

# Earn Their Trust<sup>1</sup>

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Employees can have all of the best equipment, all of the latest technology, and all of the other resources they need. But, if they don't trust you as their manager, they won't be influenced by what you say or do, and they will fail to give you their best.

Over the years, I've conducted many employee surveys in several different types of organizations in both the public and private sectors. Sifting through the pages of comments I've collected from people responding to those surveys, I've identified six key factors that erode their trust in managers.

## 1. Trust is eroded when your employees don't feel safe with you.

People don't want to be threatened by the wrath of an unhappy manager. They want to feel safe. When they don't feel safe with you, they will distrust you. They will resort to covering up mistakes, protecting themselves from punishment. They will become cautious and defensive when they communicate with you.

### HELP EMPLOYEES FEEL SAFE

- ◆ Critique, don't criticize. When faced with a problem with an employee, communicate from the objective, logical part of you, not the critical part of you—keep yourself in a problem-solving state of mind.
- ◆ View disciplining as a constructive process, not as a punishment. Develop your employees by helping them learn from their mistakes.
- ◆ Critique behaviors, not people. When you are upset by something people have done, talk about the act, not about their character or personalities.

## 2. Trust is eroded when you don't recognize employees for doing a good job.

### PRAISE EMPLOYEES

- ◆ Praise employees for a job well done. You may be busy responding to multiple demands, but take the time to praise your employees. Too many managers more often focus on someone doing the wrong thing than doing it right. Look for opportunities to praise good work!
- ◆ Make a daily practice of praising. When people are told by their managers that they're doing a good job, it helps them feel good about themselves and what they do. It helps them build their own self-esteem. People with high self-esteem communicate more effectively and perform at higher levels.

People want to work at a job in a pleasant environment. They want their manager to recognize them when they do something well. It's no wonder they are less motivated and more distrustful of a manager who rarely pats them on the back or only talks to them when things go wrong.

<sup>1</sup> Take a moment and explore Arnie's other Timely Tips at: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

### 3. Trust is eroded when you don't help employees feel a sense of belonging.

People trust someone they like and enjoy. Employees tell me they want to feel like they are part of a family at work. After all, most of them spend more time at work than they do at home with their own families. They want to be with people who have a shared sense of fun and values. Surveys show that good relationships at work are more important than salary.

**HELP EMPLOYEES FEEL THEY BELONG**

- ◆ **Cultivate a family climate in your organization.** Take the time to know your employees. A cheery "good morning," a question or two here and there about how someone is doing or how their sick child is doing, helps people feel they are part of a group that cares—part of a family. Systematically, over the course of every week or two, have this kind of personal contact with every employee.
- ◆ **Acknowledge an employee's key events.** If an employee has a death in the family, or a child getting married, or a new grandchild, etc., make a point of appropriately acknowledging the event. A kind, sympathetic, or congratulatory word (or action), goes a long way in making them feel they are part of a family culture at work.

### 4. Trust is eroded when you are inconsistent in honoring your commitments.

**FOLLOW THROUGH ON YOUR COMMITMENTS**

- ◆ **Honor your commitments.** When you tell an employee that you will be doing something, either do it or promptly explain to them why you did not.
- ◆ **Reliably respond to suggestions from employees.** When an employee offers a suggestion for improving a situation, implement it, explain why it can't be implemented, or promise to get back to him or her.
- ◆ **Don't make promises you can't keep.** Don't be the "good guy" with an employee and rush to make a promise before you really know you can deliver it. You will not build trust by making a promise you can't keep.

When you tell your employees you will do something, they want to see you doing it. They want you to follow through with commitments. How can they trust you if you never follow through on what you say they are going to do? They want you to be reliable, dependable, and true to your words.

### 5. Trust is eroded when employees think you are treating them unfairly.

Employees want managers and supervisors to treat everyone the same way. They don't want to see policies applied to them in one way and applied to someone else differently. When they see managers or supervisors playing favorites, they end up not trusting them.

**TREAT EVERYONE FAIRLY**

- ◆ **Discipline everyone by the same standards.** Don't play favorites. Don't give a break to one employee because you have good feelings about him or her, while coming down hard on another for the same behavior. Playing favorites breeds distrust.
- ◆ **Don't use a policy as a battering ram.** Don't cite a policy when disciplining someone simply because it's convenient. Find out more about why the employee did what he or she did, try to understand why, and turn it into a problem to be solved rather than an opportunity to punish. Employees will trust you more when you demonstrate that you can go the extra mile.

### 6. Trust is eroded when you do not fully inform your employees.

**FULLY INFORM YOUR EMPLOYEES**

- ◆ **Keep people informed.** When employees are uninformed they become more attuned to rumors and participate in spreading them. The spreading of rumors leads to distrust of you as a manager. The more information they have about what is going on, the more they will see that you trust them, and the more they will trust them.
- ◆ **Empower employees with information.** The more information employees have, the better they will be able to make decisions without turning to management. The more they feel free and in control of their own work lives, the more they will trust you.

Your employees want to know what's going on in the organization. The less they know the more distrustful they feel. They don't want hidden agendas. They want you to tell them what's happening and why it's happening. If something changes, they want a clear explanation as to why it changed.

**FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES DAILY!  
EARN THE TRUST OF YOUR EMPLOYEES!**