

4 Approaches To Building Employee Trustworthiness

Building trust in the organization is not simple

By Yoram Solomon, Ph.D., Innovation Culture Institute™ LLC

Building trust in your organization greatly benefits the employees, the culture, and the organization's performance, which are all tightly related. Building trust is undoubtedly important for a company, and increasing the level of trust could have a transformative effect.

Building trust would be easy only if two conditions are met. First, that trust would be **absolute**. In other words, that there is an absolute, universal set of behaviors that, if followed, would build trust for *everyone*. Second, that all it took to change behavior would be **to know** what behavior you wanted to change and what new behavior you would like to adopt instead.

Unfortunately, neither condition is true. Trust is neither absolute nor universal. While some behaviors (such as telling the truth) are universal, others are not. In fact,



the same behavior that would cause one person to *trust* you could cause another person to *distrust* you—for example, risk-takers trust other risk-takers, but those who avoid risk will not trust risk-takers because they believe they are irresponsible and reckless.

Furthermore, it is not enough to *know* what behavior you want to change. *Knowledge* is not enough. Behaviors are very hard to change. One study found that even if you know your goal, your probability of achieving it is only 10%. Even if you committed, set a timeline, and made a plan to achieve that goal, your probability is still limited to 50%.

You must first identify specific, critical relationships and specific behaviors that you must change in them. Those could be different in different relationships. Then, you must form new *habits* that will change your behaviors and build your trustworthiness, and thus the trust other people have in you. Even then, it takes time and many repetitions of the new behavior before it becomes natural. It won't happen overnight.

Sounds complicated?

It's achievable but requires a different approach than what you have heard about trust. If you want your efforts to be effective, that is.

The process of increasing your trustworthiness has the following steps:

- Identifying a *critical relationship* in which another employee (could be a coworker, a boss, or someone who reports to you) depends on you. If they don't trust you, they will not rely on you.
- Identifying your specific *behavior* that holds you back from being trusted by that person. Remember that trust is *relative*. That behavior might not cause someone else to distrust you, but it does cause the other person in *this* critical relationship not to trust you. The reason for focusing on *bad* behavior is because people respond much stronger (and negatively) to bad behavior than they do (positively) to

positive behavior. Research proved that many times.

- Creating a S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable but not too easy, relevant and impactful, and time-bound) plan that will allow you to form new behaviors that would negate the current ones. The plan should consider the process of forming new habits.
- Execute until the new habit becomes automatic and doesn't require thinking and effort anymore.

Sounds easy? Well, it's not. There are too many places where you can make mistakes. You may identify a relationship that is not critical, or the dependency of the other person in you is not important enough. You may identify the wrong behavior to work on and spend time and effort trying to fix a behavior that is not holding you back from being more trusted in that relationship while not working on the behavior that does. Your plan might be too easy, too hard, not impactful enough, or otherwise easy to drop before forming new habits. Finally, according to that study, even if you do everything right, you still only have a 50% probability of success.

How can you increase your odds?

The rest of this article will describe four approaches to building employee trustworthiness.

Self-Study

You could learn by reading books, taking online courses, or otherwise individually.

Pros:

- You can do it at a convenient place and time.
- You can do it at your own pace.
- It is typically the cheapest alternative on a per-person basis.

Cons:

- Lacking deep knowledge and experience, you are more likely to make mistakes, such as identifying the wrong relationship or the wrong behavior to focus on.
- Your retention will be the lowest, and so will the probability of forming new habits, given that nobody is holding you accountable.

Workshops

You could attend an open enrollment or company-sponsored workshops to help create the right plan.

Pros:

- Workshops typically address multiple employees in the company in parallel.
- You have an opportunity to interact with others and learn from their challenges.
- You can also ask others or the facilitator to review your plan.
- Peer pressure can provide motivation.



Cons:

- You are still prone to making mistakes in identifying the right relationship and the behavior holding you back from being more trusted.
- You still lack an accountability partner, threatening the retention of what you learned.

External Coach

You could either hire an external coach or have the company

hire one to take you through the process.

Pros:

- A coach is more experienced with the process and human nature.
- A coach could be your accountability partner throughout the execution phase and increase your probability of forming a new habit from 50% to 95%.

Cons:

- The coach may not be familiar with the company's people, dynamics, and culture.
- You may not trust the coach due to being external to the company and knowing them for a very short time.
- They can be costly, especially if coaching multiple people in the company.

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Internal HR Professional

The ultimate solution might be right under your nose—your human resources professional.

Pros:

- They are already trained and experienced in human behavior in the organizational setting, and addressing these human resources issue (trust) fits their job description.
- They are internal to the company and are very familiar with the people, the internal dynamics, and the corporate culture and goals.
- Having worked with the employees they are helping, they are more trusted by those employees than an external coach would.



- They are already on the company's payroll.

The conclusion is straightforward: building trust in the organization is not simple. It should be addressed one relationship at a time, identifying behaviors that

hold one party to that relationship from being more trusted by the other party. It should also be treated by forming new habits that change behaviors, build trust, and transform the organization. The HR Professional is ideally positioned to help do that.

Self-Study	Workshop	External Coach	Internal HR
Learn yourself through reading books and taking online courses	Bring an external facilitator to conduct a company or team-wide half-or full-day workshop	Bring coaches to work individually with multiple employees in the company	Train, and then use the internal HR professionals to coach individuals in the company
Learn at your own pace	Could be challenging to bring everyone at the same time	Be coached at your own pace	Be coached at your own pace
Low retention. Must be highly motivated to achieve results	Peer pressure and group challenges could provide motivation	High retention due to the individual nature of coaching	High retention due to the individual nature of coaching
Must appoint an accountability partner or the probability of success would be low	Must appoint accountability partners or the probability of success would be low	The coach could serve as the accountability partner	The HR professional would serve as the accountability partner

Self-Study	Workshop	External Coach	Internal HR
Inexperienced in identifying symptoms of trust (or lack thereof)	While the facilitator is experienced, the individuals are inexperienced in identifying symptoms of trust (or lack thereof) on their own	Experienced in identifying symptoms of trust (or lack thereof), but unfamiliar enough with the company to observe their existence	Experienced in identifying symptoms of trust (or lack thereof) and familiar enough with the company to observe their existence
Easy to identify the wrong relationship and the wrong behavior to focus on due to a lack of experience and training	Guided by the facilitator to some degree. Still could make mistakes due to lack of individual experience and training	Higher probability of identifying the right relationships and behaviors due to the coach's experience and training	Higher probability of identifying the right relationships and behaviors due to the HR professional's experience and training
Somewhat limited, self-focused view of the organization, although some familiarity with the dynamics, culture, and personalities	Somewhat limited, self-focused view of the organization, although some familiarity with the dynamics, culture, and personalities	Very limited view of the organization, dynamics, culture, and personalities due to the "outsider" nature of the external coach	In-depth view of the organization, dynamics, culture, and personalities due to the "insider" nature of the HR professional
Moderate cost when every participant purchases books and/or enrolls in online courses	Relatively low cost of the workshop and associated materials, especially for a large group	High cost of external coaches required for all employees in the company independently	Relatively low cost of training the HR professional. After that, they are already paid as employees of the company



Yoram Solomon, Ph.D., MBA, LLB, is the author of *The Book of Trust*®, host of The Trust Show podcast, founder of the Innovation Culture Institute™ LLC, and facilitator of the Trust Habits™ workshop.



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