



Trust and respect abroad

For organizations to succeed in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, hiring and retaining top talent is not enough. That talent must also be motivated and willing to work together to achieve corporate goals. Collaboration is key. However, fostering a collaborative work environment can be difficult when trust and respect are lacking.

Trust is present when employees know what their colleagues, managers and company will do in common business scenarios. A respectful workplace is one in which they are appreciated, valued and treated fairly. When trust is damaged and respect is lacking, conflicts, bullying and other unethical or challenging behaviours are more likely to occur. Morale, creativity and productivity decline while turnover, errors and missed opportunities increase. People are not willing to go that extra mile.

The challenge for any manager is that what is considered respectful or trustworthy in one culture or demographic – for example, eye contact, smiles or treating everyone as an equal – may be perceived as disrespectful in another. Managers can meet that challenge by understanding the cultural and generational expectations of team members and having strategies in place to promote trust, respect and collaboration.

Signs of a respectful workplace

So how can managers – especially those working in unfamiliar cultures – tell if there is a lack of trust and respect amongst their team members? Here are some signs common to many workplaces:

- Belittling or snide remarks and inappropriate jokes. Lack of sensitivity to differences – culture, race, gender, age, religion, disability, sexual preferences etc.
- Arguments and conflicts. People are telling tales, laying blame or complaining about colleagues.

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- Gossiping, rumours, excluding and bullying.
- Frequent miscommunication, important information is not being shared and/or a lack of cooperation.
- Increased absences or turnover.
- Credit and/or praise is not being given to deserving colleagues.
- Processes are being challenged or ignored.

How managers abroad can build trust

As stated, respect and trust can mean different things in different cultures. In individualist societies, such as the USA, Australia or many western European countries, employees make eye contact, smile freely, feel free to present their ideas, debate issues in meetings and ask for more information. Speaking up is not only encouraged, it's expected. But that's not usually the case in collectivist cultures like China or the UAE where the focus is on consensus and a directive form of management is more the norm. Debate, queries or questions can be seen as disruptive, disrespectful and even insubordinate.

In many Asian countries, the concept of 'saving face', or preventing public embarrassment, plays a particularly strong role. People go to great lengths to save face and they expect others to do the same. No one wants to have an idea rejected by their manager in front of colleagues and no manager wants to be questioned or challenged during meetings. Being responsible for a loss of face can destroy trust, as well as relationships, reputations and even jobs. But whether you're working in Canada or Columbia, Australia or Austria, Taiwan or Vietnam, there are things you can do to nurture trust and respect with employees, associates and clients. For example:

- **Lead by example.** Show culturally appropriate respect with your words and actions and expect the same from your team. Demonstrate your trustworthiness by keeping your word and upholding the values of the organization. Also show your employees that *you* trust *them*.
- **Communicate effectively.** Listen carefully to what employees say and be aware of non-verbal communication such as silences and body language. Be aware of what you say, how you say it, your tone of voice and your own body language.
- **Be consistent.** Showing consistency is one of the simplest ways of building trust throughout the organization. When a situation requires a new response, it's important to explain why.
- **Know when to focus on relationships and when to focus on deadlines.** Remember that in many cultures, building relationships is more important than meeting deadlines and in others, the opposite is true. In some countries, you may need to take time for small talk and in others you may be expected to focus more on tasks and timelines.

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- **Be flexible.** Be ready to adapt your leadership style -especially when managing teams in different countries. In some countries, employees expect strong supervision and feel comfortable with a directive, persuasive supervisor while in others, people want to take ownership of their work and operate more autonomously.
- **Be available.** This is especially important when managing people virtually. If you can't be reached immediately, respond as soon as possible.
- **Be careful of using humour.** In diverse or virtual teams, despite your best intentions, signals can get crossed, people may unintentionally be offended and you may alienate some team members.

Leading diverse or global teams requires managers to constantly shift gears and use different techniques to establish trust and foster respect. One thing all successful managers share, whether they're working in their home country or abroad, is their ability to inspire.

For more ideas on leading global teams, contact your Employer and Family Assistance Program.

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