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From the The Business Journals:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/news/2021/02/02/14-effective-ways-to-build-real-trust-with-your-employees.html>

14 effective ways to build real trust with your employees

Feb 2, 2021, 1:50pm EST

We've all heard that trust is a two-way street, and this is especially true for leaders and their employees. Establishing trust within a team is not just beneficial but necessary for open communication and the achievement of company goals.

It's up to business leaders to build that reciprocal relationship of trust with their employees. Below, 14 members of Business Journals Leadership Trust share ways leaders can foster trust between themselves and their team members.

1. Listen to them.

Really listen to what the employees are trying to say and what they mean to say. There are times that people will tell you only part of the story, and you have to dig deeper to really understand what's on their mind. – Brian Bishop, Gold Heat

2. Tell the whole truth.

Nothing says "I trust you" more than hearing the good, the bad and the ugly — even when it's uncomfortable. It creates a culture of honesty and understanding, with the expectation that you can trust the information being given. If and when the honesty policy is not followed, acknowledge it, make amends and move on. – Donald Donnalson, Beantown Builders, Inc.

3. Follow through on your promises.

The best way to build trust is through your actions. Do what you say you will do. It's a pretty simple concept, but many leaders promise the world to their team and never deliver. Setting clear expectations and then doing your part forges a relationship of trust at all levels. – Dena Jalbert, Align

4. Be vulnerable.

If you show employees that you can also make a mistake, they are more likely to confide in you and report an issue. Everyone makes mistakes — creating a “Just Culture” helps you to learn from those mistakes and take things to the next level. – Paul Bruning, Florida Spine Associates

5. Give employees an open forum.

We hold town hall meetings where we discuss current events and procedures. It's an open forum for employees to be heard and voice concerns. We hash things out and work together for resolution. We held a meeting to discuss how to heal hurt in our community following the death of George Floyd. As a result, we launched a grant program in which 89% of the recipients were minority-owned businesses. – Barbara Morrison, TMC Financing

6. Give them autonomy in their work.

Give them the freedom to do their work without having you hovering over their shoulder. It lets them know you're confident in them and their ability to do the work. This will build a trusting relationship. – Vinnie Fisher, Fully Accountable

7. Let them help set the company's vision.

Include your team in discussions about the company and its direction so they can be a part of the vision. Seek their input, encourage ideas and validate their suggestions even when they cannot be implemented. Follow through in all things you do and set the expectation for your team to do the same. Create an environment of personal and professional growth, and allocate the time and resources to support it. – Joe Reilly, National Drug Screening, Inc.

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8. Admit your mistakes.

Be human at work. Admit it when you mess up, and share when you are struggling. Regularly seek feedback and ask for input from your team. I've found a casual and honest culture allows your team to see you as vulnerable, which gives them space to also be honest and open about what they need to get the job done. – Crystal Lazar, Habitat for Humanity East & Central Pasco County

9. Let everyone contribute.

The establishment of two-way trust starts with the culture of the company. Giving everyone a chance to contribute to solving issues and/or recommending strategies shows employees that their input is valued. – Jerry Ramos, Ramos Consulting, LLC

10. Be as transparent as possible.

I attempt to be as transparent as possible with all of our employees. Whether it is financial information, new hire plans or company goals, creating an open dialogue makes employees feel valued and able to trust leadership and its decisions in the future. – William Balderaz, Futurety

11. Give credit where it's due.

Trust in them. It's about more than telling the truth. For example, when you delegate a job or assignment to an employee, give it to them completely; don't overreach. Then give them the credit when credit is due. – Keith Woods, KB Woods Public Relations

12. Conduct 360-degree reviews.

Recently, several of my coaching clients have proactively requested 360-degree reviews, conducted confidentially by the coach, to build skills and trust. We then use

the feedback to craft the coaching engagement and address gaps and blind spots, as well as to build on strengths. Where appropriate, these leaders broadly loop back with colleagues to share what was learned and the next steps. – Cheryl Williams, Hudgins Williams Associates

13. Show them their well-being is your top priority.

Show them clearly that the well-being and development of employees is the leadership team's priority. We give reviews and salary adjustments at the end of each year, and everyone knows that the managers must be reviewed before anyone on the leadership team can be considered for a review. Clear and material signals like this quickly build trust and set a strong culture of service before self. – Ryan Morris, First State Bank

14. Let them get to know you.

Be vulnerable, and let employees get to know you personally. In the same way, getting to know your employees by finding out such things as what makes them tick, what they do in their spare time or if they have families can help you gauge their interests and learn about their personal and professional motivations. You can apply that information to more effectively assign new projects. – Joey Johnsen, Zeevo Group LLC