Building Trust
Leading Hybrid Teams Tip Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

WHY THIS MATTERS

The ability to build trust is a critical competency leaders bring to their team. Teams with a high degree of trust are more productive, engaged, and collaborative. Research has shown that building a culture of trust has a more meaningful impact than "perks," which may boost short-term happiness but fail to have a lasting effect on retention or performance outcomes (Zak. HBR, 2017). Intentional strategies that build trust are important in hybrid teams where proximity may decrease a leader's visibility and informal opportunities for conversation and connection.

WHAT IS TRUST?

The abstract concept of trust has been defined in many ways. Charles Feltman defines trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions (2009)." He identifies four drivers of trust: sincerity, reliability, competence, and care. People tend to trust you when they believe that: you are being honest and acting with integrity and honesty; you meet the commitments you make; you have the skills, knowledge and resources to complete a task; and, you have the other person's interests in mind when making decisions.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Effective leaders are able to distinguish the rational and emotional components of trustworthiness and are able to identify areas to improve. Using Charles Green's "**Trust Equation**" model, consider the 4 variables that impact trustworthiness:

Credibility

Is usually objective, demonstrated in the words and ideas we express. To be credible, it means we believe that the person is competent, capable, and has relevant credentials. We have confidence in their abilities and skills.

Reliability

Is usually objective, demonstrated through actions and behaviours. To be reliable, it means we believe, based on previous interactions, that they will follow through, have shown consistency and are dependable.

Intimacy

Is more subjective and harder to measure as it is emotional risk. It refers to the safety or emotional security or rapport that we feel when entrusting someone with something important and the belief that confidentiality will not be violated.

Self-Orientation

The perception of self-orientation has biggest impact on trustworthiness. It refers to a person's focus. Is their focus primarily on themselves or others? How selfish or self-obsessed do we believe them to be? Do they care about others or have their own agenda?

HOW TO BUILD TRUST

1. Be Sincere |
When people sense that you are concealing the truth or being less than authentic, they are less willing to make themselves vulnerable to you. Hold confidences and avoid gossip. Be intentional about what you say to ensure you are being honest and are clearly communicating your priorities. Check in regularly and update your team when you change your mind or circumstances have changed. Strive to be congruent and avoid sending different messages to team members. Acknowledge when you have made a mistake or missed a commitment, and apologize.

2. Explain Your Logic and Invite Input |
Develop your ability to express your priorities and vision succinctly to communicate a shared purpose and team goals. Build others' ability to trust you by emphasising your credibility and reliability. Communicate your perspective and the knowledge you used to arrive at your credible opinions and decisions. If you are unable to share information with your team due to confidentiality, let them know this and commit to updating the team when you are able. Invite dialogue when making decisions and clearly communicate how discussion will inform the decision making process.

3. Practice Care |
Not being fully present in conversations and interactions with others is one of the main detractors from expressing care and building trust. Increase trust with your team by creating psychological safety. Build relationships with your team and ask them about their interests and concerns. Work to understand what your team needs and become their advocate. Show thoughtfulness when expressing yourself by asking yourself whom your comments serve. Model and set expectations that promote being fully present during conversations, such as avoiding multitasking. Establish ground rules with your team that articulate how care and respect will be demonstrated.

SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Working in a hybrid environment will be new for many people, and it will take time to learn how to best facilitate healthy and productive practices. You are not alone in this transition to a hybrid work environment. Some of us have more experience leading hybrid teams than others. We encourage you to talk openly about your successes and challenges. Share your ideas, tips, and tools with your colleagues. Be curious, ask questions, and seek support.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Human Resources, Health, Safety and Environment (HRHSE) offers a range of options for you to learn more about setting expectations, like team norms and ground rules, and holding your team accountable to them. We also offer extensive workshops and programs focused on leadership development.

Learn more about our leadership and professional development programming on the **HRHSE website**.

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Managing a hybrid work environment does not mean learning a new skill set, but it does mean being more intentional with the best management and leadership practices you are already using. Organizations with high trust report many benefits including less stress, more energy, higher engagement, fewer sick days, more satisfaction, and less burnout.

Below are a few resources to sharpen your leadership competencies around building trust:

Articles

Zak, Paul J. "The Neuroscience of Trust," *Harvard Business Review* 95(1): 84-90. 2017.

Frei, Frances X., and Morriss, Anne. "Begin with Trust: The First Step to Becoming a Genuinely Empowering Leader." *Harvard Business Review* 93(3):112-21. 2020.

Berland, Christopher. "The Neuroscience of Trust." *Psychology Today*. 12 August 2015.

Wong, Kellie. "9 Tips for Building Trust in the Workplace." Achievers (blog) 22 September 2020.

Videos

Trusted Advisor Associates, LLC. *"Understanding the Trust Equation for Professional Relationships."* 31 March 2020. (6:25 min)

Frei, Frances. "How to Build (and rebuild) Trust." Ted video, 14:21 min. 2018.

O'Neill, Onora. "What We Don't Understand About Trust" Ted video, 9:35 min. 2013.

Strudwick, Kendra. "How to Build Trust & Rapport in a Virtual Setting." *NeuroLeadership Institute*. Retrieved 10 November 2021. (60 min)

Books

Feltman, Charles. *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*. 2nd Ed. Thin Book Publishing, 2008.

Covey, Stephen M.R., and Rebecca R. Merrill. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. 1st Free Press, 2008.

Maister, David H., Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford. *The Trusted Advisor*. 1st Touchstone ed., The Free Press, 2001.

Green, Charles H., and Andrea P. Howe. *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook: A Comprehensive Toolkit for Leading with Trust.* Wiley, 2012.

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