

As a people manager, your primary responsibility is developing your talent. It's up to you to make sure your employees have a purpose, clear direction and the inner drive to achieve their critical work objectives, satisfy their own goals and ambitions, and make the organization better. And it's a lot easier to do this once you've established a relationship that's built on trust.

Tips for Building Trust

Make a Connection

Trust doesn't come from hierarchy, rank or lines in an org chart. In fact, power and perceived trustworthiness are inversely related. Trust comes from authentic, committed connections between two people. To connect with your employees:

- **Ask:** Ask questions about what they're doing and be curious about their unique skills and strengths.
- **Discover:** Find out what they love about their job and what they hate about it — and why.
- **Listen:** Learn from them about how they would like you to help them.

Be Transparent and Truthful

You are your employees' pipeline for knowledge. Always share as much as you can about the current health and future goals of the organization, and do so regularly and consistently. This will also help you establish an expectation for openness and honesty from your employees in return. Be upfront with them about your own shortcomings, where you think there are high opportunities for success and where there are areas of high risk. Any information that isn't private or confidential should be disclosed, including:

- Strategic goals
- Financial results
- Performance metrics
- Agendas and minutes from board meetings

Encourage, Don't Command

A "command and control" approach to management doesn't create trust, and it won't keep people engaged over the long term. High-trust managers encourage by giving credit. This reinforces shared goals and builds ownership among employees, opening up even more opportunities for praise.

- Spotlight employees for success.
- Ask for organizational critiques.
- Ask for personal critiques.
- Allow employees to identify and act on their own solutions to problems.

Recognize Individual Strengths

As a people manager, you're measured by your ability to identify, develop and align individuals and their particular strengths with corporate strategy. Your job is to find and nurture the strengths within each of your employees so that they can contribute their unique value and feel appreciated for what they bring to the organization.

- **Describe** how each person's individual strengths bring value to the broader whole.
- **Identify and leverage** employee strengths that balance out your weaknesses.
- **Don't play favorites:** You may naturally have more in common with some employees than others, but every employee is critical to the success of the organization. Playing favorites is the quickest way to kill trust within your team.

Show Competence

The way you achieve your strategic objectives is through your people, and that means their success is inextricably tied to yours. Your competency shows up in your ability to develop your talent to meet the goals of the organization. And you'll build higher levels of trust with your employees when you can show them that you have a plan and process in place, that you're committed to it, and that you are measuring specific areas and skills for improvement. Some key areas that will reflect your competence include:

- **Constancy:** Establish and commit to a schedule of availability.
- **Carefulness:** Be sensitive to the realities of an employee's corporate life.
- **Candor:** Never hide from the difficult truths.
- **Counsel:** Be clear and direct in guiding employees to achieve their goals.

Become Your Employees' Advocate

Managers who are employee advocates actively defend their employees' interests and promote their abilities, creating even deeper levels of trust. Because these employees know that they're being recognized and appreciated for the unique value they bring, they're more motivated to contribute fully to the advancement of their career and the success of the organization. Here are some of the ways you can become your employees' advocate:

- **Think like a marketer:** Raise the employee's profile by sharing and building their brand. When you shine a spotlight on what makes them special, you're broadening their exposure and helping them get recognized for what they contribute:
 - **Celebrate winning behaviors:** Did an employee provide a critical assist on a deliverable? Give them a public shout-out for being such a great collaborator.
 - **Give credit where it's due:** Did a researcher on your team just uncover something? Get the word out to the influencers who rely on that information. Let them see where all this valuable intel is coming from.

- **Increase their power:** There are probably any number of everyday decisions that employees bring to you for your opinion or approval, but do you really need to be involved in all of them? Embrace the philosophy that employees should have more power to make decisions about their job:
 - *Get granular:* Figure out what decisions your employees can make on a daily basis that don't require your oversight or approval.
 - *Let them do it:* Once you have outlined the decision-making authority and boundaries with your employees, it's your job to trust and empower them to do it. You can help them make good decisions by coaching, training and providing necessary information, but don't change a decision you empowered an employee to make. That will only undermine their faith in their competence and cause them to question your trust and support. Instead, teach the employee to make a better decision next time.
- **Teach them to negotiate:** To grow, your employees have to be able to ask for what they want and need. Teach them how to identify what's important to them as well as how the desired outcome will benefit both them personally and the organization. Negotiations should be initiated with a sense of the end in mind.
 - *Pinpoint benefits:* Benefits might include increased productivity and commitment, higher engagement and new cultural norms that foster similar behaviors in colleagues.
 - *Negotiations require creativity:* Encourage them to develop a few ideas and make the negotiation collaborative rather than combative. Instead of fixating on a single solution that works for them, they should be looking for multiple options that could satisfy both sides.