

Build Trust in Troubled Times



As a manager, you are responsible for getting the job done even in times of restructuring and change. This will be easier when you have built a trusting relationship with your employees based on their belief that you are working on their behalf. Here are some ways you can build trust even when times are tough.

Be honest and direct. Telling the truth is the single most valuable tool you have in developing strong bonds with your employees. They will value your integrity and appreciate knowing where they stand even though it may make them feel uncomfortable.

Keep your promises. When so much that employees believed and put their faith in is falling down around them, it is more important than ever for them to be able to rely on their managers to follow through. Predictability can be very comforting in troubled times. Holding your usual weekly meeting may seem unimportant at a time like this, but it is exactly this kind of routine that will keep the team together.

Give people time to grieve. In the face of downsizing and reorganization, employees will experience a sense of loss. Although you may not have the skills or desire to counsel troubled employees, your role is to facilitate the grieving process. You can refer them to counseling programs or simply provide a sympathetic ear. Providing flexibility in work hours and encouraging dialogue among employees will also help them cope.

Don't talk about "getting back to normal." The biggest misconception employees hold is that the organization will someday return to "normal". If you try to reassure people by telling them to ride out this brief storm, you are setting them up for a big disappointment. As the storm continues, they will recognize that you were wrong and will not trust your judgment on other issues.

Things will never be normal again, and that's not bad. Your role as a manager is to help your employees redefine "normal" and to prepare themselves for the demands of the future workplace.

Encourage people to move forward. You need to help employees pick up the pieces and move on. Involve your employees in developing creative ways to accomplish goals given the new circumstances. This can mean asking for their input, assigning them to study a particular process or simply encouraging them to focus on solutions.

Much of the time, energy and money that we invest in the future of our organizations will be wasted if it is not built on a firm foundation of trust.

You may not be able to promise your employees that your organization will be around 10 years from now, but you can promise that you will help them through whatever comes their way.