

SUPERVISOR'S TOOLKIT

Building a Culture of Trust



University
of Windsor

Department of
Human Resources

Trust is essential to boosting employee engagement and motivation. When trust is present in the work environment, employees feel psychologically safer, are proud of where they work and are more willing to go above and beyond to achieve organizational goals (Achievers.com).

Supervisors play a key role in building a culture of trust within their teams. Supervisors can create the conditions in the work environment for employees to feel a sense of belonging, be more connected to their teams and where individuals feel comfortable asking questions, sharing ideas, and expressing their thoughts (Achievers.com).

Employees may not say to their supervisor “I don’t trust you” but the following actions/behaviours can indicate the absence of trust (SHRM.org):

- Withholding information and using selective communication
- Persistently questioning goals, decisions, and actions
- Protecting self-interest at the expense of the team/organization
- Exhibiting low or diminishing commitment and engagement

This document highlights 5 strategies supervisors can use to foster a culture of trust within their teams.

1. Communicate regularly, listen actively, and demonstrate positive body language

Building a reputation for listening and caring about what others are saying builds trust. Regularly engage in communication with your team members (individually and as a group). Ask questions and encourage employees to elaborate on their ideas to ensure you truly understand their perspectives.

Be genuine and authentic when communicating. Take the time to clearly communicate expectations and build a shared understanding of responsibilities.

Pay attention to nonverbal communication. Making eye contact and nodding when a team member speaks sends the message that you care about what they are saying. Positive body language paired with skills such as empathy, patience and problem solving encourages employees to approach you to share their thoughts. The more comfortable individuals feel around you, the more likely they are to trust you as their supervisor.

2. Solicit and act on feedback

Solicit employee feedback on a regular basis using a variety of strategies such as employee check-ins, staff meetings, and surveys. Demonstrate that you welcome both positive and negative feedback, share results and emerging actions with your team promptly.

Follow through with actions identified and promises made. Mistrust arises when supervisors continuously do not follow through on their promises. If you are not able to meet a promised action, take the time to discuss this with your team.

3. Empower your team and show appreciation every day

Take the first step to show employees that you trust them. Look for opportunities to delegate tasks and provide your team members with as much autonomy as possible. Be clear about expectations, how performance will be measured and encourage employees to reach out to you should they need guidance. Micromanaging is typically viewed by employees as “you don’t trust me”.

Be supportive and take the time to recognize their efforts and contributions in real time. Recognition not only helps to build trust, but it also makes employees feel valued and appreciated; it motivates them to make a difference every day.

4. Enhance knowledge and skills through coaching

Showing support and understanding even when mistakes are made, or expectations are not met goes a long way in building trust. Look for opportunities to help employees develop new skills and address any emerging performance issues.

Coaching is an effective skill development technique which promotes independent thinking, fosters positive communication, encourages open and constructive feedback, and inspires employees to succeed.

5. Be consistent, honest, and transparent

Being consistent in action and behaviour (i.e., mood, response) builds trust over time. Practice “what you preach” every day so your team knows what to expect. Consistency typically makes individuals feel more confident and comfortable about bringing forward ideas/concerns. It reduces feelings of “walking on eggshells” that typically emerge when employees are not sure how you may react to an incident, comment, etc.

Be honest and transparent when sharing information. Share as much information as you can with employees to minimize the rumor mill. Studies suggest that when there is a void of information, individuals will fill the gap with negative/unproductive information.

Do your actions promote a culture of trust?

Trust must be earned. Ask yourself the following questions to create an awareness of your daily practices that encourage a culture of trust in the workplace.

(Source: www.greatplacetowork.com)

- Am I listening to my employees and seeking their ideas, suggestions, and opinions?
- Am I open to ideas from employees and including those ideas in the decision-making process?
- Am I setting and communicating consistent expectations regarding team and individual performance objectives?
- Do I tell employees the truth and follow through by doing what I say I am going to do, even when it is difficult?
- Am I treating everyone with the same dignity and respect that I expect and would like to receive without revealing bias, judgment, or personal favoritism?
- Are my career goals or personal agenda interfering with my team's performance and commitment to my employees' success?
- Do I demonstrate concern and caring for each employee, workgroup, and department?
- Do I set a good example and conduct myself in a manner consistent with the organization's mission, vision, and values?

Resources consulted:

- Achievers. 9 Tips for Building Trust in the Workplace (September 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.achievers.com>
- BC Public Service. My Performance Guide to Building Workplace Trust. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca>
- Great Place to Work. Managers: Are You Building a Culture of Trust? (July 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.greatplacetowork.com>
- Great Place to Work. The Benefits of Coaching in the Workplace (October 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.greatplacetowork.ca>
- Harvard Business Review. Proven Ways to Earn Your Employees' Trust (June 2014). Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org>
- Mindtools. Building Trust Inside Your Team. Retrieved from: <https://www.mindtools.com>
- Society for Human Resources Management. Building Trust as a Manager (February 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.shrm.org>



Putting the COVID-19 Employee Pulse Check Survey into Action

This initiative has been designed to address the areas of focus and key actions emerging from the survey