



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Are you building a culture of trust with your staff?

When there's a high-level of trust in the service center, people communicate well, work well together, and strive to meet common goals. Without trust, guarded communication, speculation, and disengagement can get in the way of productivity and serving customers.

How do you know if you have a culture of trust in your customer service center? According to Nan S. Russell, author of *Trust, Inc.: How to Create a Business Culture That Will Ignite Passion, Engagement, and Innovation*, one of the best indicators that you need to work on building trust with your team is if you are getting poor results.

"If you look around and you are not one of those managers getting great results from your work team, then that is a good indication that you have some relationship or trust issues," Russell says. In addition: "if there is a lack of engagement in your group, if people are late coming to work, if there are employee relations issues, or if there are issues and problems related to the rules and protocols of the job — that is a good indication that there is a lack of trust."

Build trust in your team

Communication is a big part of building trust with your team, especially in the customer service center. But we're not talking about communication in terms of getting out information about policies and procedures.

"The kind of communication that builds relationships that have trust involve knowing what matters to the

people that you lead, having dialogs with them so that not only do you know what they need, but they know what they can expect from you."

Russell refers to this as "thoughtful transparency" — meaning that your people can trust you enough to be able to make commitments to customers that they know will be honored, or to have the kind of decision-making responsibility that is recognized

Five ways to build trust through your communications

Communication is at the heart of building trust, says Nan S. Russell, author of *Trust, Inc.* But for communication to help create a culture in which trust can thrive, it must be frequent, honest, and respectful. Here are five guidelines from Russell:

- **Make it continuous.** "There's no on-off switch for trust-building communications," says Russell. "If you communicate only when you need something or when it's in your interests, you'll limit trust."
- **Make it timely.** Don't wait until you know every detail before passing along information. Keep your people updated regularly on issues related to their responsibilities — whether it's good or bad news.
- **Make it honest.** Model the integrity, forthrightness, and honesty you want from others in your communication style. Cultivate open dialog and careful listening. Expect and give honest answers.
- **Make communications why-based.** Telling people what you want or what you need is easy — now add the why. Help people to understand how what they do fits into a bigger vision.
- **Make it yours.** "How you handle difficult communications is itself a message," says Russell. "Messages of serious critiques, shortcomings, unpopular policy, or organizational change can be difficult, so let your tone and behavior while delivering such messages convey a sense of respect, caring, and compassion."



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and agreed to by all parties involved, so that it is not pulled back. "With that kind of transparent environment, people are going to operate with integrity, be accountable, and feel good about the work that they do," Russell says.

Be a model of trust

Supervisors and managers often think that the place to start building trust is to ask, "Are my employees trustworthy? Who can I trust among them?" But the truth, Russell says, is that you have to start by asking if you are worthy of your employees' trust. "Are you demonstrating the kinds of behaviors that seem trustworthy to them?" she asks.

"You have to have a good sense of how trustworthy you are before you can ask it of your employees," says Russell. If you break your own promises, if you are not very good in terms of meeting your own work commitments and deadlines — then it is not going to be very easy to build a culture of trust in your team.

Russell tells managers to start by examining their own behavioral integrity and word-action alignment. In addition, she asks, "What is your own engagement level? Can other people count on you? Do they respect you? Are you kind and compassionate? Are you keeping your promises? Do you have a good level of communication with your group?"

Rather than starting by announcing all of the things that employees can do to be more trustworthy, managers should say, "Let me create this great environment where you know you are going to get your review on time and you know you are going to get to work on higher level projects, because I said you would."

Additional trust-building efforts

"Often, managers look for an all-or-nothing kind of trust behavior, and they also tend to think that equal is fair, and if I give trust here, I need to give trust there," Russell says. "And that isn't true. There is a real need to look at individuals and situations and respond to those individually."

Another mistake that managers tend to make is to think that trust is like a light switch that is simply turned on or off — I either trust you or I don't. But trust is not something that is inherent in individuals or situations. "It's something that managers need to strategically decide about situations and individuals. It's really more like a dimmer switch," Russell says. "You are going to give a little bit, and if you get accountability on the other side, you give a little bit more."

The whole idea is to think small, Russell adds, "So when I talk about building a culture of trust I mean trying to get it down to an individual, a team, or a work group — the people that you interact with on a regular basis"

Reaping the benefits of trust

The positive benefits of a culture of trust are well documented, Russell says — people are more engaged, feeling that their strengths are being used and they are being seen as individuals. "They also treat customers in a way that builds the corporate brand," she says. "We all know that trust begets trust and when that happens it manifests itself in very positive ways at all levels — collaboration and team work increases, and there is less absenteeism and less turnover."

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