

How to Build Trust In Your Team

Your confidence that your team will deliver on a project. The mutual respect between team members. And an individual's willingness to share their ideas – and problems – with the group. These are all essential to effective teamwork, and they're all built on trust.

But the coronavirus pandemic is changing the way teams work, and testing the trust of managers and employees. Let's look at ways to maintain and develop team trust during the 'new normal.'

The importance of trust

When people feel trusted, they do their best work. Research from Harvard Business Review found that employees in a trusting environment feel 76 percent more engaged than those in low-trust workplaces. What's more, they enjoy:

74% less stress

106% more energy at work

50% higher productivity

40% less burnout

29% more satisfaction with their lives (outside of work) ^[1]

Seven steps to build trust

1. Lead by example

Do what you say you'll do. It's a simple but powerful way to build trust in your team. When people see that you make good on your promises, they'll feel compelled to do the same.

That could be small stuff like being on time for a video call right through to involving your team on big decisions on project management.

What's more, when you place your confidence in your colleagues to do their job, your team members will feel more comfortable tapping into the strengths of their group.

Top tip:

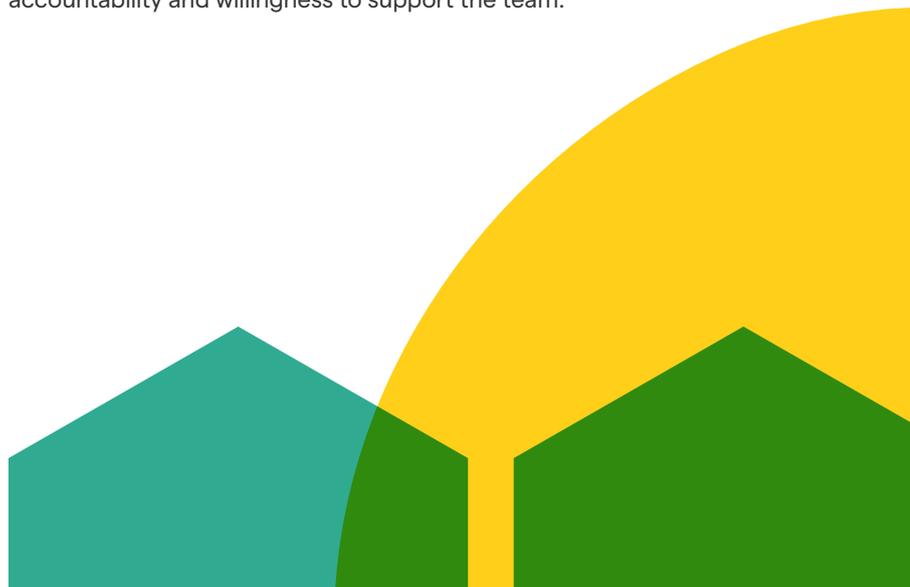
If you're leading a remote team for the first time, resist that temptation to constantly 'check-in.' Research shows that autonomy motivates individuals and lifts team trust levels – encouraging collaboration and innovation. ^[2] It also frees up your time!

2. Communicate openly

You don't want to micromanage, but it's still important to regularly catch up with your team. The more you talk openly as a group, the more comfortable team members will feel giving updates, discussing obstacles and clearing the way together.

Top tip:

At project updates, increase trust levels by involving your team members in goal setting. And agree on individuals' next steps to boost personal accountability and willingness to support the team.



3. Be transparent

Right now, everything's new – whether you've been in your role for decades or days. So, it's a good idea to define or reiterate your team's vision, and clarify each person's responsibilities.

This is also a period when your team will be looking to you for updates such as returning to the office, flexible working initiatives and measures for those with care responsibilities. So, share important information as soon as you can. And explain why decisions are being made the way they are.

Top tip:

Invite your team to participate in as many decisions as possible. By allowing them to ask questions and share their ideas, you'll show you value their input.

4. Get to know each other

Who are the people behind the job title? What's their favourite band, most embarrassing moment and proudest achievement? When people feel comfortable opening up about themselves, team trust levels soar.

In lockdown, bowling may be a no go, but activities like a virtual quiz can help people connect. You can share something personal about yourself, and ask team members to do the same.

There are always new things that old team members can learn about each other, too. So, schedule regular, informal catch-ups – face-to-face or online. And instant messaging apps can help to build team bonds, too, if your organization uses them.

Top tip:

Encourage individuals to talk to colleagues outside your team. A (virtual) coffee will help people connect, and uncover skillsets that may help with future collaboration.

5. Don't play the blame game

We're human and we all make errors from time to time. If a team member makes a mistake, don't single them out for blame. That'll only deplete the trust levels you've all worked hard so hard to build up.

When mishaps do happen, get the whole team to brainstorm positive solutions or think about ways to avoid making the same mistakes.

Top tip: To help, you can open up about a mistake you've made in the past. You'll show you're human, that it's okay to fail, and encourage people to speak up and address any issues before they become problems. Admitting mistakes shows your honesty – a value your team will emulate.



6. Tackle trust issues

If distrust has become ingrained in your team, tackle the issue head on. Find out where the mistrust comes from, and work together to create a strategy to heal and rebuild.

Top tip:

Send round an anonymous questionnaire. Individuals may feel more comfortable opening up privately about what they think the triggers are. Once you've looked over the results, talk them through together.

7. Stand up for your team

Nothing builds trust like knowing your boss has your back. So, if a client pushes an unreasonable deadline on a team member, or if another faces unjust criticism; stand up for them!

On the flip side, praise your team's successes at every opportunity. Our brains are hardwired for – and to get a boost from – praise and recognition.^[3] And shoutouts are even more important when the work of remote teams goes on behind the scenes. Something as simple as a thumbs-up emoji on a messaging app can spark meaningful recognition between peers.

Top tip:

Make use of that newsletter or take 10 minutes at the company meeting to praise achievements.

Sources

Seven steps based on Mind Tools Building Trust and Building Trust Inside Your Team.

[1] Paul J. Zak, 'The Neuroscience of Trust' (2017). Available at: <https://hbr.org/2017/01/the-neuroscience-of-trust> (accessed 9 June 2020).

[2] Dennis Reina, PhD Michelle Reina, PhD David Hudnut, MIA, 'Why Trust Is Critical to Team Success' (2017). Available at: <https://www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/why-trust-is-critical-team-success-research-report.pdf> (accessed 9 June 2020).

[3] 'Turbocharging Employee Engagement: The Power of Recognition from Managers. Part 2 – The Circle of Recognition' (2011). Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/business-and-management/collection-items/suppressed-by-publisher/willis-towers-watson/turbocharging-employee-engagement-the-power-of-recognition-from-managers-part-2-the-circle-of-recognition> (accessed 16 April 2020).