



A Manager's Guide to **Team Trust**

How to build trust in a team
and achieve all the benefits of
high trust in the workplace.



For a team to succeed,

all the relationships within the team must share strong bonds of trust. At the center of all trusting relationships is the ability for people to be themselves, value themselves, and value each other.

Trust means different things to different individuals. Some definitions that we use at Core Strengths include:

- A belief in the reliability, competence, honesty, integrity, and positive intentions of the other person
- The freedom to be real and vulnerable with the other person without being judged

But trust isn't always evident on a team, especially after the splintering of the pandemic. Many people were hired remotely and have never met their team members in person. Many managers took one-on-one meetings off the calendar in an effort to reduce burnout and inadvertently reduced their ability to know their employees. Remote work eliminated the meaningful, trust-building conversations about topics outside of work.

In my work as a consultant, I've observed that both new and well-established teams have, on occasion, taken their team members' commitment for granted and now have to reactivate team relationships as they come out of the pandemic and into the new way of working.

At Core Strengths, we're the experts in workplace relationship-building, and in this guide, we share our best advice for managers who want to build trust in their teams. Trust won't happen overnight, but you'll see long-term benefits if you build these skills consistently over time.



Why do you need team trust?

To start, let's talk about why trust in your team is so important.

We exist in a work environment that's constantly changing and creating new challenges and opportunities. Increasingly, we rely upon a collaborative work environment where colleagues with diverse perspectives, experiences, motives, and strengths depend on one another to get work done.

When team members trust the environment they work in, they move faster and make better decisions. If you can build trust in a team, you'll gain commitment to the outcome and achieve great results.

Conversely, lack of trust means we tolerate each other but don't truly commit to participation in the relationship or team, which leads to a toxic work environment at the very minimum.



Benefits of team trust



Faster decision making



Greater commitment to outcomes



Open discussion and debate



Improved process efficiency



Giving everyone a voice



Learning from each other



Ability to be agile during change or challenges



Individual wellbeing



More input leads to better decisions



More healthy debate, less conflict



More innovation



Sharing of credit



Openness to failure



High accountability



Willingness to take risks



Palpable vitality and energy



Get to know each other.

In a remote work world, spending time getting to know each other is more important than ever. The best way to do so is through one-on-one conversations. To alleviate burnout, many managers removed one-on-one meetings from employees' calendars, but doing so is a mistake.

Spend some time talking with each team member about:

- Their **value systems, conflict triggers, and strengths**
- Things that energize and motivate them
- Things that frustrate and trigger them
- Their personal development goals
- Interests and happenings outside work
- Achievements they're particularly proud of
- Valuable skills or qualities they bring to the team





Connect team purpose to individual values.

With a clear understanding of the team's (and organization's) purpose and philosophy, team members will be empowered in their daily work to make decisions that align with them.

Have a group discussion or a series of conversations, and ask questions such as:

- What matters to each of you and why?
- Are you all clear on the team and organizational values?
- How do the community values link to your personal values?
- Do you believe we live and breathe the values?
- Is there a disconnect between the values we live and our aspirational values?
- What is your elevator pitch for the purpose of our team?
- How do you feel when you tell other people you're a member of this team?

A successful outcome is when each individual can connect their personal purpose to the values of the group. This gives the employee a sense of security, knowing their employer cares about them and their purpose and that their manager is committed to including them.



Establish team rules of engagement.

People feel more secure when a team has rules of engagement, defined as a set of guidelines for interaction that create guardrails when disagreements arise.

In a group setting, discuss as a team and agree on:

- What trust looks like on the team
- Where the team currently stands on trust
- How each team member defines trust
- What needs to be in place for each team member to trust others
- What makes each team member feel trusted
- Actions to improve and maintain trust





Make Relationship Intelligence a team habit.

Relationship Intelligence is the insight into your colleagues' personalities and motivations that makes your interactions more effective. The four skills of Relationship Intelligence are positive regard, service orientation, personal accountability, and strengths-based agility.

To make these four skills a reliable part of team interactions, make these actions part of the team's rules of engagement:

- Treat each other with dignity and respect
- Look for the positive intent behind everyone's behavior
- Let people get to know you
- Be curious about what others need
- Help others succeed by being generous with time and resources
- Share what you need to succeed and why
- Express gratitude when someone supports you
- Celebrate each other's successes
- Empower others to own their own choices
- Be agile in the use of individual and team strengths

To learn more about what Relationship Intelligence is and how it works, read [our blog](#).



Lead by example.

As a team leader, you'll have a relationship with each team member, but you want to avoid a situation where the team members look primarily to you for guidance and decisions.

Part of your role as a leader is to encourage and develop relationships between team members so they can succeed without you. To paraphrase Lao Tzu: team leaders are best when people barely know they exist.

To build trusting relationships with each team member, and to encourage trusting relationships amongst them, lead by example:

- Show loyalty
- Deliver results
- Demonstrate respect, regardless of the payoff
- Create transparency, never withholding information
- Right wrongs and don't defend the indefensible
- Don't underplay the problems or overplay the benefits
- Give credit to others
- Speak about people as though they were present
- Push yourself to grow and get better
- Confront reality, tackling the tough issues head-on
- Clarify expectations
- Hold yourself and others accountable



Lead by example.

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- Listen with your eyes, ears, and heart before acting
- Keep commitments
- Extend trust

This last point is nuanced. There's an art to learning how to appropriately extend trust to others based on situation, risk, and credibility. It's easy to extend trust abundantly to those who have earned your trust. It can be more difficult to extend trust conditionally to those who are earning your trust rather than withhold it because there's risk involved.

In addition, speak openly to your team about your propensity to trust (or lack thereof). If you don't trust people easily, tell your employees. Put them at ease that your frequent check-ins are a function of your nature, not a sign that something is wrong.



Encourage healthy opposition.

Conflict happens in healthy teams. So, how can we have conflict in the right way?

As a manager, be explicit that you don't want either passive agreement or personal conflict but that you encourage healthy opposition. Let people know that it's possible to disagree and still treat each other with respect.

People will commit to the team when they have the opportunity to speak and be heard, even when others disagree with them. It's rare to find a team environment where anyone feels like they can be the one dissenter, but the higher your team's trust, the more likely you can achieve this environment.

Give people the tools for healthy opposition by discussing:

- How people can have both strong opinions and open minds
- The best way to challenge each other appropriately
- How team meetings have been going

You can even designate an advocate who will be responsible for making sure people feel heard, respected, and valued in meetings.

In the moment of conflict, you can use these questions to diffuse the situation and bring everyone back to healthy opposition:

- Whether the team is hearing everyone's point of view
- What each person thinks is the best way forward
- What's most important to everyone about the situation?
- Is everyone prepared to accept the decision and move on?



Explore unconscious bias.

When we ask people who they trust and who they don't, there tend to be three main reasons for trusting or not trusting:

- Past experiences with that person
- Information about that person that others have shared
- Not knowing that person well enough

But we also just trust some people naturally. We all have unconscious biases that contribute to who we do and don't trust implicitly, based on culture, personality, race, class, gender, accent, appearance, mannerisms, and more.

As a leader, you need to explore your own unconscious biases to understand why you may or may not trust an employee. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who do you tend to assume has positive intentions and why?
- How much is based on objective information about their competence and attitude, and how much on subjectively liking them?
- Do you support, listen to, or make yourself available to, some people more than others?
- Who do you trust, what do you trust them with, and why?
- Who don't you trust, and why?
- If you don't know people well, is it easy or hard to trust them?



Promote psychological safety.

As leaders, we need to remember that people bring their whole selves to work, and they want to be seen, known, and valued. Especially in an environment of high turnover and many options for talented employees, it's incredible that your employees have chosen to bring their unique personalities, preferences, and work styles to create something meaningful at your organization.

In return for this gesture of trust, managers owe them **psychological safety**. Psychological safety is the shared belief that it's safe to take interpersonal risks. These risks include:

- Contributing
- Seeking connection
- Speaking up when there's a problem
- Sharing creative ideas

As a leader, you can set the tone for a climate of psychological safety through your own actions:

- Make others feel they belong
- Make every voice count, regardless of seniority
- Say "I don't agree" and "I'm not okay"
- Be your authentic self and give others the freedom to do the same
- Be willing to be wrong
- Take responsibility for mistakes



Promote psychological safety.

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- Listen with the intent to understand
- Give people your full attention and ask them to tell you more
- Be generous with genuine praise
- Speak up with your own ideas last

Creating a climate of psychological safety can pay dividends, especially during times of change and disruption.



Core Strengths can help you build team trust.

Building trust is a practice that requires patience and consistency. People's attitudes are influenced by their experiences over time, so even though these tips help speed up trust, the accumulation of positive experiences will solidify it.

The Core Strengths Platform gives your team access to insight about each other, so positive experiences become the norm, and you achieve improved communication and understanding.

Connect, compare values and strengths, and build trusting teams with technology at your fingertips.

[Contact us to learn more](#)