dimension of trust is revealed. People aren't feeling that managers and organizations are loyal to them. No wonder it's so easy to disassociate from an employer and move on to another opportunity!

Most employers hyper-focus on performance instead of considering the people behind the performance. Unrealistic expectations, insufficient training and coaching, and unwillingness to

remove obstacles are just a few of the ways that employers ignore employee needs while demanding results from them.



Employers with solid reputations for engaging and retaining employees do things differently. They invest in people's growth. They take time to offer feedback and to communicate about the state of the organization. They inspire employees by helping them see their impact and the purpose of their work.

By educating, informing and inspiring employees, these employers earn trust and loyalty from employees. They demonstrate their loyalty to employees first in the form of support that genuinely helps people meet performance expectations.

A 2022 Gallup study found that there's been a big decline in the number of employees who believe their managers and employers care about their wellbeing. This, too, is indicative of a loyalty gap. When we're loyal to someone, we care about their wellbeing.

Like Trust, Loyalty Is Reciprocal

When you know someone's got your back, you're more likely to have theirs.

Loyalty is usually returned in equal measures. It's mutual. We want to reward loyalty with loyalty.

When an employer invests in our development and provides constructive feedback that helps us grow and thrive, we're more inclined to stay with that employer and more likely to work hard for the desired results.

In marketing circles, the term "reciprocal loyalty" is used to describe a premium relationship that benefits both the customer and the brand. In an age of empowered consumers, rewards programs and responsiveness to customers is vital to business success.

The same applies in employer/employee relationships. This is the age of an empowered workforce, and employers are scrambling to differentiate themselves and retain employees. Reciprocal loyalty would help. It starts when companies are deeply, truly committed to their employees in meaningful ways.

Higher pay does not foster loyalty. Instead, it conditions employees to think that pay for performance is all there is in an employer/employee relationship.

Free meals and campus-like settings do not inspire loyalty, at least not in isolation. When amenities like this are tangible proof of deeper sentiments about employee wellbeing, they do have a positive impact on loyalty.

What really makes the difference, though, is having managers who care about their direct reports. These are not managers who coddle employees and protect them from challenging assignments or constructive feedback. Rather, these are managers who care enough to tell employees what they need to know in order to grow and succeed in the long-term. These are managers who get to know people on a personal level and who take a genuine interest in what motivates and inspires each individual.

Working for a manager who cares in these ways causes people to feel a deep sense of loyalty. They support these leaders, even when there are difficult tasks or challenges to face. They reciprocate loyalty by being “all in” when that’s what is needed.

Actions that Demonstrate Loyalty

We invest in the people and relationships that matter to us. Loyalty shines through in the small things we say and do to ennoble others and demonstrate that they matter.

Loyalty is defined as “faithful adherence; faithfulness to commitments or obligations.” When we’re loyal, we keep our promises and stick to our plans. Our allegiance is clear and constant when we are loyal to a person or a cause. We are devoted.

There is an implied selflessness wrapped up in the definition of loyalty. People who are loyal aren’t easily distracted by self-interests. They won’t throw you under the bus to save themselves.

The definition also implies sustained focus. Loyalty is a long-term play. When people are loyal, they don’t ping pong between loyalties. They aren’t acting on whims or constantly chasing shiny, new objects.

The selflessness and long-term focus can cause misunderstandings, though, about loyalty in the workplace. A loyal employee may stay with an organization longer and with stronger commitment. But, a long-tenured employee may or may not be loyal to an organization. The loyalty cannot be measured by length of time alone.

Better than time served, you can ascertain loyalty by considering:

Are promises being kept? When someone cares about you enough to be loyal, they affirm their commitment to the relationship by delivering what’s been promised.

- **Is support being shown?** When someone is devoted to a relationship, person, or organization, they understand what's important and do what they can to help make it happen.
- **Do you feel backed up?** When someone "has your back" you know you can count on them in good times and bad. You won't feel abandoned when the going gets tough.
- **Are risks taken to help you?** When someone is "there" for you, they aren't merely head-bobbing or giving you lip service. Instead, they tell you the unpleasant truths to help you avoid bigger problems later.
- **Are your needs being equally considered?** When someone can look beyond their own needs and take yours into account, that is an act of loyalty.

Choosing behaviors that demonstrate these little loyalties every day will build trust. Others will reciprocate in similar, small ways that show their loyalty. In time, mutual trust will grow with loyalty.

Availability Gives You an Opportunity for Building Trust

Earning trust at work is absolutely essential for career success. In environments or relationships where trust levels are low, it's difficult to get things done quickly and consistently. When we mistrust others, we don't delegate. We don't accept their ideas or opinions. We have more unproductive conflict and less commitment to group decisions.

If you've had suspicions about others and don't fully trust them, the end result is that your own job is harder than it has to be. You're moving slower, doing more, and feeling frustrated by the added stress.

Similarly, if others have not fully trusted you, they've withheld work assignments. They haven't shared information. They've been slow to consider your input.

Sadly, so much of this mistrust is founded in vague feelings and misunderstandings. That's why it's important to understand all 12 Dimensions of Trust. It's why we're so thoroughly examining each dimension to help you eradicate those vague doubts and build stronger trust in all your workplace relationships.



Trust Is Based on Some Surprising Factors

That's not fair!

You're honest. You have integrity. **How could anyone possibly mistrust you?**

With 11 other dimensions of trust, there are LOTS of ways you could accidentally and unknowingly violate someone's trust. It happens to the best of us, and it's probably happened to you, too.

Others feel exactly the same way you do. When you signal that you don't completely trust them, they believe *"That's not fair!"* and figure something must be wrong with you... After all, they consider themselves to be honest and operating with integrity. Like you (and like most!), they aren't aware that there are 11 other dimensions of trust in play.

People assess others' trustworthiness in these 12 ways:

1. Do you display **honesty and integrity** in all your interactions?

2. Are you **competent** and able to reliably do the work you're expected to do?
3. Are you **consistent** and predictable in your actions? Do people know what to expect from you?
4. Have you exhibited **loyalty** to others and to the organization?
5. Do you make yourself easily **available** to others? Are you approachable and knowable?
6. Have you been **fair** in the way you treat and evaluate others?
7. Is your **decision-making** transparent, understandable, and rational?
8. Do you **follow through** on the promises and commitments you've made?
9. Are you **open** and receptive to feedback? Are you open to others' ideas and opinions?
10. Do you handle sensitive information with **discretion**? Can you keep a secret?
11. When you deliver feedback, do you do it with **constructive intent**? Are you helpful?
12. Can you offer an **accurate self-assessment** of your own limitations and capabilities?

Different people prioritize these dimensions differently. Some put high value, for example, in whether or not others are helpful and constructive when disagreeing or critiquing them. Others are less concerned with others' intent but place more value on whether or not someone is competent.

We all tend to be more diligent in the same dimensions that we personally value. If you're someone who strongly values following through on promises and commitments, you'll hold others to a higher standard in this dimension. Likewise, if you don't have a strong sense of loyalty, your expectations of others will be lower in this dimension.

Some of these dimensions of trust are surprising, at least at first.

Availability is one dimension that few people instantly associate with trust. It becomes easier to see the connection when you think about the people in your life who you do trust. One of the reasons you trust them is that they're "there for you." They're available.

In personal relationships, a change in physical or emotional availability often leads to breakups. Divorce is common when couples get so caught up in their jobs, children's activities, and individual pursuits that they neglect to reserve time with each other. They grow apart. A lack of availability fosters a lack of trust, and that contributes to the distance between them.

This can happen in the workplace, too.

An Easy Fix for Earning Trust at Work

A Reader's Digest article lists nine reasons people are unable to trust their bosses. At the top of the list is "They Have a Closed-Door Policy." Psychologist Nikki Martinez says "You might not be able to trust your boss if they don't seem approachable. It makes you feel like you can't go to them with questions and concerns."

Managers express similar concerns about employees who avoid as many team meetings as possible, prefer to work alone, or are not readily available in other ways.

It's also natural to slightly mistrust colleagues who are slow to respond, difficult to reach, or seem self-absorbed in their own work and priorities.

Chances are that all this mistrust is based on the assumption that someone's lack of availability signals disinterest or a lack of engagement. We leap to conclusions about their motives without considering personality style, cultural influences, work pressures, or simple lack of awareness about how their reserved or guarded behaviors impact others.

Availability is one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust.

Without realizing it, you may be experiencing a breakdown in trust if:

1. You are perceived as being physically or emotionally unavailable for others.
2. You have doubts about a colleague who seems distant, disconnected, or difficult to engage.
3. Your remote work location keeps you separate from others.
4. Another member of the team is remote or distanced from the group somehow.
5. Extremely demanding work or schedules keep people from connecting, even briefly, for check-ins and human-to-human encounters.

This is one of the Dimensions of Trust that can easily and inadvertently occur without anyone realizing what the issue really is. Oftentimes, these situations can continue for extended periods of time. That exacerbates the problem and deepens the divide.

To avoid letting a lack of availability become the source of workplace mistrust, take these proactive steps:

- Give people your full attention when meeting with them. No devices, no distractions.
- Practice listening with empathy. Build listening skills and use them!
- Carve out time for 1:1 conversations with people that aren't solely task-focused.
- Keep an "open door" policy so people know they can call or stop by any time. If that's impossible, at least set "office hours" for certain times of the day when you'll be available.
- Bring people together in virtual or in-person meetings. Have fun together. Do teambuilding activities and have occasional outings together.
- Get to know people as individuals, not just by their job functions.
- Put PEOPLE first. The paperwork, policies, programs, and tasks will be easier to manage when you've got strong teams with high trust.

To restore trust that has inadvertently been breached by a lack of availability, start by:

- Acknowledging to yourself and others that trust has been damaged. No need for shame or blame. This is a new awareness and provides an opportunity for a fresh start.
- Apologizing to those you've been insufficiently available to.
- Letting those who haven't been available to you know the impact. Explain and ask for what you need. No judgment is needed, so keep it neutral. They didn't know how important this was!
- Discussing what each individual needs and how best to meet those needs (including yours). Even small changes make big differences here.
- Starting over. Don't hold grudges or make others feel like they're under a microscope. It takes time to form new habits, so give yourself and others a little grace.

How Availability Also Restores Past Breaches in Other Dimensions of Trust

If you've experienced trust breakdowns that stem from one of the other 12 Dimensions of Trust, here's some good news.

Being more available builds trust and resets relationships. Getting reacquainted, reproving yourself, and moving past old offenses requires time together. The longer people avoid each other, the more deeply rooted the mistrust will be.

It's been said that nature abhors a vacuum. When people don't have enough information, they make stuff up in an effort to fill gaps in their understanding. Typically, what they make up isn't favorable about others.

When you're not available, you're creating a vacuum. No matter which of the 12 Dimensions of Trust you're inadvertently breaching, being more available to others gives you a better offense against anything they might make up.

For instance, you failed to deliver on a promise. If you're available, they can ask what happened or you can proactively explain what happened. It will be better than imaginations running wild or assumptions being made.

When you're available, your behaviors are observable. You'll have opportunities to demonstrate loyalty, openness, fairness, competence, discretion, consistency and more. When you're absent or checked out, others won't be able to see these Dimensions of Trust in action. You won't get credit for them.

It's especially important to spend time with people who haven't been able to trust you AND those you haven't been able to trust in the past. It's the only way to move through breaches in trust and get to a better place.

The Role of Fairness in Building Trust

Have you ever really thought about this:

- What makes you trustworthy?
- What makes you trust other people?
- What has caused others to think that you couldn't be trusted?
- What are the reasons you've lost trust in other people?



Those aren't merely ponderous questions. They're vital to understanding your workplace (and other!) relationships.

What Makes You Trustworthy May Not Be What You Think It Is

If you're like most, you answered the first question easily.

Most have instant reactions and responses when asked "what makes you trustworthy?" The reactions typically include one of more of these phrases:

- I'm honest
- I have good integrity
- I'm loyal
- I keep my word
- I haven't done anything to lose their trust

Those reasons are all valid. To earn and retain people's trust, you do have to be honest + demonstrate integrity + exhibit loyalty + keep your promises + strive not to breach the trust they've given you.

You can do all five of these and still not be trusted by someone else. Simply knowing this can accelerate building and restoring trust.

People don't trust us because they're not evaluating those five factors alone. Instead, trust is complex. It's formed by lots of conscious and sub-conscious inputs.

When we first meet someone, we evaluate their trustworthiness using some superficial criteria like:

- Amount of eye contact
- Body language that seems comfortable and natural

- Familiarity bias (how similar to us the other person is)
- Whether or not others seem to trust this person
- Confidence of the other person
- Ease and comfort when answering your questions
- Gut instinct (which is hardly an objective or accurate gauge!)

Over time, we use criteria that are more definitive. We use the 12 Dimensions of Trust to determine if we can trust someone else and to what extent. These criteria may be conscious or sub-conscious. You are likely to consider all 12, but you probably weight some of these more than others.

Here's the problem. If you haven't considered all 12 in your own actions and choices, you may not be living up to someone else's criteria. If they heavily weighted one dimension that's not on your radar as a way to demonstrate trustworthiness, there can be an inadvertent breach of trust.

The same disconnect happens when you evaluate others' trustworthiness. You may be holding them to a standard related to one, particular dimension... and they may have no idea that this dimension is a consideration you're using to trust or distrust them.

If you ever have a vague feeling of discomfort about someone... if you ever feel you can't trust a person but don't quite know why... it might mean that there's a mismatch in what you're evaluating and what they're exhibiting in one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust.

Take the dimension of fairness, for example. It can be a landmine that destroys trust when people think of it in differing ways.

What Gets in the Way of Being Fair and Being Seen as Fair

Fairness is defined as being free from bias, being impartial and unprejudiced, treating all parties alike, showing no favor to one over another, being evenhanded in administering decisions or in interacting with others.

When people perceive a lack of fairness in the workplace, they characterize it as favoritism. If valid, this can quickly escalate into infringement of employee's rights. NOTE: favoritism can simultaneously be subconscious (accidental and unintended) and real in its impact on others.

There are three areas you'll want to reflect on to find out if you are being fair and if you perceived as being fair.

Do you guard against unconscious biases?

Unconscious biases are often the root cause of favoritism or acting in ways that are not fair. The familiarity bias is especially insidious and can quickly lead you astray!

Everyone, by the way, is susceptible to unconscious biases like this one. We all – without realizing it – respond more positively to people who remind us of ourselves. This is the connection and comfort you feel when you learn that they went to the same school, grew up in the same city, are close to your own age, have a hobby you can relate to, or any number of other similarities.

Without realizing it, you may favor (or appear to favor) the person who's most like you. You may lean in, smile more, talk longer, signal openness and interest, and read their responses with a more generous interpretation. When someone is vastly different from you, the opposites are also true.

When observed, this may cause others to see you as being unfair.

If you make decisions based on a familiarity bias rather than making efforts to set it aside and evaluate people in their own right, you may actually be exhibiting a lack of objectivity and fairness.

This is why it's important to have objective criteria in your hiring/selection process and in employee reviews. It's why you'll want to check yourself anytime you don't have quick connections with people or don't have much in common.

Do you communicate frequently, clearly, and evenly?

The best defense is a good offense. If you're not communicating your intentions, your rationale, and your expectations, you're encouraging others' imaginations to run wild.

You need to manage the message better to be fair and to be seen as someone who's fair.

These three examples illustrate common misses in managing the message.

- **Different information was shared with different people.**
If you tell one person the whole story and then share less of the story with someone else, the second person is at a disadvantage. Without crucial knowledge that others have, there are bound to be mistakes. When it comes to light that someone else knew more, the leap to "favoritism" isn't a big one.
- **Assumptions were made instead of providing clarity about expectations.**
When you assume that some need less and some need more clarity, you're setting some up to succeed and setting some up to fail. Don't assume that some already know, that some will figure it out, or that some have heard it before. When it comes to setting clear expectations, be fair by giving everyone the same information and standards.

- **Decisions were handed down without explanation.**

If you aren't sharing your rationale for decisions, people may believe that you can't justify those decisions. Instead, they'll think, you made decisions so you could favor one person or group. Ideally, you'll be setting decision criteria in advance and communicating about those criteria and how they'll be used to objectively evaluate options.

Do you define what's fair the same way others do?

Personality styles cause us to think of fairness in different ways. Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) dichotomy of "Thinking" vs. "Feeling," we can see that there are at least two ways of thinking about what's fair.

Someone with a Thinking preference makes decisions based on logic, precedent, and equivalency. When determining how to handle a situation, this individual will lean strongly toward whatever was done in a similar situation in the past. What was done for one individual is exactly what should be done for another individual. Deviating from the precedent would seem, to this person, patently unfair.

Someone with a Feeling preference makes decisions based on how they will impact people. To this individual, being fair means doing what's right for the person in the current situation regardless of what was done for others in similar situations. For this person, fairness isn't measured in the equivalency of the response. It's measured in the equivalency of the satisfaction for each individual.

People with Thinking vs. Feeling preferences often clash over how decisions are made. Because they're defining fairness very differently, they may struggle to understand the legitimacy of each other's approach. There's considerable room here for misunderstandings and accusations of unfairness.

Understanding and explaining these differences can bridge the gap.

Five Quick Fixes to Demonstrate Fairness and Show Your Trustworthiness

To shore up your trustworthiness when it comes to demonstrating fairness:

- **1.** Do a deep-dive examination of your unconscious biases and how they affect your interactions with others. Move away from denial and defensiveness. Everyone has work to do here!
- **2.** Work on communicating more transparently and evenly. Don't rely on others to do this for you. Take charge of what you say, how you say it, who you say it to, and how you check for understanding. Aim to over-communicate on important matters.

- **3.** Involve others in the decision-making process. Get their input early and often. Let them know what you'll be considering as you make your objective decision. Explain the decisions you've made and how you came to them.
- **4.** Understand, acknowledge, discuss, and value differences in personality styles. Help others see that these differences are what make a well-rounded team. Help them move past right/wrong and good/bad thinking about differences so they can become stronger as a team.
- **5.** Don't try to justify unfairness. If you're guilty of being unfair or of showing favoritism, address the problem instead of trying to rationalize it away. Being entrenched in your unfairness will only fuel the feelings of mistrust others may have when they see something that seems unfair.

When you work on all 12 Dimensions of Trust, you'll find that others trust you sooner and longer. You'll also find that you are better able to identify what you need in order to trust others. Then you can convey those needs and improve your workplace relationships.

The Impact of Decision-Making on Trust

It's not automatic. Employees don't instantly trust their bosses, management teams, or each other. Employee trust must be earned, preserved, and valued.

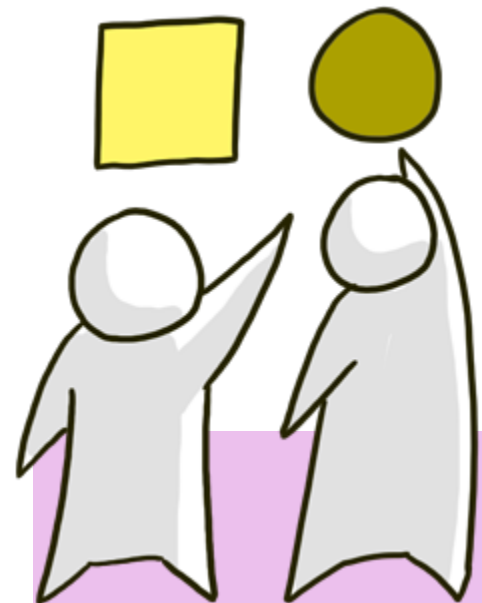
Decision-making processes greatly influence how much employee do (or don't!) trust their employers. In part, that trust is based on whether or not employees have participated in the evaluation of options. Without a voice in decision-making, employees are less likely to trust decisions.

Chicken or Egg? Does decision-making lead to trust? Or does trust lead to more inclusivity in decisions made?

In days of yore, when companies were patriarchal and more hierarchical, employees had no choice. Decisions were made behind closed doors, and marching orders were issued without explanation. People punched the clock, did their assigned task work, and left at the end of an 8-hour shift.

With the dawn of the Knowledge Economy, work shifted. Employees are expected to make intellectual contributions. Task work is no longer enough to satisfy job requirements. It's no longer enough to satisfy employees, either.

It's no longer enough to make decisions (even good ones) behind closed doors. Employees are suspicious of and resistant to decisions that don't include them or consider the impact on them. They mistrust the wisdom of decisions that fail to involve the people who are closest to the work.



Making decisions without including employees can lead to a mistrust of management.

This is true even when management consistently makes good decisions that positively impact employees. In an effort to protect employees' time and/or to shelter them from meetings, employers often make decisions at the manager level or above.

Some of those management-made decisions are sound. But the skepticism from the frontlines is palpable any time a decision is handed down without consultation beforehand. That

skepticism produces unproductive chatter, second-guessing, reservations, and outright resistance. Ushering in change becomes slower and harder than it has to be.

Management teams that habitually omit frontline employees from decisions that affect them risk disenfranchising employees. Few employees say *“They made a decision that affected my work, and I’m glad they didn’t bother me with the details. I’m just here to follow orders.”* More employees say *“I’m sick of being left out of important decisions that affect my work. They treat me like a robot!”*

There’s one more inherent flaw in making decisions behind closed doors. It signals that people can’t be trusted to handle the discussion and provide useful insights to aid in decision-making. Leaving people out of important dialogue pushes them away rather than drawing them in.

To facilitate employee trust, management teams should always get the opinions and ideas of those who are most impacted by decisions that will be made. This is not about using popular vote to simplify decision-making. It’s about dignifying and trusting those who are going to be affected by the decisions made.

Decision-making is one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust. Other dimensions, like availability, loyalty, and fairness will also impact the way people feel about participating in decision-making.

Employee Trust Is Influenced by Engagement and Inclusivity

Including people in the decisions that affect them will ennoble them. It will improve their acceptance of decisions – even the ones that weren’t their preferred course of action. It will also accelerate adoption of changes needed to enact the decision.

Leaving people out reduces their commitment. They’ll say things like *“I would’ve told them it wouldn’t work, but nobody asked me.”*

When people are forced into a commitment, they’ll do the bare minimum. And they’ll only do it as long as someone is monitoring what they do. The lack of internal, self-driven commitment will be superficial and unsustainable. True, deep, lasting commitment comes from feeling heard, considered, and included.

Research demonstrates that **people support decisions they participated in** regardless of their agreement with the final decision. Having been heard and considered is what increases the commitment.

Inclusive decision-making processes build employee trust and ensure commitment. But that’s not all!

Inclusive decision-making also increases employee engagement. The Leadership Practices Inventory® (LPI®) measures the frequency of key behaviors that make leaders more effective. It cross-compares the frequency of these behaviors to the level of employee engagement experienced by people reporting directly to a manager. The research demonstrates unequivocally that when leaders more frequently “involve people in the decisions that directly impact their job performance,” engagement levels soar.

The essence of employee engagement is “an emotional connection to the organization that causes employees to apply additional discretionary effort to the work they do.”

Additional discretionary effort is what yields higher productivity, customer satisfaction, and revenue. Every employer wants that!

Notice, though, that there’s a cause-and-effect equation to engagement. You don’t get the additional discretionary effort unless you have the emotional connection. The real work, then, of boosting engagement lies in building emotional connections.

And that brings us back to trust and inclusivity. Without trust, emotional connections are unlikely. When people feel sidelined and are not included, their emotional connection wanes. Their trust is replaced by skepticism and, perhaps, cynicism.

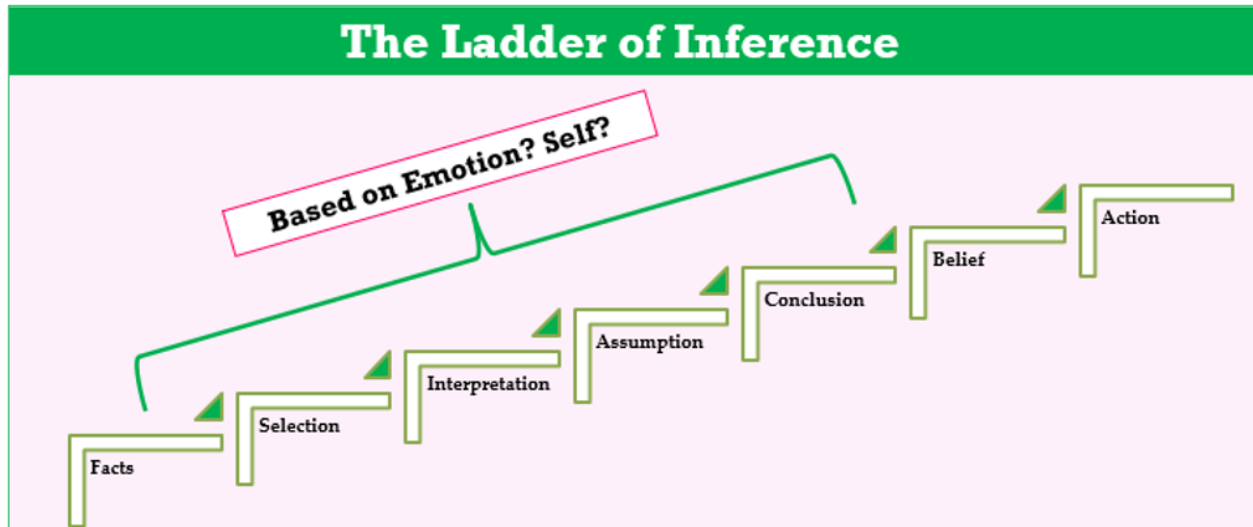
Done right, employers produce the virtuous circle of **Trust > Inclusion > Emotional Connection > Commitment > Trust.**

The Problem with Most Decisions and How They Invite Mistrust

The Ladder of Inference (see diagram below) explains how decision-making often leads to mistrust. Subconsciously and internally, we take this pathway to make most decisions.

1. A set of facts, perhaps incomplete, is considered.
2. As we take in the available and obvious facts, we selectively filter that reality. Our filters are comprised of our personal experiences, unconscious biases, comfort zone, education, upbringing, resources, and much more.
3. We interpret facts and what they mean based on what we’ve filtered, our emotional responses to those facts, and the meaning we infuse based on our filters.
4. With all that subconscious processing, we then make assumptions and apply them. We see our own assumptions as facts and are no longer differentiating what’s real vs. what we perceive.
5. We draw conclusions based on assumptions (which are based on interpretation of filtered facts).
6. With those conclusions, we determine what we believe. We form strong opinions that we’re likely to vigorously defend. We become closed off to alternate interpretations that challenge our beliefs.

7. Finally, we take actions and make decisions based on our beliefs. They seem “right” to us because we based our decisions on thought and analysis without recognizing that our process was mostly subjective and was not inclusive.



Others are walking up the Ladder of Inference as they draw conclusions, too. At the filtering and interpretations phases, they have vastly different inputs and often draw different conclusions because they form different beliefs.

That’s where conflict and mistrust come into play.

To avoid getting caught up in the Ladder of Inference trap, try this instead:

1. Keep an open mind as you invite more facts and perspectives in scoping the problem and considering the alternatives.
2. Challenge filters, especially your own. Contextualize them and give them appropriate weight instead of exaggerating their importance.
3. Get a diversity of thought and more voices in when interpreting the facts and filters everyone has presented. Acknowledge emotional responses, and differentiate them from fact-based reasoning.
4. Instead of making assumptions, check yourself and check each other. Is this real? Is it logical? Is it valid? Is it relevant?
5. As conclusions are beginning to form, collaborate to ensure that they are solid.
6. Form beliefs together. If there is still significant disagreement, explore it. Maintain an open mind and model this openness for others.
7. Review what you’ve done to make sure you’ve balanced the naturally subjective process with a more objective and more inclusive one.

This is much easier when you add two steps -- one at the beginning and one at the end.

At the onset of any decision-making, define what a good decision will include and what problem it will solve. Determine what the criteria should be for evaluating any possible decision. Know what the most important, highest priority criterion will be. Gauge the quality of possible decisions against these criteria.

At the end of your decision-making process, lay out the rationale. Explain how the final decision is the one that best meets the criteria. Be transparent so that others are more likely to trust the decision.

As you're transparently sharing your rationale, involving others, and making decisions that are objective, you're building trust.

The #1 Behavior for Maintaining Trust and Credibility Is Follow Through

Trust in the workplace is an obvious asset. It makes everything easier, life happier, and results better. But trusting co-workers isn't automatic. Trust can be broken in so many ways.

Oftentimes, when we've lost someone's trust, we don't even know that we've lost it. We don't know what we said or did that caused them to mistrust us. Without that knowledge, restoring trust is nearly impossible.

What People Who Trust Each Other Do More Often

Certain dimensions of trust, like loyalty, are as much about feelings as they are about actions. That makes them more challenging to demonstrate and more subjective to measure.

The one clear, measurable, observable, objective dimension of trust is follow through.

Behaviorally, follow through is simple: **do what you say you will do** (DWYSYWD).

Doing what you say you will do includes:

- Delivering on time every time
- Keeping commitments, even the small ones
- Living true to your word
- Fulfilling promises made
- Remembering and acting on obligations
- Sticking to the terms of an agreement
- Accepting responsibility for following through



People who trust each other more often follow through with each other and less often dismiss commitments to each other.

People who trust each other follow through because they recognize the weight of their promises and the impact on others if those promises are not honored.

At the beginning of any relationship, follow through is one of the first ways we gauge whether or not someone can be trusted. If they aren't delivering on the little things, we won't be able to trust them with the big things.

It may seem insignificant to forget an action item or a comment like “I’ll get back to you tomorrow with an answer.” Not following through on these little matters, however, signals a lack of care for the other person. What’s insignificant to you may be far more significant to them.

Take this self-assessment to see whether or not you’re following through frequently.



Do What You Say You Will Do

Do You DWYSYWD?

Check all that apply. Which of these situations keep you from fulfilling the promises and commitments you make?

- _____ I forget to follow up on items I verbally commit to
- _____ I’m so busy that I can’t keep up with all that I intend to do
- _____ Other priorities keep me from responding in a timely manner
- _____ Sometimes I say “yes” when it’s unlikely that I can follow through
- _____ Constant change makes my promises obsolete soon after I make them

Following Through on Promises & Commitments Isn’t Optional

Personality assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) reveal that we all have natural preferences. For some, living in the moment is vastly preferred over being bound by deadlines, details, and structure. People who have this preference can be reluctant (even resistant!) when it comes to making commitments and being constrained by them.

This is one reason that some people seem to view commitments so casually. They make or imply promises but don’t take them seriously. It isn’t meant as a slight to others when they fail to fulfill. Rather, this oversight is borne out of a strong preference for living moment-to-moment.

But that doesn't make it okay.

When one party believes a commitment has been made and takes it seriously, it's unfair for the other party to treat it lightly. Promises and commitments cause others to act accordingly. The person receiving the promise counts on it and makes subsequent decisions based on the promise. When the follow through is lacking, it can leave the recipient in a bad spot.

Follow through isn't optional. If you don't want to be tied down by a commitment, don't make the commitment. If you aren't sure that you'll be able to deliver on a promise, don't make the promise.

To develop a discipline of living up to your word, step one is being realistic. Ask yourself:

- Am I able to do what's being asked of me? In the time frame being discussed?
- Am I willing to deliver what others are expecting here?
- What would keep me from doing this?
- What do I need to do to remember this and deliver on time?
- How can I set reasonable expectations instead of optimistically over-promising?

Your intention to deliver isn't sufficient. Others gauge your trustworthiness by your actions. Following through in a timely manner is demonstrated in actions, not intentions. Don't make excuses for yourself. Don't expect others to repeatedly give you grace for your good intentions. They won't.

Although follow through is only one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust, it has a ripple effect. When you make a promise but don't fulfill it, people may begin to feel you're dishonest, lacking integrity, inconsistent, incompetent, disloyal, or unfair. Their perception and interpretation, based on your actions, will compromise your ability to get things done. It will also interfere with workplace relationships and may become a roadblock to career advancement.

Trusting Co-Workers Don't Want to Let Each Other Down

Here's one more reason to prioritize follow through. You don't want to let people down. Maybe you've never thought about it this way before. But when you fail to follow through, you're disappointing others who counted on you.

Strong workplace relationships, founded in trust, are important. They're also fragile. Recognizing the fragility and importance of these relationships will help you view your follow through differently.

Don't make this mistake! It's a common one, and it's completely avoidable.

When there's a strong relationship and mutual trust, it's easy to take the other person for granted. You may figure that they know you well and will be understanding when you slip up. When they're accommodating and tolerant, you figure it's no big deal to them when you don't follow through. You figure it's okay to be lackadaisical with your follow through. You end up deprioritizing deliverables to this individual because, you figure, they won't really mind.

Over and over again, in small ways, you disappoint this person. They begin to say things like *"Oh, that's just Tom..."* and you receive that as a sign that they *"get you."* You take it as permission to behave badly and continue not living up to your promises and commitments. Soon, the disappointments are more frequent and not as small. They add up. And the other person gives up on you.

You trusted that they'd give you the same free pass forever. They trusted that you'd care enough to stop taking advantage of their good nature. You're both feeling mistrustful once the relationship impacts come to light.

To preserve and protect relationships, don't take your colleague's trust for granted. Don't develop a reputation for being last-minute, late, unreliable, inconsistent, or lacking commitment. Instead, live up to the promises you make and follow through on your commitments.

For Stronger Bonds of 2-Way Trust, Open Up

Relationships, teams, and organizations thrive when two-way trust is deliberately built and protected.

Two-way trust requires more than being trustworthy. Equally important is learning to trust others, even before they deserve your trust and even after they've breached your trust.

That's not a "turn the other cheek" paradigm. It's not about you being gullible and easily deceived. **What's required for two-way trust is openness.**



What Does Openness Have to Do with Trust?

Openness is unique among the 12 Dimensions of Trust. When you're open, it will be easier for others to trust you. When you're open, it will also be easier for you to trust others because you'll be setting the boundaries, communicating the expectations, and clearly conveying your needs.

Being more open so others can trust you

Some confuse being open with being self-focused. Actually, a focus on self is a mechanism for closing out others. That's not likely to build two-way trust.

Being more open may require you to be a bit less guarded and a bit more vulnerable. But you need not go overboard. Your colleagues don't need to know your full life story and private information. They do need to know you – what makes you tick, what you value, what you hope to accomplish, etc.

They also need to know your opinion. They need your ideas and input, even when you haven't completely worked out all the particulars. By letting others in during your thought process, you'll seem less distant and more engaged. You'll be giving others an opportunity to influence and contribute as part of your process.

Oftentimes, people hold back because they aren't sure their input will be well-received. Chances are, though, that you weren't hired to sit on the sidelines and watch the parade go by.

Instead, you were hired for your unique abilities, experience, education, and ideas or opinions. Worry less about the initial reaction to your input and more about the need every group has for a dissenting voice and fresh perspective.

Be open, too, when others ask questions. Think less about the “right” answer or trying to tell them what they want to hear. Think more about how you can offer something honest and authentically from you. Don’t misunderstand the purpose of questions – most people don’t ask them to question an individual but to seek information from an individual.

Finally, strive to keep an open mind when challenged by contrary views. Don’t shut down the conversation until you’ve worked to understand the other person’s perspective. Be open in the same measure that you’d like others to be open to your views.

Being more open so you can trust others

To make it easier to trust others, be open in the way you view others and in the way you communicate with them.

Develop an appreciation for differences. Move away from right/wrong and good/bad thinking. Instead, be intellectually curious about different ways of thinking and different ways of getting things done. Your thoughts are not necessarily superior or inferior, just different. Similarly, others’ contributions are not superior or inferior, just different.

Those differences, when respected and valued, are what make teams better. Decision quality improves when differences are embraced. Trust soars when people are receiving and exploring ideas rather than proceeding without being open to others’ input.

When you open yourself up in this way, you’ll get to know others better. You’ll understand their views, values, and thought processes. By demystifying what fuels them, you’ll be less likely to mistrust them.

It’s also important to openly communicate so that you can trust others. Share your expectations in clear, consistent ways. Leave no room for doubt. Check in frequently and correct misunderstandings before they wreak havoc. If you don’t communicate about your expectations, you’re setting others up to fail. And it’s patently unfair to mistrust them for failures you contributed to.

We’re all more likely to trust people who trust us. Two-way trust has a multiplier effect. By trusting others, you’re increasing the likelihood of them trusting you... which means you’ll trust them more... and so on.

Who's Responsible for 2-Way Trust?

We typically assume responsibility for our own trustworthiness. We act in ways that demonstrate our integrity, honesty, competence, consistency, loyalty and so forth.

We typically expect others to accept responsibility, in kind, for their own trustworthiness. We expect them to act in ways that show they have integrity, are honest and competent, etc. We evaluate their trustworthiness in 12 Dimensions of Trust, some at a subconscious level.

When others violate our trust, we blame them for the misdeed that caused us to doubt them.

Here's the problem.

We see actions, interpret actions, infuse meaning into those actions based on our own interpretation of them... And we often get it all wrong.

What's more, we often fail to consider the intentions that drove the actions we observed. We leap to conclusions and judge others harshly. They do the same when evaluating some of our actions. The net result is a whole lotta mistrust that's misplaced!

Two-way trust assumes good intent, reins in emotional responses, checks for understanding, and engages the other party in conversation to clear the air. Openness is paramount in this process.

The bottom line is this: **whoever wants two-way trust is responsible for two-way trust.**

If you want to create a workplace climate where people trust each other, value trust, behave in trustworthy ways, and work to trust colleagues, you'll establish this responsibility for everyone. It's equally shared. Every individual is responsible for being trustworthy and for trusting others.

When there's potentially been a breach of trust, the two parties involved need to talk to each other and figure out what went wrong. If an action was not in good faith, the actor needs to take responsibility and course correct going forward. They'll need a second chance to successfully do that. If the action was misinterpreted, the misinterpreteer needs to take responsibility for the assumptions and interpretations made. They'll need a second chance to choose a different response next time around.

Trust, in any organization, should be linked to behaviors and not to feelings. Those feelings are what leads us astray. They're often borne of unconscious biases or baggage from the past. Feelings usually interfere with giving others a fair chance.

When should you abandon hope and shift to not trusting someone? Only after a pattern of behavior has been observed, documented, discussed, and repeated. Until then, simple misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and/or a lack of awareness may be in play.

Behaviors for Fostering 2-Way Trust

To foster two-way trust in the workplace, use these 10 behaviors consistently. They will demonstrate your openness in a variety of ways.

1. Assume good intent until you're proven wrong. Give others the benefit of the doubt.
2. If something doesn't seem quite right, ask about it. Seek to understand.
3. Give grace. People make mistakes. Help them recover by showing an alternate way.
4. When you don't trust someone, figure out why. Privately, discuss what you need. Offer a pathway back instead of shutting them out forever.
5. Be open in describing your own motivations. Share your decision criteria. Be transparent.
6. Seek others' opinions and input. Be receptive to new ideas.
7. Share information in a timely manner. Don't withhold information that impacts others.
8. Offer your opinion. Contribute to discussions. Participate in ways that signal your interest.
9. Communicate frequently and not just about work tasks. Be knowable and interested in genuinely knowing others.
10. When receiving feedback, avoid becoming defensive. Listen, process, and glean what's constructive.

When you adopt these behaviors, you'll be modeling them to others. You'll begin to see others behaving like this, too. Openness fosters more openness... More openness fosters more two-way trust.

Discretion vs. Going Overboard with Openness

Information is currency. In the workplace, people gain trust and earn favor by having the right information and sharing it with people who need it. Trusting co-workers often begins with a pre-payment of relevant, useful information.

During onboarding, a new employee will begin to trust the co-workers who are supportive in sharing insights, shortcuts, cautions, and history. When determining who to trust, among new colleagues that you don't know well, you'll initially respond favorably to those who seem open.



But being the purveyor of information can also lead to mistrust if you over-share or fail to use good discretion in considering what to share.

Discretion vs. Openness: Strike the Right Balance for Trusting Co-Workers

Openness is not a license to over-share.

Discretion is needed for balance. Being open with what's appropriate and useful is essential. Being open about yourself is also necessary (to an extent).

Some people go overboard with openness. They aren't discreet. They aren't "judicious in one's conduct or speech, especially with regard to respecting privacy or maintaining silence about something of a delicate nature."

In the workplace, we expect people to use good discretion and avoid sharing anything that:

- Makes others uncomfortable
- Violates the privacy of others (this includes gossip!)
- Alarms others unnecessarily
- Speculates or over-reaches in drawing dramatic, unsubstantiated conclusions
- Repeats hearsay that is unfair and damages others' reputations
- Puts them in the middle of a conflict or pushes them to choose sides

- Requires secrecy without just cause for that secrecy

A classic example for striking the right balance is determining how much personal information you share with colleagues. The dimension of trust related to openness advises us to be knowable. That means being open about your background, your workplace needs, your strengths and values, and your non-work life. But you need not take that to an extreme.

While being open, you also need to be discreet. People at work don't need to know every detail of your personal life. It's good for them to know that you're married. But you're overdoing it if they also know the details of every argument and issue you have with your spouse.

Those in management must also balance openness and discretion. There are topics discussed in management meetings that aren't ready yet for broader sharing. Coordinated dissemination of information is better for all members of the organization. What's more, sharing before a decision is made or before the plan is determined only rocks the boat.

Yes, managers should solicit input from people who will be affected by a decision. Gathering the information ought to be done discreetly rather than oversharing what would needlessly alarm people.

Similarly, managers must maintain discretion when talking about employees. A senior manager should never vent or share about a direct report with another direct report. It's unfair to both the person being talked about and the person being talked to (who's now in the awkward position of knowing things they aren't supposed to know).

Balancing these two dimensions of trust can be tricky, especially if you personally value one far more than the other.

What People Think about Over-Sharing

In the moment, being on the receiving end of juicy gossip is invigorating. But it often becomes uncomfortable while hearing it or soon after. Doubts about the gossipmonger creep in – *Is this an exaggeration? Is this person violating someone else's right to privacy? Can I trust this person with my own sensitive information? Why are they telling me this?*

Despite the temptation to seek out and listen to gossip, hearing it becomes a burden. You may wonder what to do with the information you've heard. Should you pass it along? Should you let the person being talked about know what was shared? Should you think differently about the person who shared it? How about the person being talked about?

The person who gossiped is the person who we're most likely to distrust long term. We will withhold information from that person because we don't want to be the subject of the next

round of gossip. This is true even if we continue listening to the rumors, innuendoes and gossip being reshared by that individual.

The same sentiments surface when we are exposed to other kinds of oversharing. It makes us uncomfortable even when it piques our curiosity. There's a certain sense of power that accompanies being in the know. But that power and initial rush are seldom worth the damage done to trust. By listening to and inviting oversharing, we inadvertently contribute to bad behaviors that impair our ability to trust the person doing the sharing.

Therein lies the rub. If you're encouraging or indulging in others' oversharing, you're doing them a grave disservice. You'll end up trusting them less for responding to your interest. That's not fair!

If you're the one doing the oversharing and failing to be discreet, stop and ask yourself these questions to determine what should be shared vs. what is not appropriate to share:

1. Will sharing this information genuinely help the recipient with the work they need to do?
2. Am I motivated to share by a desire to help or a desire to hurt someone else? (Be honest!)
3. Am I talking to someone I can support or about someone who needs support?
4. Will sharing this information bring people together or will it create divides?
5. If the roles were reversed, would I want others to share this information about me?

It's human nature to rationalize sharing that may not be appropriate in the workplace. We tell ourselves that others deserve it, others would do it to us, others have a right to know, and so on. Those types of rationalizations, though, should not supersede the thought process outlined in the questions above.

After oversharing, it's impossible to rein in what you started. The perceptions others have about your oversharing (and about you) are now formed. This becomes part of your reputation. It will take time to undo perceptions that you have been indiscreet... for some, big breaches of trust in this dimension become millstones they have to carry for many years.

How to Repair a Reputation Damaged by Indiscretions

If you've used information as currency and enjoyed being the purveyor of inside information or gossip, you may have developed a reputation that no longer serves you well.

Your lack of discretion can simultaneously make you someone who others lean in to for all the latest scoop AND someone others avoid confiding in. When it comes to important dialogue, you may find yourself on the sidelines.

If the information you've historically shared is also inaccurate at times or exaggerated in any way, the mistrust is twofold. By violating both dimensions of trust – integrity and discretion – you've given others cause to doubt your word and your character.

Oftentimes, this sort of reputation is an obstacle to workplace relationships and can also be a career roadblock. If people feel you can't be trusted with information and discretion, they won't be as willing to trust you with other responsibilities and more information.

For those who have damaged their reputations in this way, it will take time to reset relationships and demonstrate the newfound commitment to discretion. These steps can help accelerate that reset:

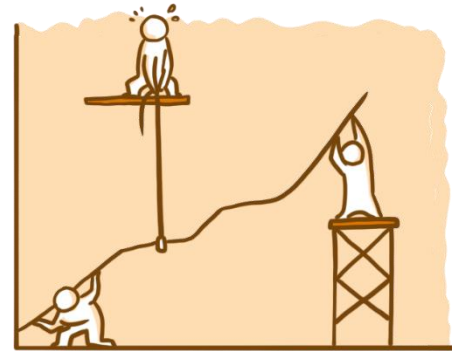
1. Acknowledge that past behaviors and choices were unwise. Admitting this to yourself, without rationalizing your actions away, is the first step because the others won't be solid without it.
2. Apologize to people you've injured. This includes those who were put into an awkward position because they had to carry the weight of what you shared inappropriately.
3. Model the example of no longer being open to gossip or inappropriate sharing that comes your way. When people approach you with personal or sensitive information, express your discomfort and explain that you are attempting to make a change. Step out of conversations that are about others who aren't sharing their own information directly.
4. Use the questions above to evaluate your motives and to sort out whether or not what you'd be sharing is useful, professional, fair, and helpful to others.
5. After you've broken the habit of oversharing, announce it to others. Be sure this is after the apologies and after the demonstration of new and improved ways. By declaring that you've made a change, you're making a commitment. People may not believe it at first and will be watchful to see if it's real.
6. Stay the course. Because people are watching, it's important not to backslide! Some may even test you or attempt to lead you astray.
7. Go directly to people. Adopt a philosophy of "I won't talk about you without you." When someone may need support or is being talked about, extend a listening ear without prying. Be sure to keep these conversations confidential and to only engage in them when you have a strong relationship, an ability to help, and a motive that serves that individual.

Allow time to heal the past breaches of trust. Until people see that you are genuinely remorseful and truly changed, they will have lingering doubts. Showing them the new you will take time.

Constructive Intent Fuels Personal Success and a Positive Work Culture

Why are some workplaces so much more laidback AND are still more productive than others? What is it that makes teams hum and employees engaged? How can some organizations retain employees and attract superstars with seemingly little effort? All these questions can be answered by understanding the value of trust in an organization.

When people throughout an organization trust the organization, the management team, and their colleagues... when they feel trusted... and when that trust creates effortless synergies and unleashes innovative thinking... people feel a sense of pride and belonging. Trust is a powerful adhesive that holds the entire operation together through thick and thin.



Measuring the Value of Trust in an Organization

The impact of two-way trust that's consistently displayed is described well in the Covey work known as *The Speed of Trust*. The over-arching conclusion of that research is that **"trust is a hard-nosed business asset which can deliver quantifiable economic value."**

When trust is high, both time required for task completion and costs go down. When trust is low, time required and costs increase. To save time and money, organizations should focus on building and maintaining a culture of high trust.

You'll be able to measure the costs associated with mistrust in your organization when you:

1. **Calculate the cost of time wasted in meetings** due to mistrust. If people are checking on one another's findings, requiring over-representation vs. sending a single delegate to speak for the group, stalling decisions due to unresolved doubt, or failing to engage in healthy conflict for fear of retaliation, then meetings are less productive than they ought to be. Multiply every hour spent in meetings by the cumulative cost per hour of every employee in those meetings. Ouch.
2. **Run the numbers related to employee turnover** that results from low trust. Employees who don't feel trusted don't stick around. Employees who believe they can't trust their managers also look for greener pastures. The costs associated with

recruiting, hiring, and onboarding can be significant. Don't forget to add in the overtime, missed opportunities, and impact on those who remain and try to fill in the voids.

3. **Add up the costs of employee resistance.** If they don't trust the decisions or don't understand what's expected of them, they won't get on board with change. They'll push back, and they'll spend unproductive time commiserating with each other and railing against the decisions and people they don't trust.
4. **Consider the hard costs of declines in employee engagement.** Low engagement compromises productivity, customer satisfaction, and top line revenue. It erodes profit margins by contributing to reduced revenue and increased expenses. Employee engagement is much more than a biannual survey or buzzword. It matters, and it is directly linked to two-way trust within any organization.
5. **Take a look at external impact and cost, too.** Low trust leads to bad reputations. Former customers and employees grouse about companies they left. In hyper-competitive times, why risk your organization's reputation by allowing mistrust to fester?

A Culture of Constructive Intent Boosts Trust Up, Down & Across the Org Chart

You'd like to create a high trust culture. You see the value of trust in an organization. You know things could be so much better if only people trusted each other... But where to begin?

Because trust is a touchy topic, many organizations choose to forego training and teambuilding that would develop or deepen trust. Many managers are uncomfortable broaching this sensitive subject and opt out of giving feedback about what employees could do differently to demonstrate trustworthiness.

The one thing that instantly raises trust between people is when they have open communication. They feel heard and they understand the importance of listening to others.

Defensiveness, arrogance, and internal competition make open communication impossible. Openness, humility, and team focus lead to stronger communication and trust.

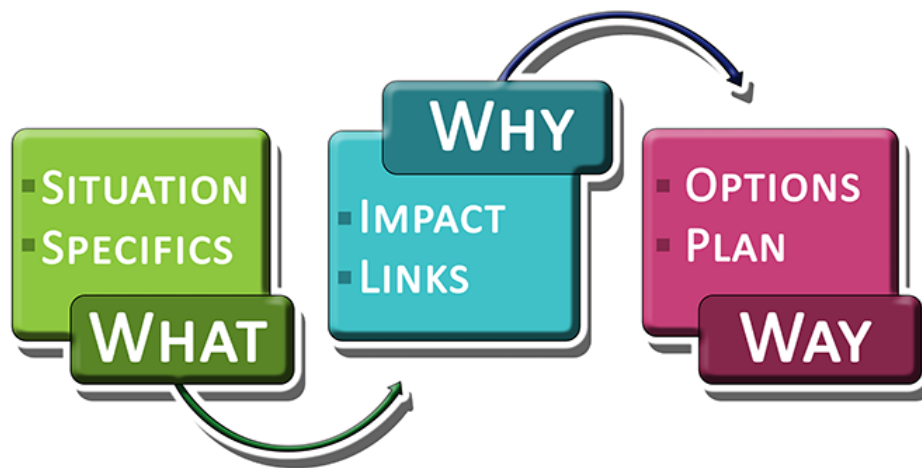
To build a high trust culture, organizations need people who are receptive to feedback and willing to give it to others. Feedback that is welcome up, down, and across the organization is healthy. Those who receive it model openness and humility. That's why folks at the top shouldn't be exempted from inviting and receiving feedback.

But there's a critically important component to this equation. Not all feedback is created equally. The feedback that boosts trust is driven by constructive intent.

Constructive intent is one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust. People need to know that your feedback is motivated by a desire to help them improve. It must be delivered in a way that does not seem like an ambush, attack, or threat.

Giving Feedback with Constructive Intent

The 3W Feedback Model conveys constructive intent. It diffuses tension and reduces the chance of a defensive response.



To deliver feedback using this model:

Explain WHAT the specific situation is. Give a neutral, objective, firsthand account of the situation. No hearsay. No judgment. No accusatory tone. Just a straightforward recap of what you've observed with specifics rather than generalizations.

Describe WHY this matters. State the impact on the team, customers, the results, or the individual. If there is no consequential impact, reconsider giving this feedback. People need to know why something is an issue so they can be motivated to change.

Share the WAY you'd like this to be done differently in the future. Clearly, firmly, and succinctly state the change you need to see. Offer any support that is needed or appropriate.

Here's an example.

WHAT: You've been late to our past 3 meetings, including today when you came in 30 minutes after we'd started.

WHY: I'm mentioning this because your contributions in these team meetings are essential. We can't make decisions before we hear from you. When you're not there, we're wasting time for the other 11 people who are there.

WAY: Going forward, I need you to let me know in advance when you won't be on time. I also expect you to prioritize these weekly team meetings so that you'll be there and on time more often.

This feedback is delivered without pauses, questions, or conversation in between. It's a matter-of-fact statement that's conveyed without equivocation. There's no beating around the bush and no room for misunderstanding.

Constructive intent is built into the 3W Feedback Model. The second W– WHY– provides an opportunity for sharing the intention of this feedback along with the importance of the change you're requesting.

If you feel that more may be needed to convey your constructive intent, open with a brief statement like "I'd like to share something with you that is intended to help you." Mean it if you say it! Move past your own discomfort so that you're focused on positive outcomes rather than focusing on your apprehensions about how the other party will respond.

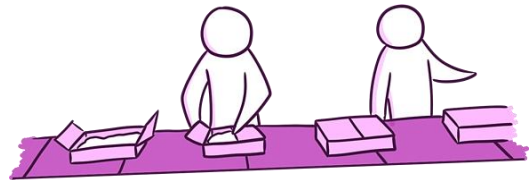
Don't make the mistake that deprives people of your feedback. Oftentimes, managers will avoid giving feedback because they fear it will impair morale or harm the relationship they have with a direct report. This misguided niceness isn't very nice at all – depriving someone of feedback is also depriving them of a chance to improve and grow. Who can trust a manager who doesn't tell them the truth or support them enough to help them do better?

A culture of high trust is one that breaks down barriers between people. It's not about false harmony and avoidance. It's about genuinely connecting by using constructive intent with the aim of building trust and strengthening relationships.

Being Honest with Yourself, AKA Accurate Self-Assessment, Is Essential

Work from home. The Great Resignation. Record-high levels of employee disengagement, burnout and low morale. Demands for higher pay, work/life balance, faster promotions, and competitive benefit packages that are increasingly difficult to meet. Trusting employees who make these demands isn't always easy.

At the same time they're expecting more, it may seem that employees are giving less. They call in sick more often, take longer breaks, are less engaged and more likely to leave than in years past, and complete less work in a typical shift. That may make it even more difficult for employers to trust employees.



Measuring the Value of Trust in an Organization

Add to the mix that not trusting employees is a surefire recipe for disenfranchising them and exacerbating all the problems cited above. Employees want a sense of belonging in the organizations they work for. They want to be seen as contributing, valuable team members. They want opportunities to grow. A lack of trust keeps employers from meeting these needs.

But, Wait, Trust Has to Be Earned, Right?

Many organizations have instituted a 3-month probationary period for new employees. Others churn through employees quickly, moving them out if they don't quickly demonstrate their skill and will to do the job well. Onboarding new employees is usually a one-direction process of disseminating information that sets policies and teaches practices without considering individual needs, learning styles, or prior experience.

From the start, then, employer/employee relationships are based on an implied understanding that the employee bears the burden of earning trust, adopting company ways, and demonstrating fit in the new role. No matter how lacking the onboarding program, training, or support is for new employees, those newbies are expected to prove themselves.

This is a classic case of "trust has to be earned." It's a one-sided and unfair approach to genuinely gauging whether or not a person is trustworthy. Many new employees fail because they're not taught in ways that fit their learning needs or are not given clear expectations for

what they need to do to be successful. Sadly, in many organizations, new hire training is delayed or lacking completely.

Side note: Turnabout is fair play. Employees expect (and rightly so!) that their managers and employers will earn their trust, too. New employees lose faith in organizations with sloppy business practices and inconsistent standards. When they're trying their best to learn and fit in, trust is breached when they discover that support is lacking and they've been abandoned to sink or swim on their own.

The "trust has to be earned" principle shows up elsewhere in organizations, too. It's not just applied to new employees. As people enter new collaborations, they may be tentative about trusting others. Managers may withhold stretch assignments or delegation of new tasks because they are waiting for proof of ability rather than providing opportunities to develop those abilities.

Once trust has been violated, even inadvertently, re-establishing it can be a long, drawn-out process of "trust must be earned." Our once-burned-twice-shy defenses kick in and keep us from extending the opportunities that would give someone a chance to reprove that they are trustworthy.

Accurate Self-Assessment Gives Others Confidence that They Can Trust You

A new hire who demonstrates a solid understanding of their own strengths and humbly acknowledges their own gaps will earn trust faster.

New employees who brashly dive in without understanding their own skills or knowledge gaps invite mistrust. They're more likely to make mistakes, too, that validate that mistrust. Although they might initially be viewed favorably for their confidence and initiative, the lack of self-awareness about their own limitations will cast doubt on their overall capabilities.

New employees who hold back and show a lack of confidence also invite mistrust. Hired for their education and experience, excessive tentativeness casts doubt on their overall capabilities, too, when the employee doesn't put that education and experience into practice.

Employees who overpromise and underdeliver are similarly violating trust. This dimension of trust, Accurate Self-Assessment, applies in any situation where someone over- or under-represents what they can capably do or what they know.

A failure to use your voice can lead to a vague sense of mistrust about your actual commitment. Out of a fear of saying the wrong thing or a preference to fully form thoughts before sharing

them, you may be – without realizing it – seen as someone who isn't fully invested and is opting out of group discussions.

While you may feel that you don't have anything of value to add, others need to hear from you in meetings and discussions. Your self-assessment that you don't have anything useful to add is quite likely invalid. Even an affirmation or agreement or a question raised can influence the conversation and demonstrate that you haven't checked out.

Admitting, candidly what you aren't able to do is a way to build trust. Knowing your own limitations and not trying to “fake it 'til you make it” will cause others to believe you won't overreach and put them at risk, too.

This doesn't mean you should display false humility as a ploy to get compliments and encouragement. The “*aw, shucks*” opening that leads into others heaping praise on you may feel good in the moment. But it quickly wears thin as people learn that you're fishing for compliments and not accurately assessing your own abilities.

At the onset of a new project or when asked to take on a new task, break it down. Let others know what parts you are genuinely confident about doing and which parts you'll need additional guidance or help to complete. State this matter-of-factly and with the intention to convey an accurate self-assessment.

Side note: This, too, applies in reverse. Employers should be careful not to oversell their commitment to employees, and managers need to manage expectations about promotions and development opportunities. An inaccurate self-assessment of what the organization can and will do for the employee may get a seat filled when hiring. But it will almost certainly cause the person in that seat to feel duped and disengaged once the truth emerges.

Trusting Employees AND Equipping Them with the Tools for Maintaining Your Trust

To get to a point where you're able to trust more employees more quickly and more solidly, the following proactive initiatives are advised:

► Behavioral Interviewing Based on Competencies

Do you have selected competencies for each job role so that you can evaluate candidates by these competencies? If not, you're bound to have disappointing results when hiring. Once you do have competencies, you can use behavioral interviewing to screen candidates and reduce the likelihood that they “sell themselves” in the interview by overstating qualifications.

▶ **Understanding Adult Learning Principles**

Train your trainers about the differing learning needs and styles of adults. Orientation and routine training isn't reaching everyone if it's always delivered exactly the same way and/or doesn't have a good mix of learning modalities.

▶ **Clear Job Role Expectations**

The job description is a good starting point. It should be updated and expanded upon for people already in the job. Additionally, it should be considerably clearer to breakdown umbrella terms like "other duties as assigned" or "ensures customer satisfaction." When an employee has clarity about what's actually expected, they have a better chance of accurately self-assessing whether or not they can perform a task.

▶ **Performance and Professional Standards**

You need both. Performance standards codify what is required in a job role and how much of it needs to be done. These should be formal and fair across all like jobs. Professional standards codify how the work is to be done and how employees are to interact with each other and with customers. Both can be barriers to long-term success, so sharing them is a way to demonstrate what the organization expects.

▶ **Transparent Processes for Development and Promotion**

Don't make it a top-secret process or an arbitrary choice that reeks of favoritism. Instead, create pathways (using competencies) and communicate frequently (not just in the annual review) about what it takes to be promoted. Create opportunities for continual development like mentoring, job shadowing, rotational and stretch assignments, and courses on soft skills and transferable skills.

▶ **Enablement of Employees**

Enabling means to provide someone with resources, time, skills, and confidence to do what they've been asked. Adequate budget, task prioritization to free up time for the new task and the training needed for all boost confidence within the employee. Letting them know you believe they can do it is also enabling.

▶ **Ennoblement of Employees**

Ennobling means to make others feel worthy or important and to make them feel that their work and contributions are valued. Authentic praise, inclusivity, inviting input, and genuinely caring about the individual (not just the work product) are all ennobling behaviors.

By equipping employees and entrusting them with meaningful work that dignifies their abilities, you'll create a culture of trust where people thrive. When you see an employee over- or understating their abilities, let them know that this is not necessary and that it has an impact on others' ability to trust them. With any breach of trust, a similar conversation is the best remedy for eradicating the behavior and getting back to mutual trust.



Don't Discount the Importance of Trust in Business

As we wrap this booklet on The 12 Dimensions of Trust, we'd be remiss if we didn't reiterate the importance of trust in business.

In business, trust isn't some optional, nice-to-have, occasional perk. **Trust is absolutely essential.** It's the lifeblood of success and the currency of workplace relationships. Trust accelerates decisions and innovation. It enhances communication and collaboration.

By contrast, a pervasive distrust within any business can be devastating. Employee morale suffers without the confidence that comes in knowing you can trust your colleagues. Things move slower when mistrust leads to micromanaging, double checking, delayed decisions, and inaction.

The Links between Trust, Employee Engagement, and Business Success

This excerpt from *What Makes a Great Employer*, by Mark Feffer, says it all. Let's take it in four parts.

Trust Is Correlated with Employee Engagement

"Great places to work have high levels of trust and engagement."

Like salt and pepper, they travel together. Employees are more engaged when the trust their managers and employers. They're also more engaged when they feel trusted by managers and employers.

2-Way Trust Is Required

"Trust goes both ways: Employees have an implicit trust in leaders to make the right decisions for the organization - including its people - while leaders trust employees to put the organization's needs first as they interact with customers, vendors and partners."

Trust is a 2-way street. It's reciprocal. The outdated, patriarchal systems of top-down management and mistrust no longer work. Employees have more options and aren't afraid to explore them. They won't put up with feeling "under the microscope" or mistrusted at work.

Leaders Proactively Demonstrate Their Trust in Employees

“Leaders demonstrate that trust by clearly communicating about the company’s challenges as well as its successes and by pushing decision-making power downward. That trust contributes greatly to a sense of engagement.”

Openness is just one of the 12 Dimensions of Trust. But it is an important one when it comes to earning employees’ trust and engagement. Openness about the state of business creates a sense of belonging and conveys that “we’re all in this together.”

Stronger Employee Contributions Lead to Business Success

“Armed with a clear view of the state of the business, invested in the company’s success and loyal to their colleagues, workers see themselves as being a part of something greater—the company’s mission and its values.”

With a sense of belonging and being a part of something bigger, employees are more likely to be highly engaged in their work. They’ll be less likely to leave and will apply additional discretionary effort to the work they do.

Without trust, none of this is possible. It’s not sustainable to rely on command-and-control authority tactics.

If Trust Has Been Damaged, Do the Repair Work

It will be awkward, uncomfortable, difficult, and NECESSARY to restore trust.

Oftentimes, once trust has been broken, the parties involved reach an uneasy truce. Rather than resolving the issue, they take a guarded approach going forward. They accept that there’s something in between them, but they don’t work on fixing it. Each blames the other, and that uneasiness becomes the norm.

But at what cost?

It doesn’t have to be that way. Despite the discomfort of deliberately working to rebuild trust, the payoff is worth it. Whether the lingering tensions are in 1-to-1 relationships or across entire teams, these steps will help you restore trust.

1. **Do a root-cause analysis** using the 12 Dimensions of Trust. Use this booklet for team sharing, perhaps in the form of a book discussion club. Use the assessment at the end of this booklet, a gift from People First Productivity Solutions. Use the assessment to diagnose what caused the feelings of mistrust. Use it to self-assess and to assess those you don’t fully trust so you can understand what’s in the way. Engage People First Productivity Solutions for team activities that will rebuild trust over time.

2. **Reset the emotional tone.** Set aside personal feelings and let down your guard. Be objective, even clinical, as you reach out to matter-of-factly state your desire to open a healing conversation and understand what's needed for a reset. Keep emotions out of it so you can logically and rationally discuss what's happened and how to move past it.
3. **Share responsibility.** This problem could be founded in misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or miscommunication. There are two parties involved in each, and both parties bear responsibility for how the message was conveyed and how it was received. Who cares who's to blame? That won't solve the problem. Looking forward and owning your part of the problem will serve you better.
4. **Find common ground.** Maybe you don't see eye-to-eye. You have different styles, different perspectives, and competing goals. You've also got some mutual interests – if for no other reason than you work for the same organization. Move past all the differences and focus on the common ground.
5. **Build Your Relational Agility.** This is the advanced-level of finding common ground. The overlap between your own needs, the needs of others, and the needs of the organization can give you great clarity in focusing on the right things. Zoom out so you can see it all and won't remain hyper-focused on the small stuff.

To rebuild trust, you've got to be willing to give people a second chance. If the offense wasn't egregious enough to cause a separation from the organization, then it can't be so big that you can't offer grace.

The Importance of Trust in Business Can't be Overstated

Without trust, the environment is toxic. With trust, the culture and workplace liberate all-in contributions.

Without trust, engagement suffers. People leave (or stay but aren't giving their all). With trust, employees contribute at higher levels.

Without trust, finger-pointing and blame create deep divides. With trust, people bond and collaborate.

Without trust, there's a palpable sense of suspicion and doubt. No one wants to take risks or voice their opinions. With trust, there's a sense of excitement and a freedom to innovate and offer ideas.

Without trust, an us/them mentality shores up silos and builds barricades between teams. With trust, synergies are discovered and unleash continual improvements.

There are no downsides to improving trust in the workplace.

Ultimately, higher levels of trust improve every aspect of work.

Take the plunge. Work to proactively repair and preserve trust between teams, team members, manager/employee groups, and the organization overall.

The 12 Dimensions of Trust

Integrity: Consistently makes ethical choices regardless of convenience, profit, fun or other personal benefit.

Competence: Skills & knowledge are commensurate with expected results. Strives to learn & increase competence.

Consistency: Reliable, steady, predictable. Everyone knows what to expect from this person. Someone you can count on.

Loyalty: Makes and keeps long-term commitments to individuals, teams and organizations. Supports others at all times.

Availability: Makes time for needed conversations and listens without distractions. Is fully present.

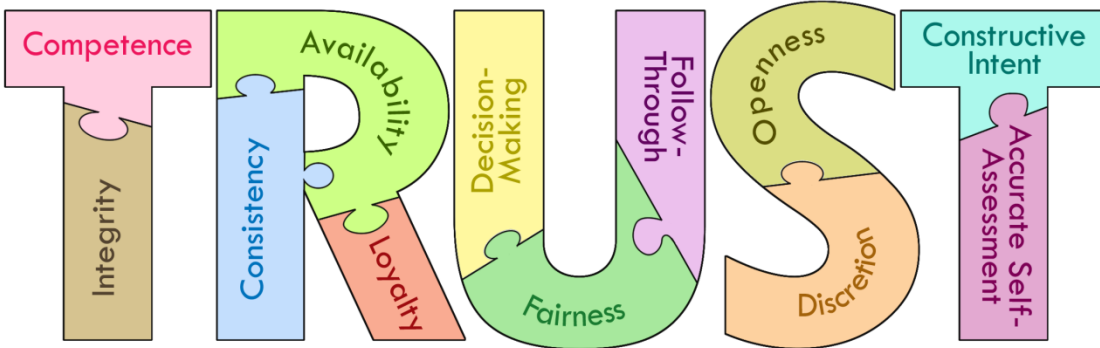
Discretion: Respects confidentiality. Gets permission, uses care before sharing information with others.

Constructive Intent: Shares sensitive messages without causing defensiveness. Communication motives are not self-serving.

Accurate Self-Assessment: Understands and acknowledges his or her own limitations, seeks and accepts help when needed.

Openness: Communicates with complete disclosure, doesn't hold back information. Shares opinion even when it's not popular.

Follow-Through: Delivers what has been promised. Honors agreements and accepts responsibility if commitments are not kept.



Decision-Making: Knows and shares decision-making criteria, involves others in decision-making process, explains rationale.

Fairness: Uses objective criteria to evaluate situation. Does not exhibit favoritism, holds all to equal standard.

Artwork by Renee Calvert of People First Productivity Solutions

Complete this self-assessment with candor. This is for your eyes only.

Think about the people you work with on this leadership team and people you've worked with in the past in peer or direct reporting relationships.

Rate yourself in each dimension the way those people would likely rate you.

Dimension and Description	Breach of trust has occurred	Some cause for lack of trust	Some cause for doubt in trustworthiness	Completely trustworthy, no doubts.
Integrity: Consistently makes ethical choices regardless of convenience, profit, fun or other personal benefit.				
Competence: Skills & knowledge are commensurate with expected results. Strives to learn & increase competence.				
Consistency: Reliable, steady, predictable. Everyone knows what to expect from this person. Someone you can count on.				
Loyalty: Makes and keeps long-term commitments to individuals, teams & organizations. Supports others at all times.				
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Fairness: Uses objective criteria to evaluate situation. Does not exhibit favoritism, holds all to equal standard.				
Decision-Making: Knows & shares decision-making criteria. Involves others in decision-making process. Explains rationale of decisions.				
Follow Through: Delivers what has been promised. Honors agreements and accepts responsibility if commitments are not kept.				
Openness: Communicates with complete disclosure, doesn't hold back information. Shares opinion even when it's not popular.				
Discretion: Respects confidentiality. Gets permission, uses care before sharing information with others.				
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Accurate Self-Assessment: Understands and acknowledges his or her own limitations, seeks and accepts help when needed.				