

## **Leadership Guide: TRUST**

**Exceptional leaders engender, inspire and sustain trust.** Trust is a topic that comes up frequently in my work - whether it's establishing trust, promoting trust, addressing undercurrents of distrust or repairing breakdowns.

When trust is high between individuals and within teams, communication is clear and frequent, conflict is resolved, learning occurs and collaboration is deepened. Economist Kenneth Arrow said, "...trust is efficient". When trust erodes, efforts to manage complexity, span organizational boundaries, facilitate change, and capacity for new action is stunted.

Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus wrote that "trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work." Stephen Covey said "We trust someone when we have confidence in their character, ability, strength or truthfulness. We rely on them not to let us down."

**Trust is the foundation for effective, positive relationships.** It's an active process that requires intention, engagement, commitment, and consistency.

**Trust is influenced by credibility and reliability.** When assessing trustworthiness, we ask ourselves, "Does this person have the competency and ability to meet their commitments?" and "Can I count on this person to keep their promises?" We also consider whether the person acts out of self-interest vs. being committed to shared goals and success.

**Trust is related to openness and vulnerability.** When we trust someone we feel little need to censure or limit communication. We don't hesitate to share new ideas or concerns. In The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni explains that trust is about vulnerability; "team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation of trust."

**Trust flows from our experience.** Each of us has a predisposed tendency to trust or distrust others based on life experiences, personality, social differences and culture. Being able to trust others is based on our ability to trust ourselves. Robert Solomon and Fernando Flores, in Building Trust, say "the way to build authentic trust is to trust. Trust is a skill learned over time so, like a well-trained athlete, one makes the right moves, usually without much reflection..."

**Trust can be generated through concrete actions. What are some ways a leader can cultivate trust?**

- Be present and pay attention.
- Listen deeply.
- Keep others informed about your intentions, actions and future plans. Tell the truth. Don't "sugar coat" difficult news.
- Notice and appreciate contributions. Create an environment that values and acknowledges team members. Provide frequent feedback.
- Accept responsibility for outcomes. Admit mistakes and apologize.
- Share information and recognition freely. Don't take sole credit for team projects.
- Allow opportunities for the team to explore new ideas. Invite input.
- Don't micromanage.
- Keep your promises. Approach every agreement you make as if it has the potential to build or erode trust. Track your agreements and commitments. If you can't meet a commitment, contact the other person in advance of the expected delivery date and negotiate a new agreement.

- Consider what life experiences have shaped your point of view about trust. Reflect how family relationships fostered or limited your beliefs about trust...and notice how past experiences impact your experience and quality of relationships today.

**Recommended Reading:**

The Trust Crisis in Healthcare: Causes, Consequences and Cures.  
David A. Shore, editor

Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace: Building effective relationships in your organization. Dennis Reina and Michelle Reina

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Patrick Lencioni

Building Trust: In Business, Politics, Relationships, and Life.  
Robert Solomon and Fernando Flores

"The Decision to Trust", Robert F. Hurley, Harvard Business Review,  
Sept. 2006