

There have been a number of surveys and much anecdotal information to suggest that trust is on the decline – trust in big organisations, trust in Governments and trust in the workplace. An article in Harvard Business Review in September 2006 (“The Decision to Trust” by Robert F Hurley) opened with the line “Roughly half of all managers don’t trust their leaders”. A clear message!

This article defined trust as “confident reliance on someone when you are in a position of vulnerability”.

Why is trust so important?

In 2001 the University of Sydney (aciirt) with support from the Business Council of Australia carried out research into excellent workplaces in Australia. The paper is titled “Simply the Best Workplaces in Australia” [I accessed it at <http://www.aciirt.com/research/default.htm> and have included the major findings in a paper I have titled “Employer of Choice”]. The following quote has been taken from the University of Sydney paper:

“In all our excellent workplaces the atmosphere of mutual trust and respect was overwhelming. We became convinced that central to every excellent workplace is the understanding that to produce quality work in Australia, one must have quality working relationships. What mattered most was the quality of the working relationships, particularly with respect to key dimensions such as trust, respect, self-worth and recognition. The fundamental relationships built on that magic word – trust – couldn’t be over-estimated”.

So in answer to the question, “why is trust so important?” I would state that, from my experience, trust is **the** foundation of every productive/successful relationship and in any effective communication. You simply won’t develop a culture of accountability/responsibility without it! Trust is the filter through which all relationships and communication must pass. If trust is low then relationships and communication run the very high risk of being distorted by the ‘noise’/interference that higher levels of distrust will cause. Without, atleast a minimum level of, mutual confidence and trust how can one effectively work or communicate with another person?

A key message for all leaders and managers is that they need to be consistently working on their trust ‘bank account if they want to get the most out of the people they have and to attract and retain the people they want. However how does one ‘tangibilise’ such a nebulous concept as trust? One of the important attributes of leadership is the ability to turn intangible concepts into tangible outcomes, and trust is no exception. How do you, as a leader, turn this important but intangible concept called trust into a tangible outcome?

I am aware of two excellent models, while being highly consistent in their philosophies, do approach this issue from two different perspectives.

The first model is one I have been working with for some time now and sees trust as being composed of four key elements:

Openness: *“I give and ask for feedback freely”*

- Being non-secretive
- Volunteering information
- Keeping people informed – no surprises
- Sharing your feelings, good and bad
- Asking for feedback
- Adequate access to each other

Congruence: *“I’ll do what I say I’ll do”*

- Being direct with people
- Saying no when you mean no
- Clarifying expectations of others
- Practicing what you preach
- Facing up to conflict
- Honesty

Reliability: *“What I say is what I mean”*

- Keeping promises
- Being dependable
- Maintaining confidences
- Being punctual
- Following through on detail
- Accepting responsibility
- Being competent in your role

Acceptance: *“Who you are is OK with me”*

- Being non-judgemental
- Being non-critical of people’s differences
- Not talking down to people (including use of jargon)
- Mutual respect
- Giving others permission to make mistakes
- Listening

As a leader or manager you need to look for opportunities to improve your performance in each of these areas. Some will be harder for you than others – won't come naturally – based on your personality profile and other factors, but you can deliver on all these areas with conscious effort. You also need to keep in mind it is perception of these issues that is most important in establishing trust.

Also assess your organisation on these items – how well does your firm perform/perceived to perform on these issues? Attempt to understand people's behaviour in terms of this trust model and then look for ways of influencing improvement.

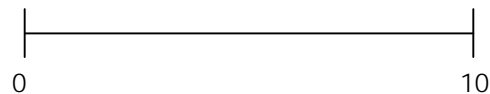
The second model is one outlined in the September 2006 Harvard Business Review ["The Decision to Trust" by Robert F Hurley]. The key points from this article are:

- o Trust is a decision based on factors that can be identified, analysed and influenced.
- o Trust can be predicted by reference to the model developed by the author. This model is outlined below.

There are ten factors affecting the decision to trust:

Decision-maker Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Risk tolerance. o How personally well-adjusted the person is. o Relative power the person has.
Situational Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Security. o Similarities between people. o Alignment of interests. o Level of benevolent concern. o Capability. o Predictability and integrity. o Communication.

The higher the rating on each of the factors outlined the higher the likelihood that the person will make the decision to trust. The lower the rating on each factor the higher Conversely, the level of distrust.



The essential part of this model is understanding where people you work with sit on each of these factors – which factors may need to improved? Once you have determined this then the author provides the following 'advice table' for managing trust.

If this factor is low...	then you should:
<i>Risk tolerance</i>	Spend more time explaining options and risks. Evaluate processes and results separately; recognise excellent work regardless of outcome. Offer some sort of safety net.
<i>Level of adjustment</i>	Be patient; it simply takes longer to build trust with some individuals. Try to enhance confidence by recognizing achievements and by correcting failures through coaching rather than harsh discipline.
<i>Relative power</i>	Provide choices when possible; avoid being coercive. Communicate that leadership decisions aren't made arbitrarily by explaining how they serve organisational interests.



If this factor is low...	then you should:
<i>Security</i>	Find ways to temper risk inherent in the situation. Expect to invest time in raising comfort levels.
<i>Number of similarities</i>	Use the word "we" more and the word "I" less. Emphasise what you have in common (values, memberships and so on).
<i>Alignment of interests</i>	Be clear yourself about whose interests you are serving. Take others' interests into account and find a way to accommodate them where possible. Focus on the overarching strategy, vision and goals. Shape a culture that reinforces doing the right thing for the enterprise.
<i>Benevolent concern</i>	Take actions that demonstrate a genuine concern for others. Serve others' interests even if, on occasion, you bear some loss (and find a tasteful way to show that – by your choice – they gained more than you did). Engage in fair process.
<i>Capability</i>	Find ways to demonstrate competence in carrying out the task at hand. Acknowledge areas of incompetence and compensate by sharing or delegating responsibility.
<i>Predictability and integrity</i>	Under-promise and over-deliver. If you can't fulfill your promises, explain why – honestly. Describe the values that drive your behaviour so that others see consistency rather than randomness.
<i>Level of Communication</i>	Increase the frequency and candor of your communications. Build a relationship beyond the constraints of your respective roles – for example, by going out to lunch or playing golf.

Transparency, from my experience, is probably the key driver in building a relationship of trust. Not only because the other person sees what is going on (and therefore builds trust in what you are doing) but also because you, realising that you need to be transparent in what you do, will, hopefully, think more about what you are doing and how you are doing it. The age-old test/question still holds true: If what I am doing today was to be published, in detail, on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper would I still do it or do it this way?

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