

Trust: A Gift Our Teams Give Us

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At InnerWill, we believe that building trust is essential to cultivating and sustaining strong relationships. Trust is a gift that our teams give us, but it's one that is continually being re-evaluated based on the choices we make moment to moment. Some people grant trust easily, assuming the best in us. Other people need to see trust earned before they are comfortable extending it. Regardless of how trust starts, the choices we make as leaders can either foster it or erode it away, and paying close attention to that impact is important.

Some of the most valuable feedback I've received as a leader has been regarding how my actions impact people's trust in me. Several years ago, I took part in an exercise that examined this subject closely, inviting each member of my team to describe the choices and actions I took that built trust with them, and the choices that damaged it. I learned that the critical thinking skill that I prided myself on was often getting in the way of building trust. When I met with my team members, they weren't always sure whether my questions about how they were doing were grounding in genuine curiosity and caring, or whether they were born from a desire to critically evaluate their choices and whether or not I agreed with them. Granted, both are things we must do as leaders, but the uncertainty about my motives made it difficult for people to be fully honest and open with me. Thanks to the feedback, I was able to shift my behavior to choose curiosity, caring, and support more often, and to be clear when a conversation was simply about evaluating performance. I had to be really intentional about not falling back into old patterns, but the impact was significant. And the act of asking for feedback and intentionally working to address what I had heard was a huge trust builder as well.

Most recently, I was reminded how crucial it is to not take trust for granted, even in long standing relationships. A choice I made to tackle a conflict was completely ineffective for another member of my

team. It was the trust we had built over time that got us through the conflict, but it also took a hit in the process... and reminded me that trust is a gift to be carefully tended.

As a leader, there are many ways to instill a culture of trust within your workplace – focusing on people first, living your values, and consistently receiving and giving feedback are just a few. How do you build trust with your team? Comment below or send me an email at sharon.amoss@innerwill.org.

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