

## Building Higher Trust 68 Restoring Lost Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Trust between individuals is bilateral. At any point in time, we have a balance of trust with every person whom we know. Trust is also directional; I trust you at some level and you trust me as well, but not at the exact same level.

In all our daily transactions with others, the trust fluctuates based on what happens: what we say, our tone of voice, body language, texts, and even what other people are saying. It is a very complex and dynamic system.

I believe that if the trust in one direction is very different from the reciprocal trust for a long period of time, that relationship will not endure unless forced to endure, or unless something happens to resolve the disparity.

At work, we have a trust level with each person based on everything that has happened thus far in the relationship. Rebuilding trust is a situational thing, and not every situation calls for the formality offered below.

### **Nine tips to rebuild lost trust**

#### **1. Act Swiftly**

Major trust withdrawals can be devastating, and you need to address the situation immediately. Just as a severe bodily injury requires immediate emergency care, so does the bleeding of emotional capital need repair after a major letdown.

#### **2. Verify care**

Both people should spend some time remembering what the relationship felt like before the problem. In most cases, there is a true caring for the other person, even if the hurt and anger of the moment seem unbearable.

### **3. Establish a desire to do something about it**

If reparations are going to happen, both people must cooperate. If there was high value in the relationship before the breach, then it should be possible to visualize a return to the same level or higher level of trust.

### **4. Admit fault and accept blame**

The person who made the breach needs to admit what happened to the other person. If there is total denial of what occurred, then no progress will occur. Try to do this without trying to justify the action. Focus on what happened, even if it was an innocent gaffe.

### **5. Ask for forgiveness**

It sounds so simple, but many people find it impossible to verbalize the request for forgiveness, yet a pardon is exactly what has to happen to enable the healing process. The problem is that saying "I forgive you" is easy to say but might be hard to do when emotions are raw.

### **6. Determine the cause**

This is a kind of investigative phase where it is important to know what happened in order to make progress. It is a challenge to remain calm and be as objective with the facts as possible. Normally the main emotion is one of pain, but anger or stress can accompany the pain.

Both people need to describe what happened because the view from one side will be significantly different from the opposite view. Go beyond describing what happened, and discuss how you felt about what happened.

### **7. Develop a positive path forward**

The thing to ask in this phase is "what needs to happen to restore your trust in me to at least the level where it was before?". Here, some creativity can really help.

### **8. Agree to take action**

There needs to be a formal agreement to take corrective action. Usually, this agreement requires modified behaviors on the part of both people. Be as specific as possible about what you and the other person are going to do differently. The only way to verify progress is to have a clear understanding of what will be different.

## 9. Check back on progress

Keep verifying that the new behaviors are working and modify them, if needed, to make positive steps every day. As the progress continues, it will start getting easier, and the momentum will increase.

### Conclusion

Modify the process to fit your particular application and do not follow a plan blindly. If a step seems like overkill or is just not practical, then you can skip it, but for serious breaches, the majority of steps will help.

In many cases, it is possible to restore trust to a higher level than existed before the breach. This method is highly dependent on the sincerity with which each person really does want the benefits of a high trust relationship with the other person.

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