

ARTICLE REPRINT

A Manager's Guide To Destroying Trust

Sales managers who want to build trust in their selling organizations might want to examine the results of a survey about trust conducted with managers and employees in the U.S., France, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Survey respondents revealed what managers do to destroy trust, and what they must do to build trust within their organizations. The truth in their answers appears so self-evident that it's not surprising that trust in managers is at an all time low.

Here are some trust-busting behaviors that many managers employ with great success:

- **Telegraph mixed messages:** Your employees will never know where you or they stand on any issue.
- **Get up each morning and ask, before you do anything, what you can do for yourself today:** Your employees will catch on, and they'll expect you to always first serve yourself in all situations.
- **Blame anything or anyone besides yourself when you screw up:** Your employees will soon learn that you were born perfect, remain perfect, and that you don't suffer mistake-prone humans well.
- **React immediately when you hear any bad news, and never, ever check the facts before you react:** You will train your employees to keep all bad news to themselves, keeping you in the dark, even about urgent issues.
- **Withhold the truth from or lie to your employees:** As long as you believe that what they don't know won't hurt them, and that there really is a difference between a "white lie" and a "whopper," your employees will learn to regard everything you say with automatic suspicion.

If sales managers don't want to destroy trust in their organizations, it seems obvious that they would be well served by simply avoiding all the above trust-busting behaviors as they work with their sales teams. But building and maintaining trust is perhaps the most difficult challenge facing most managers today. Fortunately, the survey respondents provided the following trust-building behaviors sales managers should employ if they want to build trust:

- **Always communicate openly and honestly, and don't distort information in any way:** Your employees will soon know you as a straight-shooter who delivers information "as it is," even when it is painful to deliver or hear.
- **Treat team members as skilled, competent associates:** Remember, in today's business climate, your team members don't work "for" you, they work "with" you.

- **Invite input from other sentient human beings:** Most people will offer opinions and suggestions if asked, and if they perceive their points of view will be heard, even if you might not agree.
- **When you promise and when you commit, always deliver – always – unless you unexpectedly find yourself in a hospital bed:** Breaking a promise or a commitment is perhaps the best way to destroy trust and credibility.
- **Eat your own cooking – or practice what you preach:** Your employees learn much more about you from watching what you do than they learn by listening to what you say. They may listen to what you say, but they will watch much more closely what you do and judge how closely your actions reflect what you preach.

The employees and managers who responded to this survey on trust are really telling all managers that what's at risk for managers, ultimately, is their credibility with their employees. Managers cannot have credibility with their employees if they don't have the trust of those employees. The survey provides excellent stop-doing and start-doing guidelines for sales managers who want to avoid trust busting behaviors and employ those behaviors that build trust among their sales team members.

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