



## How to Intentionally Build Trust

You've probably gone to great lengths to surround yourself with honest people. They don't lie, cheat, or steal. But trust involves much more than honesty. More frequently in the typical workplace, trust means consistency. Do you trust Kate to finish the project on time and within budget as she promised? Do you trust Carlos to build a cohesive team or will he be a divisive force in the department? Will Najma have your back when the executive team blames you for all the problems?

Trust, personality, performance, competence, and consistency are intricately linked. Those who lose trust may never know the significance of what they've lost, when they lost it, why they lost it, or how to regain it. But the loss is huge.

### Distrust Is Our Default

More and more, we trust fewer and fewer people and organizations. New headlines remind us daily about the mismanagement, moral lapses, and malaise at the top of corporations and government bureaucracies.



Likewise, terrorist threats led to a sense of heightened physical and emotional vulnerability. So the default in our psyche is set to distrust. Or if the default has been reset to trust, the switch toggles to distrust rapidly by any of the following behaviors: deception in any form (half-truths, lies, cover-ups, values people claim to hold that do not match what they actually do), refusal to accept personal responsibility for mistakes or non-performance, finger-pointing, or simply inconsistencies in actions or decisions.

## About the Author

### Dianna Booher



Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 46

books, published in 26 languages, with nearly 4 million copies sold. She writes, speaks, and consults on leadership communication, executive presence, and productivity. Her latest book is *WHAT MORE CAN I SAY?: Why Communication Fails And What To Do About It*. National media outlets such as *Good Morning America*, *USA Today*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Bloomberg*, *Forbes.com*, *CNN International*, *NPR*, *Success*, and *Entrepreneur* have interviewed her for opinions on critical workplace communication issues. For more information visit [www.BooherResearch.com](http://www.BooherResearch.com) or [www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com](http://www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com)

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## Trust: With a Little Help From Your Friends

Survey after survey shows that people make decisions every day by asking others for opinions.<sup>[i]</sup> To determine that for yourself, look no further than social media: We check the Twitter feed to see what people are saying about the latest box-office hit. We ask Facebook friends about favorite restaurants or books. We read endorsements on Angie's List or LinkedIn for supplier recommendations. We call a friend or family member for a referral on a financial advisor.

So if you want to expand trust outside this circle of people who already know you, be aware of what destroys trust, and have a specific strategy for building a reputation of trust.

## Build Trust Intentionally, and They Will Respond

So how do you change the default setting to one of personal trust? The body of research suggests these specific ways:

- **Straight Talk:** People want to work for a boss and an organization that tells the truth: clear communication of the numbers, the reasoning behind decisions, and positive direction for the future—not gobbledegook, vague generalities, nonsensical “explanations,” and negativity. Straight talk does not necessarily mean gloom and doom. It means simply facing facts, but with a positive outlook.

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- **Regular Communication:** To hear from a boss or the organizational leadership only when things go wrong feels like being treated as a child. Regular communication—whether in a marriage, between school and home, or between an association and its members—builds a foundation of trust. Regular communication implies that you trust the recipients with information—that they are “insiders” and important members of the team. Secrecy breeds rumors. Regular communication, on the other hand, drives out paranoia and builds loyalty.
- **Affability:** Until they prove themselves to be liars, we tend to trust people we like. And we like people most like us: those who have the same interests, the same hobbies, the same values. Physical attractiveness helps. We judge attractive people to be happier, smarter, nicer, more successful, more convivial, more intriguing, and of higher moral character.<sup>[ii]</sup> But likability is about more than being genetically blessed. Packaging counts (grooming, facial expression, gestures, fitness). In short, pay attention to people. Find out what you have in common. Treat others with courtesy. Demonstrate respect by your body language, your dress, your grooming, your language, your tone of voice, and your habits.
- **Competence:** But no matter how much you like *some* people, you can't trust them. Nothing creates distrust like incompetence. If you say you're going to bring in 3 new clients, bring in the clients. Competence is a prerequisite for trusting a leader.
- **Consistency:** You may love Phil or Jill, but if you can't count on them to follow-

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through, you can't trust them. If you say, you're going to send a report, send the report. If you say you're going to form a committee to write guidelines, form the committee and write guidelines.

The first filter for those who influence us positively is, "Do I trust this person?" Communication fails to the degree distrust sets in. Communication improves as trust increases. Never leave trust on the "default" setting.

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ii) Linda L. Price and Lawrence F. Feick, "The Role of Interpersonal Sources in External Search: An Informational Perspective," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, vol. 11, ed. Thomas C. Kinnear (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research), 250–55.

iii) Karen Dion, Ellen Berscheid, and Elaine Walster, "What Is Beautiful Is Good," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24 (1972), 285–90; Comila Shahani-Denning, Purvi Dudhat, Roni Tevet, and Nicole Andreoli, "Effect of Physical Attractiveness on Selection Decisions in India and the United States," *International Journal of Management* 27 (1) (April 2010); Erin Shinnars, "Effects of the 'What Is Beautiful Is Good' Stereotype on Perceived Trustworthiness," *University of Wisconsin–La Crosse Journal of Undergraduate Research* 12 (2009).

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