Building
Trust
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Why trust is important

"Those who are successful at building trust usually don’t talk about it; they live it.”

—Robert Bruce Shaw, Trust in the Balance: Building Successful Organizations on Results, Integrity, and Concern
Levels of trust go up and down like a nation’s sense of optimism. In the 1950s, for example, people had more trust in the government, and in their employers, neighbors, and community leaders. That isn’t as true today. We’re less trusting of politicians, corporations—even of the people next door. Corrupt politicians have left us less trusting of government. Corporate scandals have rocked the business world, and we trust business leaders less. Downsizing has left many employees feeling less secure in their jobs and less trusting of their employers. The up-and-down stock market has left many people feeling uncertain about the future. Experts say that trust levels today are lower than ever before. Yet everything from a good relationship with a customer to a good marriage is built on trust. Trust affects how we see the world, how safe we feel, and how we approach new people and situations. It affects whether we’re willing to go the extra mile for a friend, a co-worker, or even someone we’ve never met but with whom we do business.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey talks about the idea of an “emotional bank account”—the reserves of trust that we build up in our relationships with people. When there is a lot of trust between people, the bank account is full. You feel safe, committed, and comfortable with the other person. When trust levels are low—when the bank account is overdrawn—relationships feel strained. People aren’t committed, they don’t work cooperatively, and they feel threatened by one another.

Trust is what makes us feel understood. It’s what makes work groups get along. It’s what makes us believe in people, organizations, and causes. Trust is the thing that makes us commit and stay committed, despite problems and misunderstandings.

How can you build up reserves of trust with the important people in your life? That’s what you’ll read about in the following pages. You’ll be asked to think about trust and the role it plays in your personal and work relationships. Are you trustworthy? Whom do you trust and don’t you trust? How can you learn to trust more? Are there people you should trust less?

The quiz that follows will help you begin to think about these questions.
How trusting are you?

Ten questions to help you look at trust in your life.
After each statement below, choose the answer that best applies to you.

1. A friend confides in you about a family problem. You keep the information to yourself.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ SOMETIMES

2. When you say you’ll get back to someone soon, you do.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ SOMETIMES

3. Your spouse or partner says, “I’m sorry I was late.” You accept the apology and forgive.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ SOMETIMES

4. When you have a misunderstanding with someone, you talk about it and try to resolve your differences.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ SOMETIMES

5. You like to meet people who are very different from you, like people from other countries.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ NOT SURE

6. Honesty—in yourself and others—is very important to you.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ NOT SURE

7. The people you work with can be counted on to do a good job.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ SOMETIMES

8. When working on a project, you like to involve others and seek their opinions.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ NOT SURE

9. Even when there are setbacks at work, you’re still committed to doing a good job.
   ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ NOT SURE

10. When you have to make a decision at work, you think about it, decide, and are usually comfortable with your decision.
    ○ YES  ○ NO  ○ NOT SURE

Turn the page for an explanation of what your answers mean.
Scoring

Trust affects all areas of your life. It affects how you approach new situations, new people, and new challenges. It affects how you feel about yourself and the people around you. It affects whether you believe people will do what they say they’ll do and be there for you—and whether you’ll be there for them.

Statements one through six on the quiz are about trust relationships in your personal life. Seven through ten are about trust relationships in your work life. How did you do on the quiz?

If you answered “Yes” to nine or ten of the questions on the quiz, your trust relationships at work and in your personal life are probably strong. You put a lot into your relationships and you probably get a lot back. Read on to learn about how to keep on building strong, trusting relationships with the people in your personal and work life.

If you answered “Yes” to seven or eight of the questions, your trust relationships are probably pretty strong. But there may be parts of your life where you could work on building trust. After which statements did you answer “No,” “Sometimes,” or “Not sure”? Do you need to work on building trust in your personal relationships or your work relationships? On the following pages you’ll find positive steps you can take and skills you can acquire to help you build trust in both these areas.

If you answered “Yes” to six or fewer of the questions, trust levels in your life may be low, and this may be affecting how you interact with others. After which statements did you answer “No,” “Sometimes,” or “Not sure”? Do you need to work on building trust in your personal relationships or your work relationships? On the pages that follow you’ll find positive steps you can take and skills you can acquire to help you build trust in both these areas.
Here is more information about what your answers mean:

1. A friend confides in you about a family problem. You keep the information to yourself. If you circled “Yes” after this statement, then you're probably a good listener and someone people trust enough to confide in about their personal feelings and thoughts. If you answered “No” or “Sometimes,” you may not be as trustworthy a friend as you could be.

2. When you say you'll get back to someone soon, you do. This question has to do with follow-through and reliability—both key components of trust. Can you be counted on for small day-to-day things like returning phone calls? Do you show up when you say you will and do what you say you'll do? Can you be counted on for the bigger things, too, like being there for a friend who needs you?

3. Your spouse or partner says, “I’m sorry I was late.” You accept the apology and forgive. To build trusting relationships, you must be able to forgive and move on. You must be able to trust that the person is sorry. How did you respond to this statement?

4. When you have a misunderstanding with someone, you talk about it and try to resolve your differences. To build trust takes work. Are you willing to work at it?

5. You like to meet people who are very different from you, like people from other countries. How did you respond to this statement? It's easier to trust people who share your values, lifestyle, and beliefs than it is to trust people who are different from you. The more open and interested you are in people who aren't like you, the wider your circle of trust will be.

6. Honesty—in yourself and others—is very important to you. You can't build trust unless you can commit to being truthful with others.
7. *The people you work with can be counted on to do a good job.* Trust experts say there are two kinds of people in the world: those who trust others until there’s a reason not to trust, and those who withhold trust until it’s earned. If you answered “Yes” to this question, you’re probably the first kind of person. You meet your child’s new teacher and assume the teacher is someone you can trust to do a good job. You meet a new co-worker and assume he’s capable and honest. If you answered “No” or “Sometimes” after this statement, you may be someone who withholds trust until the other person has earned it. You “wait and see” about the new teacher or co-worker.

8. *When working on a project, you like to involve others and seek their opinions.* How did you respond to this statement? When you trust people, you want to know what they think and you’re eager to hear their opinions. The more you involve others in your work, the more trusting you are. If your response was “No” or “Not sure,” think about why that’s true.

9. *Even when there are setbacks at work, you’re still committed to doing a good job.* An important part of building trust is being committed to making things better—to working through problems and working on solutions.

10. *When you have to make a decision at work, you think about it, decide, and are usually comfortable with your decision.* People who trust themselves trust their decisions and follow through with those decisions. When you trust yourself, you are confident that you can do a good job and handle difficult situations. When you trust yourself, people tend to trust you, too.
As you review your answers, take a moment to think about the trust levels in your life. Is trust missing in any of your relationships? Where could it be strengthened?

- Do you trust yourself and feel confident that you can make good decisions?

- Do you trust others—your partner or spouse, your children, siblings, friends, your manager, and co-workers?

- Do you trust people you don't know?

- Do you believe that trust can be rebuilt?

In the following sections, you’ll read tips about building and rebuilding trust in yourself and in others.
When trust breaks down

“If you don’t have trust, people won’t cooperate, won’t be committed, and won’t know where they stand.”
—Robert Levering, The Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc.
When you trust someone—whether it’s your boss, a co-worker, or your best friend—life feels good. When trust levels are high, you feel relaxed and accepted; you can be yourself. When trust levels are low, you feel uncomfortable and on the defensive; you can’t be yourself. Friends who trust one another can be themselves around each other and share their innermost thoughts and concerns. Co-workers with high levels of trust enjoy working and spending time together and tend to be more productive. Couples in trusting relationships communicate more openly and understand each other. They love deeply and feel safe in their intimacy.

But when trust breaks down—at work or at home—life does not feel good. Lack of trust can cause people to feel angry, hurt, or disappointed with one other. Teams with low levels of trust have trouble working together and reaching agreements. Communication is poor. People compete with rather than support one other. Friends who have had a falling out act like strangers. Couples who have had a serious breakdown in trust—who have experienced an infidelity, for example—may become estranged or even consider divorce.

Trust can break down for any number of reasons. It can break down if someone

- lies to you
- takes advantage of you
- fails to keep a promise
- misleads you in some way
- talks behind your back
- avoids you
- breaks an agreement or contract
- withholds important information from you
- takes credit for your work
- judges you harshly or criticizes you unfairly
If you’ve experienced betrayal before, you may have become overly suspicious. The result might mean that when someone at work withholds information out of carelessness, for example, you start to mistrust them. It’s very helpful to have a trusted adviser or counseling resource to help you determine if you are really seeing a pattern of untrustworthy behavior or if you are overreacting to isolated incidents.

Our first urge when trust breaks down may be to not trust the other person again—to “write the person off.” However, this is counterproductive and exactly what you shouldn’t do, especially if the relationship is important to you—if it’s with a co-worker, manager, friend, or someone else you care about. When trust breaks down, it’s important to repair and build bridges so that you’re able to heal and move on, and turn anger and negative energy into something positive and productive. For example, if someone criticizes your work harshly to the boss, it will be hard work to trust that co-worker again. But if you don’t work at rebuilding trust, you may lose vital cooperation and camaraderie. And mistrust can escalate, with others taking sides and making everyone’s work time difficult.

To take charge of turning things around requires three things:

- a willingness and desire to get beyond the problem, breakdown, or misunderstanding
- a willingness to talk with the other person to resolve the problem
- a willingness to look inside yourself and take responsibility for your past and future actions

Again, a trusted adviser or counselor can help you do a reality check, evaluate the situation, identify your options, and plan how to work on the problem.
When trust is seriously damaged

When trust is seriously damaged—due to an act of abuse or another traumatic event, or a serious betrayal, violation, or deception—it can affect your personal and work relationships. You may have difficulty committing or forming close attachments. Or you may feel like you “can’t trust anyone.”

What if there is a serious breach of trust, such as an infidelity in a relationship? As in all cases of betrayal, you need to talk about and acknowledge what happened, and discuss if and how you can rebuild a trusting relationship. Many couples who experience an infidelity are able to renew their commitment and strengthen their relationship. Other couples break up. Rebuilding trust can be a slow process and it sometimes requires professional help. It takes the recognition that people and marriages are not perfect. And it takes commitment to work on the underlying issues that may have caused the infidelity. But it is possible.

A serious betrayal or breakdown in trust can affect your relationships and your ability to cope. Talking with a professional can help. You may want to seek help from a professional if you are

- arguing a lot or having trouble getting along with others
- feeling aggressive or having trouble managing anger
- more irritable or frustrated than usual
- abusing drugs or alcohol
- experiencing sleep problems
- feeling stuck or unable to move on

Talking with a counselor or therapist can help you rebuild trust. Your employee assistance program (EAP) or employee resource program can help you find a professional to work with you.
Building trust in your personal and work relationships

“Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people.”
—Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
You’ve probably heard of those team-building exercises where an employee allows himself to fall backwards into the arms of co-workers, risking injury while trusting that others will catch him. That’s what trust is about—taking a risk and accepting your own vulnerability based on an expectation of your co-workers’ good intentions and behavior toward you.

Trust sometimes takes months or years to build, but it can be destroyed in an instant. You build trust by paying attention to the big and little things in your relationships with others, and by investing time and energy in those relationships.

1 Keep it confidential

When someone confides in you or shares personal information, don’t share it with others. “The World War II saying loose lips sink ships could easily be turned into loose lips destroy relationships,” writes Eileen O. Brownell in the journal Manage. If a friend or relative confides something personal about his marriage, or a co-worker shares something private about a work issue, resist the urge to tell others about these private conversations. Before sharing confidences, first ask permission of the person who confided in you. You might say, “Is it OK if I mention this to Phil? He might have some good advice.” Look back to how you answered question one on the quiz. Do you keep confidential information to yourself?

Trust builders

• When you are working with a group or committee, don’t share sensitive committee work outside the group.

• Never forward an e-mail document marked “confidential.”

• Respect privacy. Avoid eavesdropping on co-workers’ conversations.

• Don’t talk behind people’s backs. You could unfairly hurt someone’s career or reputation. And word often gets back to them.
• Avoid starting or passing rumors.

• Carefully, share an opinion or a confidence. When you show people you trust them, it helps them to trust you.

• Respect the confidence your children place in you. Don’t discuss your child’s personal relationships or secrets with all your friends. If your teenager talks with you about a breakup with a boyfriend or a problem with a teacher, for example, share the information with your spouse or partner but not with all your friends.

2 Keep your promises and follow through with commitments

When you follow through with your promises and commitments, you show people that you care about them, that you’re reliable, and that you can be counted on in the future. Look back to question two on the quiz, and think about your follow-through habits. Can you be counted on to do what you say you’ll do? When you promise to help a co-worker with a task, do you do it? When you promise to do something for your child, do you do that, too? Realize that when you let other people down, they lose trust in you and hesitate to turn to you in the future. They are also less likely to go the extra mile for you.

Trust builders

• Before you accept a commitment, be certain you understand all that it involves. Will you be able to deliver that report on time? Do you have the resources and time to do a good job on it? Set reasonable deadlines so that you can deliver on your promises.

• If you can’t make a deadline, explain why as soon as you can and renegotiate the deadline if possible. Be prepared to suggest ways you still might help the person get what he needs.

• Always try to do what you say you will do, even for the small things. If you promise your child you’ll be home by five o’clock to bake a
cake, keep your promise. If you tell a friend you’ll be there for her son’s baseball game, show up. If you tell your co-worker you’ll be at the meeting, arrive on time and be prepared.

• Be honest and turn down a request or invitation if you know you won’t be able to follow through. Others will respect you for knowing your limits and for being honest with them. For example, instead of saying, “No problem, I’ll be there,” decline an invitation if you know you won’t be able to attend. Avoid any impulse to make a promise you don’t intend to keep.

• Examine your follow-through habits. If you miss obligations, is it because you are disorganized? Overcommitted? Do you have a history of not meeting deadlines? Learning what causes you to not honor commitments will help you plan better—and be more reliable—in the future.

3 **Forgive and move on**

One of the first lessons we teach our children is to say, “I’m sorry” when they’ve done something wrong. It’s fundamental. Look back to how you answered question three in the quiz: Your spouse or partner says, “I’m sorry I was late.” You accept the apology and forgive. Do you accept and forgive? Remember, to build trusting relationships, you must be able to forgive and move on.

**Trust builders**

• Try to let go of old arguments, resentments, and issues from the past. “Most of the betrayals that occur at work are unintentional,” write the authors of *Trust & Betrayal in the Workplace*, Dennis and Michelle Reina. “Most of the time we hurt others by oversights, rushing, cramming to do more with less time. . . . “ Find ways to be more careful with people so that you avoid oversights. Checking in with teammates often, perhaps at least once briefly each day, will help you be more aware of their needs and concerns.
• Accept the other person’s apology and don’t dwell on how it was offered. Sometimes we think people aren’t being sincere when they offer an apology. But it may have been very difficult for the person to apologize. It’s best if you accept the apology and try not to read into how or why it was offered the way it was.

• Sometimes we need something from the person who has betrayed our trust, such as a makeup date for the dinner that was missed. It lets us know the person is sincerely sorry. If you know what you need, ask for it. Others cannot read your mind and it’s OK to ask someone to make amends for their behavior.

• Don’t rehash what happened in the past.

• Put things in perspective. Remember the good times instead of dwelling on the bad. Look toward the future.

• Remember times in your life when you needed or wanted forgiveness. Face your own mistakes and forgive yourself. It’s often easier to forgive another person when you can admit your own wrongs and forgive yourself.

• Realize that there may be times when it is impossible to forgive. There may be conflicts or breaches of trust you cannot forgive. You may have to let go of the friendship or relationship. Consider talking with a counselor if you are having trouble getting over a betrayal or misunderstanding. A counselor may be able to help you move on with your life and help you prevent the betrayal from affecting your other relationships.

4 Realize that trust is up to you

You are responsible for how much—or little—people trust you. Think about your relationships with others and about your actions. Are you a trustworthy and honest co-worker and friend? When you have a breakdown in communication with someone, do you try to get beyond the misunderstanding? How did you answer question four on the quiz?
Trust builders

• Accept responsibility for building trust in new relationships.

• Collaborate with co-workers and others. Help out a co-worker who is less experienced than you. Offer to help a colleague who seems overloaded.

• If a friend, relative, or co-worker is ill or going through a difficult time, offer to help. Be there to help with errands or other jobs.

• If mutual friends, family members, or co-workers have had a breakdown in trust or communication, offer to help re-open the channels of communication. When a breakdown in trust occurs between you and a co-worker who is not open to discussing the problem, try to identify a likely intermediary to help you talk.

• Ask a friend or co-worker to give you feedback on how reliable or trustworthy you are. You might be surprised by what the person says. For example, you may have thought you were giving honest feedback, as requested, in a team meeting, only to find out that it was interpreted by a co-worker as undermining her project.

5 Trust people who are different from you

It’s easier to establish trust quickly with people who are more like you than different from you. You may trust the neighbor next door because she, too, has young children. What’s harder, what takes more work, is to trust people who hold values, opinions, and beliefs that are different from yours. Differences in age, race, religion, in the way a person talks, or even the way he or she dresses can affect our ability to trust. Sometimes we only trust certain types of people, and mistrust others. In an increasingly diverse and changing workplace and world it’s important to be able to trust people outside your circle. How do you react when someone’s political views are very different from your own? Are you accepting of other people’s life choices or spiritual beliefs? Are you able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes when you are having a misunderstanding or problem?
Do you treat others with fairness and respect? The more open you are, the more trusting your relationships will be. How did you answer question five on the quiz about meeting people from different backgrounds?

**Trust builders**

- Be open to new ideas, regardless of where they come from. When you are open and receptive to new and different ideas and perspectives, people feel comfortable sharing what they think. When someone with much less experience than you offers an idea, are you receptive and open to hearing it? Are you open to hearing ideas from people outside your department or at a job level different from your own?

- If you are a manager, make an effort to hire people who are different from you. Resist the urge to hire people just like you.

- Lead by example. Don’t be afraid to speak up when other people act in a discriminatory way toward another person—if someone tells an offensive joke or engages in antigay behavior, for example.

- Try to use inclusive language that doesn’t assume everyone is heterosexual or married. Instead of using the words “husband” or “wife,” for example, use the word “partner.” Instead of telling a co-worker or employee to bring a “spouse” to an event, ask them to bring a “guest.”

- Treat other people the way you would like to be treated.

- Respect the fact that others may not always share your opinions.

- Show a genuine interest in other people. Ask questions about the other person’s life, culture, beliefs, and background. Look for common interests. Try to focus on what is familiar, and build slowly from there.
6 Tell the truth

News stories about dishonest leaders can make it seem as if truth and trust are disappearing from the worlds of business and politics. But that’s not true; most organizations are still run by honest leaders who act with integrity. We all have a responsibility to tell the truth, even when it’s unpopular. Tell the truth, and you’ll surround yourself with trusting—and trusted—co-workers and friends. Look back to how you responded to statement six on the quiz: Honesty is very important to you.

Trust builders

- Tell the truth on your resume. “Puffery” or lying about skills or qualifications on a resume or employment application is unethical. In many organizations, “stretching the truth” on these documents can be grounds for immediate termination.

- Admit when you are wrong. Don’t cover up a mistake. It’s easier to correct an error as soon as it’s discovered. Never place blame for your own actions on someone else.

- Don’t embellish your role at work or lead people to believe you have more responsibility or authority at work than you do. Never take credit for someone else’s work. If you are working on a project with a team, make sure everyone is given credit for the work completed. Don’t make it sound as though you did all the work on a project if the team was responsible.

- Commit to being truthful. Report honestly what’s true for you: your feelings, thoughts, and ideas. For example, if you deliver negative
news in a sensitive but honest manner, without putting a positive spin on it, others will learn that they can trust your words.

- Talk with your children about the importance of being honest. Reinforce the message that it is never OK to lie. Talk about the consequences of not telling the truth. People get suspended from school, fired from their jobs, or even sent to prison for serious breaches of trust.

- Explain to your children what plagiarism is: offering someone else’s work as your own, whether it’s a sentence or a paragraph taken from a book, magazine, the Internet, or from another student’s writing. Studies show that cheating is on the rise among high school and college students. It’s more important than ever to reinforce lessons about plagiarism.

7 Communicate openly and honestly

To build trust in groups or with individuals, you must be willing to communicate openly and freely and to share your ideas, thoughts, and concerns. When you withhold important information, for example, people question your motives and intentions. “Does he have a hidden agenda?” “What isn’t he telling me?” When you share information openly and honestly, people trust that your intentions are good. Look back to how you reacted to statement seven on the quiz: The people you work with can be counted on to do a good job. When you feel you can count on people, it means you can be open and honest about your thoughts and feelings.

Trust builders

- Use your team meeting to talk about a problem that’s been bothering people. Instead of talking about the issue in small groups, bring the team together to discuss it. It’s important to create an environment that allows team members to be courageous in communicating with each other and with you.
• Be careful with e-mail. Be cautious about how you communicate with associates, clients, and co-workers. Sometimes e-mail notes or memos can sound curt or too casual. Review your e-mail response before sending it to make sure the tone is what you intended. Remember that your correspondence can be forwarded and copied and that e-mail is saved on your company’s network or server. Even when you delete a message, it can still be retrieved.

• Provide feedback in a helpful and timely manner. A co-worker may ask you to review her work and provide honest feedback on it before she submits it to her manager. Provide the feedback in a timely manner. Give honest feedback, but think about how you state negative comments. You don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings.

• When you have a problem with someone’s behavior, provide constructive feedback in private rather than in front of others. Sometimes it seems easier to sulk or strike back than to talk, but the payoff from a successful conversation is likely to be much higher. If you absolutely can’t engage your co-worker in talk, the next best thing is to show no hard feelings, and to try to rebuild a strong working relationship through positive behavior yourself.

• When you are in a group discussion, don’t dominate the conversation. You want people to feel they can share information. Give everyone an opportunity to talk. Invite people into the conversation who may be reluctant to speak.

• When you’re talking about difficult issues, avoid words and behavior that can trigger a conflict or put people on the defensive. Avoid phrases like “You always . . . ,” “You never . . . ,” “It’s your fault,” and “Why didn’t you . . . .” Name-calling and negative labels create mistrust. Ignoring questions, acting like the expert, pointing a finger, lecturing, yelling, and humiliating others also create mistrust.

• Examine your thoughts and feelings so that you can be honest with the people in your personal life. For example, know what’s bothering you and what issues you want to discuss before you sit down with your partner to work out a disagreement.
• Be aware of the tone of your voice and your body language. Sometimes it’s not the words you use but how they are expressed that creates mistrust.

8 Be a good listener

Listening well is one of the best ways to show, give, and rebuild trust. How did you respond to statement eight on the quiz: “When working on a project, you like to involve others and seek their opinions.”? It’s about listening. How good a listener are you at work and at home?

Trust builders

• When you are talking with someone face to face, don’t answer the phone, check e-mail, or sort the papers on your desk.

• If someone wants to talk and you don’t have the time because you’re busy with something else, be honest and say that. Instead of listening and being distracted, it’s better to say, “I want to talk with you. But I don’t have the time right now to give this my full attention. Could we arrange a time to talk later?” Whenever possible, try to schedule a time to talk within the next 24 hours.

• Be a patient listener. Not everyone thinks or speaks as fast as you do. Avoid completing people’s sentences or putting words in their mouths.

• Keep an open mind when you are discussing a problem. The mindset “I’m right, you’re wrong” prevents many people from listening well. Refrain from responding until you’ve heard all that the other person has to say.

• When you’re having an important discussion with someone, if possible, go to a place that offers some privacy so you won’t be disturbed or distracted.

• Make time to talk one-on-one with your spouse or partner.
• Get down on the floor with small children to listen attentively to what they are saying.

• Don’t interrupt when your teenager is telling a story or providing an explanation. Ask questions and listen to your teenager’s answers.

9 Work at building trust when there is a problem

When there are setbacks or disappointments at work or in personal relationships, the only way to regain lost trust is to work at it. How did you respond to statement nine on the quiz? When there are problems, do you acknowledge what happened, deal with the consequences, and try to re-establish trust with the other person? Are you committed to trying to work things out with friends, relatives, and co-workers through setbacks and disappointments?

Trust builders

• Talk with the person who let you down. Talk about how you feel. If you feel angry, disappointed, betrayed, or taken advantage of, talk about it. This is the first and most important step in getting past a problem with someone.

• Don’t wait. The longer you wait to talk about a problem, the bigger the misunderstanding becomes.

• Make notes for yourself about issues you want to cover in the conversation. The notes can help you stay focused and not react angrily when you talk. It’s good to be honest about how you feel, but you don’t want to be so angry that it interferes with the discussion.

• Find small ways to trust the person again. When you see smaller commitments being met over time, it’s easier to trust that the larger ones will be met, too.

• Don’t be afraid to apologize.
• Take a “trust retreat.” If there are serious issues or concerns that you need to discuss as a couple, take a day or weekend off together to focus on rebuilding trust.

• Consider professional counseling to work through the tough issues of rebuilding trust.

• Be realistic and know that it can take a long time to rebuild trust.

10 Learn to recognize whom to trust

The unfortunate fact is that not everyone can be trusted. It can be harmful to trust too much, just as it can be harmful to not trust enough. It’s not a good idea to trust everyone you meet, or to share personal information about yourself too freely. It’s important to look at a person’s past performance and reputation before making a trust judgment. Learn the signs that someone may not be trustworthy. Use your instincts, good judgment, and interactions with people to determine whether or not someone can be trusted. Statement ten on the quiz is about trusting yourself, your judgment, and your ability to make good decisions. How did you respond?

Trust builders

• Watch for signs that someone may not be trustworthy. These include: when someone won’t look you in the eye, stumbles over her words, fidgets a lot, makes conflicting statements or outlandish promises, or purposely speaks so that you cannot hear. (Be aware that there may be other reasons for some of this behavior, such as cultural differences or disabilities.)

• Listen to your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable, take time to figure out why you feel this way. Check out the person’s story or background if possible.

• If something feels wrong, hold off trusting the person until you feel comfortable doing so. To trust others, we need to be able to trust ourselves. For example, if a stranger approaches you on the sidewalk...
looking as though he’s about to take something from his pocket, you would be wise not to let the man come closer. It’s safer to follow your instincts and keep your distance. Distrust and suspicion are healthy behaviors under certain circumstances.

- Choose the people you trust. Be alert to any stranger who tries to strike up a sudden friendship in person, online, or over the phone. The person may use your first name or engage in small talk as part of his pitch. Don’t automatically judge a stranger by his voice or good manners. To get on your good side, a con artist can sound just like a concerned neighbor or relative.

**Why it’s important to trust yourself**

How would you rate your sense of self-confidence? Do you trust your decisions, abilities, and instincts? Do you trust yourself to do what you say you’ll do? Willingness to trust others is often related to how much we trust ourselves. You can’t trust others if you know you cannot be trusted. You can’t trust others to tell the truth if you aren’t truthful.

- If you find it hard to trust others or yourself, think about why this is true. It might be that you experienced a serious betrayal in the past that’s affecting your ability to trust now. Maybe you lived through a traumatic divorce as a child, or were betrayed in a love relationship.

- Think about what qualities you exhibit that show other people you are someone who can be trusted. Look for those qualities in others.

- **Work on paying attention to your instincts.** Many times, people ignore their “gut feelings” that something is wrong, doesn’t feel right, or isn’t what it should be. While first impressions sometimes turn out later to be misreads, they still send valuable signals to be careful.

- **If you have trouble trusting yourself, consider talking with a professional.** If you have trouble trusting your decisions, or you would like to learn ways to work on your self-confidence, consider talking with your EAP, or a counselor or therapist.
Trust tips for managers

“When employees feel betrayed, they stop talking to their managers.”
—Stephen M. Dent, Partnering Intelligence News
In today’s work climate, it’s more important than ever to learn ways to build trust as a manager. In a recent survey by the consulting firm Development Dimensions International, 56 percent of workers surveyed in four different countries said that lack of trust was a problem at work. When you build a trusting environment around you, the benefits are enormous for both you and your employees. “Employees feel more freedom to express their creative ideas,” say the authors of *Trust & Betrayal in the Workplace*. People are more committed and they work harder. “They are more willing to take risks, admit mistakes, and learn from those mistakes.”

Here are ten ways to build trust on your team and with individual employees:

1 **Lead by example**

   • **Do what you say you’ll do.** A leader who advocates one thing but does another won’t be trusted by employees. For example, if you promise rewards and recognition for a job well done and fail to deliver, your reputation will be severely damaged.

   • **Be open and candid.** A leader’s job is to create an atmosphere of openness and candor and to deliver both good and bad news in a timely manner.

   • **Avoid creating a culture of blame.** When a work problem arises, lead the group toward correcting it and learning from it. When people are afraid of blame and harsh criticism, it engenders finger-pointing and mistrust within the group.

2 **Show that you care and are concerned about others**

   • **Spend time with people.** Show an appropriate level of interest in employees’ lives outside of work. “How was your daughter’s basketball game?” “How is your father doing?”
• **Support employees.** Offer to help someone who is having a difficult time with a project or customer. During difficult times or periods of overload, offer support to employees and show that you appreciate everyone’s hard work.

• **Show your appreciation.** Give public recognition at a meeting, send an e-mail to an employee to say “thank you,” or use bulletin boards to call attention to your team’s good efforts.

• **Be available.** Create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable enough to drop by your office to ask a question, make a request, or just say “hi.” Make sure people know you are available for coaching and advice.

• **Coach to develop your employees and show interest in their growth.**

### 3 Be honest

• **Tell the truth whenever possible and never tell an untruth.** Research shows that honest leaders inspire a greater sense of teamwork. Their employees have more positive work attitudes. The more honest and straightforward you are, the more employees will trust you and the organization. Employees appreciate a direct, “I don’t know” answer when it’s the truth. It’s better than giving a vague or not truthful answer.

• **Admit when you are wrong.**

• **Share what you know with employees.** Use staff meetings to share information that is given to management. Give frequent updates, especially during times of change, so that employees won’t feel you’re keeping information from them.
4 Avoid micromanaging

• Trust people to make good decisions. “People closest to the work know it best,” writes Robert W. Rogers in *The Psychological Contract of Trust*. If an employee attends a meeting where decisions have to be made, set parameters before the meeting and allow the employee to make decisions within those parameters. Then step back and trust.

• Make yourself available as a problem-solver or coach. Then try not to interfere in day-to-day activities or decisions unless an employee is new to the job and needs more direct supervision.

• Supervise without surveillance. Let employees do their jobs. Don’t pick on the small things that don’t affect performance. If you have given someone a project, for example, have the person do a project plan with set target dates. Agree on how often you will have status meetings. Then, unless you are seeing performance problems, don’t constantly ask for updates.

5 Encourage people with different skills to work together

• Offer opportunities for mentoring. Pair less-experienced employees with those who are more experienced.

• Provide work opportunities that might be a stretch for an employee but that you believe the person can accomplish with some guidance.
6 Whenever possible, involve employees in changes or decisions that will affect them

- Allow employees to have input into their jobs. Whenever possible, encourage employees to make suggestions about changes in what they do and how they do it, based on their direct and daily experience of what works, what doesn’t work, and what could work better. And be prepared to act on good suggestions.

- Encourage employees to ask questions and voice concerns.

- Make sure there is room for minority or unpopular views. Teams can easily slip into “group think,” especially when they are successful. Those who see flaws in the way the group does things may be politely ignored or even treated with hostility. The key to avoiding this fate is trust. Those in the majority must be able to trust that those who disagree do so honestly and with good intentions. Those in the minority must be able to trust that they can speak up without being punished or left out.

- Help people succeed. Let senior managers know when an employee has done well and give people the visibility they’ve earned.

- Play to people’s strengths. If someone is a great project manager, give her assignments in that area, especially if she enjoys it. The opportunity to shine will be appreciated and her trust for you will be reinforced.

7 Keep your promises

- Do what you say you will do. If you tell an employee you will give feedback on a project, give a time frame and make every effort to keep to the deadline. If you have to delay the feedback, tell the employee and give the reason. If you say that you are going to bring in information on a needed topic for a discussion at the next meeting, do it. If you say that you will be able to attend a meeting and take the minutes, do it.
• Don’t make promises you aren’t sure you can keep. For example, avoid promising a reward for everyone unless you know for certain that you’ll be able to deliver. One broken promise—even a small one—can seriously damage trust and credibility.

• Communicate the importance of people keeping their promises.

• Give second chances. It’s important that you take the lead as the manager in re-establishing trust.

• Re-evaluate often. Look at your relationships with your employees and decide what you’re going to work on. Keep in mind that relationships evolve.

8 Encourage open communication

• Create an open-door work environment that encourages your direct reports to come to you when they need to. This improves communication and helps keep you in the loop.

• At the same time, don’t discuss employees with their co-workers. If someone has a complaint about a team member, listen respectfully and then end the conversation. Whether or not you take action is not usually appropriately discussed with the person’s co-workers.

• Encourage people to ask questions and offer suggestions. Then respond. Make it a point to ask direct questions to employees who may be reluctant to speak up in meetings. You might say, “You’ve been quiet about this issue. What are your thoughts on this?”

• Encourage employees to say what they think and to share ideas. Be open to ideas and to what people have to say. Remember to say, “That’s a great idea.” “How can we build on that idea?” If you don’t feel an employee’s idea is helpful, give concrete feedback on why it’s not. For example, let the employee know you appreciate his efforts, then give sound business reasons why the idea may not work. Publicize creative ideas in newsletters and department memos. Give credit where credit is due.
• **Share information.** Employees will trust you as the best source of information if they hear from you about what’s going on at the company rather than relying on the rumor mill. When dealing with sensitive subjects, always check with upper management about what messages to communicate to employees. Then be as honest as you can be.

9 **Treat everyone equally and with respect**

• **Avoid favoritism.** “Don’t turn to the same person for help over and over again,” suggests Gregory P. Smith, in *Here Today Here Tomorrow: Transforming Your Workforce from High-Turnover to High-Retention.* “Train and develop all your employees so everyone has equal opportunity to prove themselves and the workload is shared equally.” Avoid socializing repeatedly with only certain employees. It’s really manageable to maintain professional distance from the group while still being open and available.

• **Create a working environment that’s free of discrimination and harassment.** Discrimination and harassment seriously undermine trust. Make it clear that the following will not be tolerated: hostile, humiliating, or demeaning remarks; ridicule or persistent teasing; derogatory words; offensive jokes; explosive outbursts; intimidation; unwelcome sexual or romantic advances; spoken comments, written comments, or conduct that is meant to annoy, disturb, or frighten another person. If someone raises an issue about one of these problems, treat it as a serious matter.
10 Find out what’s wrong and commit to changing the things you can change

• Commit to being open, honest, and respectful with staff. Maintain a positive attitude and help your staff take responsibility for their own attitudes and behavior. Let employees know that conduct that hurts other team members will not be tolerated.

• To promote trust, find out what bothers people. Have discussions with employees about what’s right—and wrong—on your team or within the organization. What resentments or reservations do people have? Are there sources of disappointment or frustration that you could address or do something about? If employees complain, take the issue seriously. Employees respect managers who respond to their needs and work to resolve problems.

• Commit to changing the things you can change. Sometimes employees are looking for more honest communication from upper management and leaders at the company. If possible, find ways for leaders at the organization to be more accessible—through town meetings, online chats, or other opportunities for discussion with employees.
We’d like to hear any suggestions or ideas you have on this topic. Please write to us at publications@ceridian.com. Be sure to include the title of the booklet in your message.

Thank you.