

How can we rebuild trust?

Patrick K. Magyar



The coronavirus pandemic seems to create an ever-growing rift in society and to divide families, friends, co-workers. Our trust in others is shaken. If that is because of the pandemic itself, or because it is being used to divide us is anyone's guess. In any case, teams will not be able to perform at their best without trust. Rebuilding it will therefore become a pressing matter for businesses everywhere.

Using trust, rather than fear

Just to be clear, trust is not the only emotion strong enough to generate top performances. Fear will do the same, efficiently and for years. However, to me, using fear is not an option.

We need a trust turnaround

The cracks in our society begin to show. The pandemic is noticeably dividing people these days. There is the question of whether or not to get vaccinated. And the crisis unleashes dynamics that have more to do with existing tensions and a general suspiciousness than with a virus. In addition, face-to-face communication has been moved into the digital realm. Masks and work from home scenarios further complicate personal communication. Co-workers are no longer working alongside each other. We need a trend reversal: Investing in trust, focusing on trust now seems more important than ever. But how do we go about this?

Building trust in five steps

We have combined my experience with numerous turnarounds with my partners' knowledge in psychology and neurobiology. This allowed us to develop a – by now tried and tested – method that helps build trust in five steps.

Creating closeness: I am a fan of digitalisation and of working from home. Still, there are things that require closeness. People communicate via body language, sometimes even more effectively than by using words. Therefore, building trust will take a minimum of physical closeness. And once it is established, there has to be room for sharing personal stories and experiences.

Listening: When trying to build trust, we have to talk, act, and, above all, listen. If our own view is going to be the only one that counts, what we will need is obedience, not trust.

Accepting diversity and otherness: Listening makes identifying other perspectives and opinions easier. Without a general willingness to accept other views, to be open and engage with them, we will simply not get very far.

Being a role model: Nobody likes colleagues or superiors who keep interfering or who know better all the time. Being a role model means to treat other in the same way you would like to be treated by them. This is true for both the head of a team and all its members.

Creating connectedness: People feel connected when they can build a positive relation with others. The most important prerequisite for connectedness is having common goals. And almost as important is acknowledging and valuing the work of all team members. Connectedness is what happens when the members of a team stop monitoring each other, and when they stop wanting to know better.

An impulse is often all it takes

People are social beings. In principle, they would like to trust each other and achieve things as a group. In my experience, an impulse is often all it takes to build or rebuild trust. But after that first nudge, we cannot let up. Instead, we will have to practice, and then practice some more.

Mission Team as an impulse

What could give such an impulse? While I usually do not describe our products in blog posts, I would like to mention one of them here: Mission Team (www.mission-team.com) has been designed to do just that, give a valuable impulse. In the workshop, teams of all kinds and hierarchy levels learn how to enter into a process of creating mutual trust, a process that culminates with a common decision (to be connected). Mission Team was created prior to the pandemic and is based on the firm belief that trust is the decisive emotion when it comes to generating top performances. Now, in times of COVID-19, this aspect seems more important than ever.