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WHITE PAPER

Trust or Bust

4 Ways to Earn the Trust of Your Employees and Build a Loyal and High-Performing Team.

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TrustInside
Assessments

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith Ayers is the Founder and CEO of Intégro Leadership Institute, author of Engagement is Not Enough: You Need Passionate Employees to Achieve Your Dream , and one of the world's most respected experts on the topics of employee engagement, leadership effectiveness and workplace trust.

Having joined Intégro as a consultant in 1977, Keith took over the ownership of the organisation in 1982 and developed it to become one of Australia's top specialist leadership development consulting firms. With an increasing proportion of his time allocated away from Australia, Keith moved to Pennsylvania in August 2001, where he grew the U.S. division of Intégro to over 60 certified associates. Keith returned to Australia in 2009.

Keith's expertise is working with CEOs and senior executive teams to help them create a high performance culture, one that is based on a high level of trust and personal responsibility. Keith has worked with executive teams in Fortune Global 500 organisations and SMEs in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, China and the U.S. He is also regularly invited to be a keynote speaker worldwide including such places as Germany, Finland, the U.K. and the U.S.

Trust or Bust

4 ways to earn the trust of your employees and build a loyal, high-performing team

You are not untrustworthy…

… But do your employees trust you? Think about it. Run through the team one by one. Do all of them trust you? Do any of them? "*But I'm trustworthy*," you say. Of course you are – but that's not enough. Building trust and trustworthiness are two different things. Your trustworthiness does not automatically mean that people will trust you. You have to develop the ability to build trust.

Trust. So what?

You might ask: "*why would I want to build trust anyway? Employees are here to do their job, full stop. What does it matter if they trust me or not?"*

If you like the idea of having an under performing team of people with an eye on the exit, then it probably doesn't matter. But if you want to improve bottom-line outcomes through a team of committed employees, you may want to read on.

Employees who trust their boss tend to be far more productive than those who don't. The most engaged employees identify trust for their boss as one of the principal reasons for their commitment to the job and the organization, according to our research.

Academic studies have also shown conclusively that trust and employee engagement have a significant positive impact on performance.

A study by two academics who specialize in hospitality management, Tony Simons of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration and Judy McLean Parks of Washington University, showed that hotels where employees found their managers to be highly trusted were significantly more profitable than the average. So much so that an incremental improvement in trust for management (a 2.5% improvement on the academics' five-point scale) increased annual profits by an average of $250,000 per hotel!

From *The Integrity Dividend*, by Tony Simons:

"Many of the hotels with high management integrity converted over ten cents more of each dollar of revenue into profits than others (at an average revenue of $10 million this would translate into $1 million more profit in these hotels). Does behavioral integrity make a difference to the bottom line? The evidence said emphatically – and hugely – yes. We had detected the integrity dividend.

Here are the details of the chain of impact that we saw:

- **Where employees feel their managers keep promises and live by the values they describe, they trust their managers more.**
- **Where they trust their managers more, they become more emotionally committed to the company – caring more deeply about its mission and taking pride in working for it.**
- **Where they feel greater emotional commitment to the company they are more willing to stay in their jobs and go beyond their formal job descriptions by providing discretionary service to satisfy guests requests.**
- **Guests who experience discretionary service from hotel employees like it and feel more satisfied.**
- **Satisfied guests translate to repeat business, which boosts profits.**
- **Employee retention boosts profits as well."**

The Gallup Organization, which surveys engagement levels around the world, has shown that *engaged organizations have 3.9 times the earnings per share growth rate compared to organizations with lower engagement in the same industry."*

A much-cited study by Alex Edmans of Wharton Business School found that high employee engagement has a significant positive impact on the share prices of listed companies relative to companies with lesser engagement levels.

If you only remember two things…

We probably agree at this point that trust is important. Now for the hard part: how can you go about building it? It may seem like an abstract or emotional concept, but trust can actually be broken into a process, just like most other aspects of your work.

There are two key factors to remember when getting started: **consistency** and **communication.** Building trust is driven by those two core skills. Fail at one of them and you fail at both.

You've heard the saying *"It takes time to build trust."* That is particularly true with consistency: are you consistently honest and ethical, or do you sometimes bend the truth a little? Do you consistently do what you say you will do and do it well, or do things occasionally fall through the cracks and you let your team down? Consistency generates trust because your team members know they can rely on you. It is particularly important when dealing with many different people, or when you are affected by mood and unforeseen circumstances.

"Consistency generates trust because your team members know they can rely on you."

The importance of communication can get lost in the clichés and buzz terms of formal corporate communications. When we say communication here, we mean the one-to-one kind. Remember the days before everyone used email to interact with people sitting a few meters away? That's right: the kind of communication that builds trust requires actually talking and listening to your people.

To understand these skills of consistency and communication, it's time to look at the Intégro Trust Model. The foundation of the model is that there are four behaviors that build trust: Acceptance, Openness, Congruence and Reliability. You may be thinking right now that there must be more to building trust than four behaviors – but bear with me on this. Many years of research have found that all trust building behaviors are subsets of these four behaviors. And what would you rather – a simple model that focuses on four behaviors that actually work, or something more convoluted?

We know from our research that when managers are consistently accepting of employees, open and transparent with them about what is really happening, are congruent in operating by their core values, while demonstrating their reliability by delivering on their value promise – that both employee trust and passion are high and customers are more loyal.

These Trust-Building Behaviors are Values-Driven

You have no doubt at this stage thought, this is not rocket science. Of course it makes sense that if someone you work with operates by these four trust-building behaviors you would have no trouble trusting them.

But do all of your team members operate by each of these four behaviors all the time? I can almost guarantee they don't – or at least, some of your team members don't. You have some team members who are very reliable, but they don't share very much – they are not very open about what they are doing. You have other team members who are very accepting and tolerant of other team members, but they lack straightforwardness – they don't say what they really think for fear of creating conflict.

Our research has identified two values that drive each of the four trust building behaviors – you won't use these behaviors until you believe it is important to do so.

Have you ever wondered why some people can be so judgmental of others? They seem to believe they have a right to be critical of others and point out their faults and inadequacies. What they don't realize is that people they judge negatively will not trust them. How can you trust someone who belittles you?

We have learned from our research that this judgmental person will not learn to accept others until he or she realizes that they need to value respect and recognition – they need to come to the realization that people deserve to be respected for who they are, and to get credit for what they do. If they are unwilling to respect and recognize their team members, they will not be accepting of people and gain their trust and they most likely won't achieve what that team is capable of. That team will fail to become a high performing team.

The Intégro Trust Model

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The Intégro Trust Model

To understand this model we need to start with the four inner circles - the behaviors that build trust.

Imagine working for a boss who is very accepting of you as a person – they show that they care about you, shows an interest in you and appreciates the work you do. They are also open with you. You always know how you are doing and when any of your work is not up to scratch they bring it to your attention. Your boss is also open to your ideas,encouraging you to contribute to improving team performance.

You can count on your boss to be congruent with you. They don't sugarcoat the pill when they need to be direct with the team, however they do it in a way that you still feel respected and makes you want to improve your performance. You also know that you can rely on your boss – they never let you down. When they make a commitment**,** you can count on her delivering. They always give their best performance.

How well does this describe you? Is this how your team members see you?

The Eight Values that Build Trust

As mentioned earlier, to actually use these behaviors to build trust, it is necessary to believe in the values that drive these behaviors.

When you genuinely operate by these eight values day-in, day-out, because you believe it is important to do so, you will see amazing results. The trust your team members have for you will grow substantially and with that trust will come increased levels of engagement, passion and performance.

When you genuinely operate by these eight values you will see
amazing results. It may seem simple, almost too simple. But you would be amazed how many employees say that their bosses lack some or even all of these values. How many do you think you adhere to every day?

As we go through these eight Values that Build Trust below, ask yourself how your team members would rate you on each statement.

RESPECT

I respect my team members for who they are

It all starts with respect. Respect is the foundation on which mutual trust is built. If a member of your team does not believe you respect them, they simply will not want to work for you.

RECOGNITION

I appreciate what they do

*If s*omeone does a good job, why shouldn't that be noted? After all, if they do a bad job it certainly will be. How else can your employees improve unless good work is recognized as much as mistakes are highlighted?

RECEPTIVITY

I solicit their thoughts and opinions

There is no better way to show someone that they are important to you than to listen to what they say. Do you ever ask: How can I do better? What are your views on this issue?

DISCLOSURE

I share my opinions with my team members

Just as your people like to be able to share their views, they also want to know yours. They want to know what's going on in the organization. A lack of transparency leads to uncertainty and confusion.

STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS

I am direct with people

When a team member asks you a question and you respond without really answering it, it is painfully obvious. People see politicians on the television. They know a non-answer when they get one. Being direct does not mean being blunt. Tell it how it is – with respect.

HONESTY

I am honest and ethical

We all want to succeed in our professional environments. But sometimes people push boundaries and may bend the truth in pursuit of objectives. Do you tell the truth and avoid ethical gray areas?

KEEPS COMMITMENTS

I keep my commitments

If you say you're going to do something – do it. Some of us are over-optimistic about what we can achieve. We might commit to something without considering its feasibility, or just simply forget. Stop and think when making commitments: *Can I really follow-through on this commitment?*

SEEKS EXCELLENCE

I always do my best

Leaders often get to where they are through hard work and dedication, sometimes. Once you're there, do you give up? Have you reached a certain altitude where you are happy to cruise along? Employees trust a leader who is always striving to improve their own performance and that of their team.

Some trust-building behaviors are easier than others

Building trust with others only comes easily with people who are similar to you. They see your behavior as normal – it makes sense to them. For example if you are dealing with someone who places a high priority on punctuality and attention to detail, they will find it much easier to trust you if you are on time for the meeting and have all the facts you need to support your argument. But if you are two minutes late for the meeting and don't have all the detail the other person is looking for, you will notice a very cold response from them.

To build trust with someone who places a high importance on Reliability, it is essential that you Keep your Commitments, and that you Seek Excellence in everything you do. This requires a high degree of discipline for some people.

Why Do We Have Eight Values and Four Behaviors?

We recommend that you focus on the four behaviors that build trust to keep the model at its simplest level. However, if you find yourself struggling with any of these four behaviors, it would make sense to go back to the eight values. If you are not operating by these values you won't use the behaviors.

In summary, here are the four behaviors that build trust and an explanation of what might be happening depending on whether this is a strength or challenge for you.

ACCEPTANCE

People who have difficulty accepting others are often those who set extremely high standards for themselves and others. When others do not measure up, a short fuse of intolerance can sometimes ignite; they tend to become critical—whether they express it openly or not. They can also be very self-critical when they do not measure up to their own standards.

People who are naturally strong in acceptance are more understanding and forgiving of those who make mistakes. It doesn't mean they will accept poor performance; they may just find it easy to understand those who are dealing with performance issues. As a result, they find it easy to trust others who are as respectful and accepting as they are, and don't trust people who tend to be insensitive, uncaring and judgmental of others.

OPENNESS

Some people have difficulty being open because they are naturally inclined to be more private. They keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves and require a high level of trust for another person to open up to them, especially about their feelings. These people typically have a strong need for accuracy and find it difficult to describe their feelings. After all, they are feelings not facts.

Then there are those people who are naturally strong in openness, who are happy to share their feelings with anyone who will listen. In fact at times they may share so much that others feel uncomfortable with the level of personal information they reveal. Because of their natural openness they find it easy to trust people who are open with them and struggle to trust people who lack openness. They see them as secretive, guarded and withdrawn.

CONGRUENCE

When looking at people's natural strengths and challenges around congruence, it is important that we deal only with Straightforwardness, not Honesty. Honesty is character-based whereas the other seven values are influenced by aspects of personality.

Some people struggle with being straightforward because they do not want to hurt people's feelings or alienate them. On occasion, they may say things they do not really mean to avoid unpleasantness or conflict. They can also tell a long roundabout story rather than getting straight to the point, especially when there is bad news.

Those who are naturally strong in straightforwardness may even pride themselves on their ability to tell it like it is. They say things like: "I call a spade a spade!

Some people struggle with being straightforward because they do not want to hurt people's feelings"

Others may see them as blunt or insensitive at times, but you always know where you stand with them. Not only are they good at straightforwardness, they trust people who give them straight answers and find it difficult to trust those who *beat around the bush*.

RELIABILITY

The primary reason some people struggle with reliability is that they tend to over-commit themselves. With the best of intentions, they say they will do something, but then get overwhelmed with all the things they have committed to. Typically these people are enthusiastic, optimistic and energetic – strengths that are essential for starting new projects, but not very useful when it comes to finishing things off. These people are often not very time-conscious. They may get so involved in a phone conversation that they completely lose track of time, only to realize later that the meeting started five minutes ago.

People who are naturally strong in reliability take their commitments very seriously and won't make a commitment until they are sure they can not only keep it, but also do it to the best of their ability. They typically have high standards, are very time conscious, and find it difficult to trust people who fail to keep commitments or consistently run late for meetings.

Time to get started

Now that we have established the core skills of communication and consistency, gone through the four behaviors and eight Values that build trust and understood that some are easier than others – it's time to get started building trust with your team. Here are five simple steps to take. Before you go through the five steps, think of a relationship where the trust levels are low – one that you would really like to see improve. Perhaps you have had a hard time connecting with one of your direct reports. Or it may be with someone whom you yourself are accountable to. Don't pick a relationship that is already working well – leave those well alone, they're just fine!

Write down two or three things about this person that you respect. Look for both characteristics or talents, and competencies.

Write down a couple of sentences you could use to communicate to this person what you do respect about them and how much you appreciate them.

Think of some questions you could ask this person to get a better understanding of what their priorities are and any ideas they have that could help you work together more effectively.

Share with them what is important to you and any ideas you have on how you could work together more effectively.

Clarify your expectations of the relationship and ask them what they expect of you**.**

What do you really think about your people?

Trust is the essential foundation for creating a high-performing team. When you really trust people, believe in, and partner with them, when you get them more involved and give them more responsibility, then you get people who really want to do a first-class job for you.

Take time to think about the people in your team. What are their talents and what do they bring to the table? If you don't know, then it is time to find out. What are the unique strengths of each person? Do they have strengths they could be using that you don't know about?

If you believe in people, you lay the foundation for an open and honest work environment in which employees feel switched on, engaged, and prepared to be passionate about their work and their organization. It may not seem this way at times, but your team members really do want to make a difference and want to do their best. It is only when you truly believe this about your people that you will be able to build the trusting relationships necessary to get the best performance from your team.

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