

Bank on it – How to create trust that pays a real dividend

By Steve Bernard



Trust, in business, counts. A lack of it is eating away at your ability to get results today. Collaboration, buy in, support, and key input from colleagues are all highly prized in the work place and yet none of these are possible without a trust foundation.

Programme Manager: FMCG. Carl was a senior manager in an established central programme team. Things were fine with everyone reporting in to the same Head of Department. One day he discovered that the Dept Head was commissioning secret weekly reports on each programme manager's activity over and above their direct conversations and reporting. Carl never saw his boss in the same light and withdrew some of his key insights and support from the team as a result.

Trust is fragile, and creating trust in the first place is not easy if its core ingredients are not well understood. Many senior managers will simply accept a falsehood and believe they are trusted or even respected within key workplace relationships, when this can often be far from the truth.

Without trust everything is harder: you don't know if you can believe the information you are given, and you don't have the confidence in the reactions of others, making it harder to move forward with your own work. Organisational structures tend to compound the trust challenge; the more senior a manager, the more vested influence they have and the easier it can be for them to assume they are trusted by their peers and teams.

It's worth exploring some of the costs of failing to build and maintain adequate levels of trust. We will discuss the concept to help identify what to do if you want to build up your Trust Quotient and reap the benefits.

Over the years we've tracked 100s of manager and senior managers, teams and businesses and one of the consistent calls for our assistance stems from a lack of trust that is hurting their results. The costs of ignoring low levels of trust or leaving managers in post that cannot create trust are great.

What a Lack of Trust Costs Businesses:

- **Rework & Lost Time:** We've seen numerous cases where a senior manager has key information withheld from them as a direct result of a trust issue with one of their team members. Without realising it, most managers continue unaware of the missing information or inaccurate data they have come to so heavily rely on. Risk quickly gets sucked into their assumptions, budgets and projects, rework incidences multiply and significant time is lost as teams try to fathom out where it is going wrong.
- **Extra Management time getting to commitment:** We all hope to avoid the need to overcome the resistance others might build to change / progress. Where we see limited trust, we see resistance skyrocket. Resistance takes many forms (including withholding information). This can be as extreme as actively sabotaging initiatives or projects or refusing to provide key support to enable a project to move to the next stage. On the surface, what is measurable as an indicator is 'delay' – lots of time wasted and targets missed. All those time targets quickly translate into monetary ones. Distracted managers = danger!
- **Problem fixation without solution:** We see lots of teams that are just not that productive because they waste effort fixating on the problem. Without trust there just isn't the incentive to shift to solution mode. In extreme cases people would rather sit on their hands and let something fail (exacting some kind of organisational revenge for the person they blame for the lack of trust).
- **Inertia:** At its most extreme, things just grind to a halt. Because trust is such a fundamental human need, if people feel that unsure or unsafe, they will simply stop or withdraw. There is huge effort in getting things off the ground in the first place, so when things stop and require restarting it can be daunting. Each occurrence of this can easily chip away at the confidence or belief in the project.

If you've had the misfortune to work in teams or situations that lack trust, you will know all too well the very real costs involved, even if the indicators and measure are subtle or hidden. But what do we really mean when we talk about missing trust?

The first thing people associate with trust is our **reliability**. Do we do what we say? This is really about keeping our promises, whether it's being on time, delivering work or following up / taking action that is expected or promised.

This can often be where the definition for most people stops, but there are other key facets. The next is **openness**. This is about having a high degree of honesty in every form. Whether it's taking time to clarify / set expectations or sharing your feelings about something, this is where you achieve a high degree of personal connection. Simply put, you become more believable.

Acceptance is another facet of trust – being accepting of others views. If you can genuinely respect others views and not over judge their contribution, you open the door to a lasting relationship. It's amazing how people respond when they are listened to properly. This unconditional regard (accepting limitations) creates a unique belief about how genuine an interaction is. This characteristic is often associated with high levels of EQ and empathy.

Being **authentic** is the last piece of the trust puzzle. People will look for and measure how congruent or consistent your behaviours are over time. They want to understand if you live the values, walk the talk; they want to know if you play games or change your personality / approach significantly based on who you are with. Being too kind or masking tough decisions is an easy way to lose that sense of an authentic you.



It is really easy to lose the trust that you work so hard to establish. It may seem trivial to you, but the simplest act or behaviour that is out of character, or a promise unfulfilled can be all it takes to do great damage. While it takes time and effort to build and maintain trust, the rewards are great and the formula at least is simple to understand:

- **Keep your promises** – be reliable and communicate changes so that they are understood. Make yourself someone to be relied on.
- **Be open** – use your honest feelings to express important matters. Take time when you need to express expectations, rationales, hopes and concerns.
- **Listen** – don't be so quick to judge, rescue or impose yourself. Take the opportunity to fully understand other perspectives which you may learn from or help you make better choices.
- **Be you consistently** – Be true to how you live your life and fulfil your role. Underneath a flexible leadership style, ensure you know your fundamental character and honour that.

Trust is a powerful agent in our lives. In business, without it, we are left with the very blunt instruments of managing by fear (relying on power), using short term incentives of money and ultimately accepting second best. As organisations become more complex and we rely on longer and longer chains of people and dependencies, those with the currency of trust will achieve the most fulfilment and largest dividend in the long term.