

Building Supervisory Trust in the Workplace

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We hear a lot about the importance of trust in today's workplace, yet many people do not give it much attention or do little to foster and maintain trust. Why is trust so important? Research has shown that when employees trust their bosses, they are likely to perform at a higher level, work more cohesively, and communicate more openly. One study showed how powerful this bond between trust and performance is. After interviewing over 1200 supervisors in fourteen organizations for his 1995 book *Communication and Organizational Behavior*, William Haney found two types of trust cycles:

1. *Constructive* - in which high trust on the supervisor's part leads to higher worker output. This in turn leads to and reinforces a higher level of trust by the supervisor.

2. *Destructive* - in which low supervisory trust fosters lower productivity and subsequently lowered supervisory trust of the employee. Obviously, such a self fulfilling prophecy approach to trust building could be disastrous in your organization.

As a supervisor, you must earn trust. Most people will have confidence and expect you to be able to perform your job simply because you are the supervisor. It is up to you to demonstrate that you are capable of doing the job and rate their trust. Only then, does the trust come. Here are some strategies for helping to gain the trust of others:

Communicate effectively and convincingly. It does not matter how much you know, or think you know; if you can not communicate your knowledge to others, you will not be effective in convincing them to believe you or in assisting them. A key in communicating for trust is to provide more than simple facts or figures. Project your feeling as you communicate; this makes you appear more human and approachable.

Demonstrate that you are capable. Obviously your boss believed you had the basic qualifications to do your job or you would not have been promoted. It is up to you to show that their belief was well founded. You need to perform in a manner that convinces others that they can depend on you to get the job done.

Display concern for others. Place your emphasis on helping others rather than on yourself. Being available and willing to assist when necessary shows that you have the goodwill of others in mind.

Be fair. Nothing will turn others against you faster than showing that you are inconsistent in your treatment of people. Assist, reward, coach, counsel and punish equitably in order to avoid problems and resentment.

Admit you are wrong or do not know. People generally warm up to those who appear human. And, to err or not have all the answers is human. You can often win someone over by appealing to them for help, but do so in a sincere manner or not just to make them feel needed. They may sense your paternalism and could be incensed.

Foster a "team player" image. Be a part of the team and encourage others to do the same. Something as simple as coordinating a team meeting or an after work get-together can go a long way.

Trust others. By showing you trust others, you can often gain their trust in return. One way to demonstrate your trust is to share information freely and quickly. If you or someone higher makes a decision which impacts others, and it is not confidential or damaging, pass the information on to others. It is human nature for people to want to be in on decisions which affect them.

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