

Building Trust

In our seminars, when we ask people to define trust, there's a long silence as participants pause to think about how exactly to explain something as esoteric as trust. But if we ask how trust is built, they answer more quickly. If we ask how trust is destroyed, they answer even more quickly—and vehemently. This is another one of those instances in which we may not know exactly what something is, but we know it when we see it.

What do you think? What is trust, and how is trust built? What helps and what hurts a trusting relationship?

Let's start with a dictionary definition:

trust /truhst/

Adapted from Dictionary.com

Verb:

1. To rely on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, and so forth, of a person or thing. For example: *We can trust their recommendation since they are experts in their field.*
 2. To have confident expectation of something; hope. For example: *We trust that the banquet will exceed your expectations.*
 3. To rely on a person or thing. For example: *I trust him to keep his promise.*
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When there is trust, we know we can rely on the other person and believe she will meet our expectations. Of course, building trust takes time and attention. Consider the story of Georgia:

Georgia is a senior auditor in internal controls with more than fifteen years of experience. She manages a team of auditors whose job it is to review workflow processes and financial reporting for their assigned business unit, the product development department, to ensure legal and regulatory compliance. When Georgia and her team do their jobs well, they uncover potential problems, bring them to the attention of the business, and recommend solutions. In their eyes, they prevent serious trouble and are genuinely trying to help the business.

Their customers don't see it that way. To the people in product development, going through an audit is a big hassle in which they have to constantly interrupt their regular work to justify everything they do. While this is a natural tension that the auditors have to learn to deal with, it can be disheartening when no one is ever happy to see you coming.

As a long-time audit professional, Georgia understands this dynamic and is supportive and encouraging with her team. She coaches her auditors to build strong, trusting relationships with the folks in product development by interacting with them outside the audit period in division-wide meetings and networking events. She encourages them to learn as much as they can about "the business of the business" including the strategy, goals, and vision. She also expects them to be transparent about the audit process so that the business really understands and buys into the audit process. Finally, she takes every opportunity to remind folks on both sides that they have the same end goal.



What do you notice about the coaching Georgia is giving to her people?

Georgia's focus in developing her team is to build their interpersonal skills. She knows she can't change the natural tension between auditors and auditees, but she also knows that strong, trusting relationships between the teams will make things easier for everyone and result in the best outcome. Georgia's coaching is targeted to four aspects of trust and their supporting behaviors:

1. Credibility, demonstrated through knowledge of the product development business as well as their own business
2. Transparency, demonstrated by openly sharing the what, how, and why of each audit
3. Rapport, built through non-audit interaction
4. Common focus, built through dedication to a shared goal

What do you think is the impact of these skills and behaviors on the auditors' presence?

Yes, the auditors will feel more confident and less self-conscious when there is more rapport and trust between them and their colleagues

in product development. If they are more relaxed and natural, their auditees will feel the same way.

Accurately Gauging Their Reactions

Imagine for a moment the last in-person meeting you attended. Remember who was there, and where they sat? You don't need to remember every topic that was covered, just the general gist of things. Now, can you recall any time at that meeting when people had an emotional response to something that was said (or implied) during the meeting? If so, what specifically did you notice about other people's responses?

- ➔ Who smiled at whom? Or who frowned at whom?
- ➔ Who suddenly sat forward, or sat back, and when?
- ➔ Who folded their arms at some point in the discussion? Were their arms folded loosely or tightly?
- ➔ Whose voice became noticeably louder, or softer?
- ➔ Did anyone sigh audibly?
- ➔ What else?

When I coach people who need to be more adept at noticing the subtle signals in a room, I send them on a “subtext safari.” I ask them to come back to our next session with a list of the specific things they noticed, like the list above. Just make a list of what you notice without any interpretation. Why? Because I want them to start to train their eyes and ears to pay attention. When you pay attention, you begin