

A Roadmap for Trust: Enhancing Employee Engagement

For a workplace team to be productive, cohesive, and ultimately successful, trust in one another is essential. When team members know they can count on each other, and understand that all contributions are welcomed and valued, it creates an environment in which morale increases, productivity sees an upswing and the product becomes exceptional in its quality.

The Importance of Trust

When team members feel they're working in tandem toward common goals and objectives, fears of backbiting and undermining take a back seat to creativity. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to work in an environment of mistrust, in which ideas are usurped, credit is stolen, and team members talk about each other in derogatory terms. Concurrently, when team members feel confident that others value their input, support their ideas and willingly share credit, trust grows naturally.

Having a feeling of trust between colleagues helps strengthen an organization overall. It can help reduce turnover, improve morale, decrease workplace anxiety and ultimately improve the products and services the company is able to offer. This translates to increased earnings, corporate stability and a reputation as a great place to work. All of these factors can positively assist in recruiting and retention efforts.

When Teams Don't Trust

Have you ever managed people who didn't trust one another? If you have, then you'll know how challenging and draining this can be. Trust is a concept we often find hard to describe. It's sticky, intangible and difficult to pinpoint but we know when trust is absent. As Warren Buffet once put it "Trust is like the air we breathe – when it's present, nobody really notices; when it's absent, everybody notices." And when it's missing from a workforce, a culture can unravel.

A team without trust isn't really a team: it's just a group of individuals, working together, often making disappointing progress. They may not share information, they might battle over rights and responsibilities, and they may not cooperate with one another. It doesn't matter how capable or talented your people are, they may never reach their full potential if trust isn't present. So how can you, as a leader, help your team to build the trust that it needs to flourish?

Below, we'll dive deeper into why trust in the workplace matters, as well as nine steps to help you build trust among your employees.



Why Trust Really Matters

- Trust is good for morale and motivation
- Trust builds teamwork and collaboration
- Trust produces increased speed, improved efficiency and hence, decreases costs
- Trust empowers ethical decision-making
- Trust increases loyalty and the willingness to stay with a company
- Trust decreases stress levels and hostility in the work environment
- Trust overcomes resistance to change
- Trust breaks down corporate silos and isolating behaviors
- Trust is a gateway to persuasion, sharing and developing ideas
- Trust is a key ingredient to coaching and improving employee performance
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Trust is an essential element in team productivity. Without it, you're unlikely to get anything meaningful done. But with it, teams can accomplish everything they set out to do... and more.

As a leader, it's important that you set an example. Show your team members how critical trust is to you by demonstrating your trust in them, as well as in your colleagues.

As a Leader, Being Trustworthy is About:

- Deserving confidence
- Doing what you say you will do (being dependable)
- Being approachable and friendly (people trust leaders they like)
- Showing support for your team members, even when they make mistakes
- Balancing the need for results with being considerate of others and their feelings
- Working hard to win over people by being respectful of their ideas and perspectives
- Ensuring that your words and actions match.
Not just some of the time—all the time

9 Steps to Building Trust Among Your Employees

Building trust in the workplace is must-have, not a nice-to-have. If you focus on it, you can create an employee experience that aligns well with the priorities and motivations of your workforce – one that encourages them to stay at your organization and perform their very best work.

Here are 9 steps you can take to build high levels of trust in your organization.



1. Measure Employee Engagement

Measuring employee engagement helps you gain insight into employee opinions about organizational successes and opportunities for improvement. Leveraging key drivers of engagement allows you to simplify your focus. Employee engagement surveys look at how connected employees are to their work, to their team and to their organization.



There are many benefits to measuring employee engagement with a survey, here are just a few:

- Engagement surveys give every employee an opportunity to voice their views and concerns
- Surveys that ask clear and direct questions make it easier to measure employee opinions on those issues
- Human Resource and leadership teams can then use the survey feedback to develop a roadmap to increase employee engagement and measure progress by comparing survey results over time
- Employee engagement surveys are also an important step toward understanding your culture and whether it needs to be changed

2. Communicate Your Survey Results

You've surveyed your employees and the results are in. Now what?

The first step after an employee engagement survey is communicating the results to your employees. This is one of the most important steps of the survey process.

Communicate well and you can inspire participation and buy-in for your engagement initiatives. Communicate poorly and you may lose the trust of your employees, and even cause disengagement. With such high stakes, it's important to plan your communication carefully.

Here are 6 Communication Tips for Sharing Employee Engagement Survey Results:

- Be open
- Be clear
- Respect employees' responses
- Don't debate who's right and who's wrong
- Don't play "who said what"
- Be objective

Communication can make or break your engagement efforts. Keep everyone on board and demonstrate your ongoing commitment to your employees by communicating survey results clearly, honestly, and in a timely manner.

Whether it's an employee engagement survey, a pulse survey, or anything in between, follow these tips to make the results-sharing conversation easier and more effective at every level.

3. Get Aligned

C-level executives, managers and HR professionals spend a lot of time (and money) discussing and executing initiatives to foster and increase engagement, motivation and performance within their teams and the company overall. Once in a while, the term “alignment” comes up as well, is deemed very important and then left to its own devices. And we often wonder why.

Misalignment between employee performance and business objectives can slow down a company’s growth – no matter how engaged the employees are. Getting aligned is easier said than done as you can’t solve this issue by training, installing a new tool or implementing a new process but it’s super important for moving you towards your organizational goals.

Here are 3 ways to make sure employees are aligned with your company goals, and that their engagement is getting you where you want to be:

Make Sure Employees are Connected to the Bigger Picture

Managers are often held responsible for creating a link between the employee’s day-to-day responsibilities and the organization’s goals and conveying that link to each employee. This helps them understand how they’re contributing towards those business goals.

Create Goals and Measure Employee Progress

You are no doubt measuring key metrics (KPIs) at every organizational level. But if you seem to be getting no closer to your business goals toward the middle of the quarter, check in on each employee’s individual goals and progress.

Implement 360° Reviews

Another way to tell if employees are supporting your business goals is with 360° reviews. Getting feedback from a manager is great – but it’s narrow information. It won’t give you the big picture of how the employee is impacting the organization or supporting your business goals. Gathering feedback from peers, stakeholders, and other managers creates a more holistic picture of performance.



4. Take Action

Too often, the results of the survey come in, but it's unclear who is responsible for them and how they will be acted on. As a result, nothing happens and employee engagement remains stagnant or, even worse, declines.

There's little reason to survey at all if you don't act on the results.

That's where an employee engagement action plan comes in.

An employee engagement action plan helps you:

- Identify and discuss key engagement drivers
- Commit to the changes that will have the most impact
- Hold everyone accountable for the results of your employee engagement initiatives

Use the following framework to develop an effective employee engagement action plan:

- Review your employee engagement survey results
- Choose your focus area
- Brainstorm solutions
- Commit to action
- Communicate progress

5. Launch an Employee Focus Group

In an employee focus group, employees take part in a guided discussion on a particular topic. Focus groups are often used as a tool to improve employee engagement. Many organizations use focus groups to leverage employee survey results. In this case, the moderator helps the group examine and discuss survey trends and findings. They probe the group on critical issues and encourage employees to develop solutions.

Employee focus groups can bring numerous advantages to companies looking to dive deeper into their culture and engagement levels. Here are a couple of benefits:

- Employee focus groups are an easy and efficient way to uncover workplace ideas.
- Your employee surveys can help you uncover trends, strengths, and weaknesses in your organization. But surveys usually don't point to tangible action steps for improvement.
- Focus groups help build upon the conversation started in an employee survey.
- Focus groups serve as an extra opportunity to communicate that you value employee feedback and are committed to positive change.

6. Create an Effective Leadership Development Program

Creating and implementing a strong leadership development program for your organization is essential. Especially in the current climate, team members of an organization need strong leaders to turn to for guidance and support.

A good leadership development program not only increases the current leadership competency but provides your employees the opportunity to develop the necessary skills they need in order to move up within your organization.

Leadership development is a practice that aims to expand the capacity for individuals to perform in leadership roles within organizations. Leadership in this sense refers to the roles that facilitate the execution of the organization's strategy, done so through building alignment, gaining mindshare, and developing the capabilities of others.

Leadership development does not apply strictly to formal leadership roles. It can also help informal leadership roles that carry little official authority, such as a member of a team who influences team engagement and direction, or a lateral peer who listens and negotiates through influence.

While you should adapt your approaches according to leader level, there are 5 key critical skills that should permeate all aspects of your various leadership development programs. These include:

- Coaching
- Accountability
- Change Management
- Influence and Negotiation
- Communication

7. Get a Pulse on How Your Employees Feel

Employee pulse surveys are a relatively recent phenomenon, gaining interest from companies both big and small, across a wide range of industries in many countries in the last five years or so. There's a reason for this healthy uptake; pulse surveys are highly effective in helping steer and improve the course of your organization.

An employee pulse survey is a fast and frequent survey system, that does away with complex questions and is intentionally designed to be done weekly, or every few weeks. They give a quick insight into the health of a company, hence the name 'pulse'.

There are many known benefits of employee pulse surveys, mostly found in employee engagement, improved company culture, and the like.

The benefits include:

- Real-time measurement of employee engagement and satisfaction
- Improved employee engagement
- Increased positive company culture
- Serves as a reminder that management values employee feedback
- Encourages open communication
- Promotes employee happiness

8. Assess Your Organizational Culture

You can assess your current company culture in several ways. This culture assessment can involve walking around, conducting interviews with employees, or using a culture assessment instrument.

Participate in a Culture Walk

One way to observe the culture in your organization is to take a walk around the building and look at some of the physical signs of culture.

- How is the space allocated? Where are the offices located?
- How much space is given and to whom? Where are people located?
- What is posted on bulletin boards or displayed on walls?
- What is displayed on desks or in other areas of the building? In the workgroups? On lockers or closets?
- How are common areas utilized?
- What do people write to one another? What is said in memos or email?
- What is the tone of the messages (formal or informal, pleasant or hostile, etc.)?
- How often do people communicate with one another? Is all communication written, or do people communicate verbally?
- What interaction between employees do you see?
- How much emotion is expressed during the interactions?

Conduct Culture Interviews

Another way to understand the culture of your organization is to interview your employees in small groups. It is just as important, during these interviews, to observe the behaviours and interaction patterns of the people as it is to hear what they say about the culture.

Ask for Feedback with Culture Surveys

Written surveys taken by people in the organization can also provide information about the organizational culture. It is important to create or select the survey using the information collected during the culture walk and the culture interviews.

These are just 3 ways in which you can observe and understand your organizational culture. The results of your assessment of your organizational culture will tell you what to do more of, less of, stop, or start. The results from your organizational culture assessment will either confirm the efficacy of the culture you have or provide the encouragement you need to change your organizational culture.

9. Get Ready to Survey Again

For best results, plan ahead. How did your last survey go? What bumps or kinks could be ironed out (or avoided)? Does everyone know their role or responsibility?

Provide clarity for the role each person plays in employee engagement. Develop a plan before the survey launches: what role will HR play? How will managers act on the results? Will leadership be involved?

Assigning responsibilities in your employee survey action plan will ensure that the results lead to action and not fall on deaf ears. Involve managers early on to communicate with their teams about upcoming surveys and encourage employees to participate. If you've successfully communicated and acted on past surveys, you should have solid participation again.

The Bottom Line

You build and maintain trusting relationships and a culture of trust in your workplace one step at a time through every action you take and every interaction you have with your colleagues and employees. Trust may be fragile, but it has the capacity to grow strong over time.

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