



Releasing the potential of people in business

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

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Trust is in the news - to what extent do you trust politicians in the UK right now?

Trust has been eroded recently, for a variety of reasons that have been well documented. But what about your firm?

- Do you trust the firm that you work for?
- To what extent do your people trust the firm?
- What sort of impact has the economic down turn (including redundancies etc) had on trust?

We see trust as an increasingly important issue in professional service firms. This article explores the nature of trust, what our recent survey suggests, and what you can practically do to ensure other people trust you personally and the team that you lead or support.

What is trust?

We have recently published our first book which is called 'Brilliant Selling' (published by Prentice Hall and available in all good bookshops). We carried out some research for this book into what makes brilliant sales people successful. We discovered that these people (well over 100 of them) were well aware of the impact of trust in their commercial relationships. One of the key things they did to become and remain successful was to foster trust at every opportunity. To what extent do you focus on ensuring you and your team are trusted?

Trust. A short five letter word, much more difficult to define! It is a 'reliance on a person or thing'; it is a confidence or dependency, a willingness to depend on others. We have a strong sense of when we trust someone or can tap into our 'gut instinct' when we feel there is a reason not to trust. Trust has become an important topic of inquiry in a variety of disciplines. The way that professional service firms have dealt with the credit crunch has either improved trust, or lacerated it, depending on the strategic changes implemented and the way they have been communicated to staff.

Think about your own role – you are likely to be in HR, or L&D. If you are a lawyer or accountant – welcome!:

- How many people do you really trust in your team?
- How many people do you trust in your firm?
- How many external agencies do you trust?
- On what basis do you decide whether you trust someone or not?



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In your role you will be continuously attempting to influence and persuade. You might be getting a partner to attend a development seminar, suggesting a new HR process, ensuring that the appraisal system is followed. However you are influencing people, trustworthiness is of critical importance. Would you buy something from someone who you did not trust? Unlikely. And yet how do you guarantee that an internal client or external agency will trust you? This is trickier to define. We would argue that trust comes from 3 core areas:

- Competency (ability or skill)
- Integrity (honest, sound, moral)
- Benevolence (disposition to do good)

These three areas are highlighted in our own research, as well as in the research by Mayer et al (1995) and Rousseau et al (1998). We found that top sales people focused on these areas as they developed long term relationships.

For the rest of this article I want to focus on what you can do to ensure you develop trust.

Competency

We are talking about the skills, knowledge and ability to do a specific job, along with the interpersonal skills to succeed in an organisation.

In your internal role, it is critical you come across as competent. Partners and associates will be constantly filtering for this. Are you adding value by your skills, knowledge and behaviour?

Here are 5 ways you can increase your competence:

1. Get better at what you are good at. Strengths-based coaching is becoming increasingly popular and it is based on the premise that it is better to focus on what we do well. Identify your strengths and improve them.
2. Get more knowledgeable. Stay on top of what is happening in the firm, the market, and of course HR or L&D. Knowledge is well respected in the firms you work in.
3. 63 % of our respondees understood the importance of continuous improvement - choose to improve your skills with regular training.
4. Get better at presenting your ideas. When you formally present in your firms make sure you convince with a sound structure and use the credible voice – the attributes of this are: slow, pauses, down at the end of the phrase or sentence and monotone. You will **sound** more convincing if you do this.
5. Ensure people get to hear about your successes. When you and your team deliver on a project avoid downplaying it – tell people!



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Integrity

Adherence to sound moral and ethical principles - integrity represents a very rational reason to trust someone, as a sense of fairness or moral character provides a kind of long-term predictability.

- Do you demonstrate consistency with your promises, actions and behaviours?
- How confident do you feel that your boss keeps you fully informed about things that might concern you?

Integrity can be defined as acting consistently with what one says is important, in other words “walking the talk.”

Interestingly, 34% of our respondents mentioned honesty and integrity as a core strength in our survey. Integrity is often a core value in a professional service firm but how do you live it? How do you demonstrate integrity?

One simple way to lose integrity in the eyes of your clients is to over-promise and under-deliver. If you are involved in an internal project for example, avoid agreeing to an unworkable timeline. Better to negotiate for more time and complete within the timescale.

Benevolence

An act intending or showing kindness and good will; so often it is the small things that matter. Tom, my business partner, spent 2 years chasing a client whose first order was for well over £25,000. He did this by constantly being benevolent. For example the client was interested in mentoring and he dropped around a manual on the subject for no charge. We occasionally do taster sessions to allow clients to identify what we can offer. Equally we always provide welcome packs for all new clients. They cost us less than £50 but are the sorts of benevolent actions that will build trust.

Are you a do-gooder? It is a key component of trust!

There are lots of examples of benevolent actions that we see or hear of in professional development firms. Here are just five:

- Passing on a key contact and effecting an introduction
- Help with positioning presentations internally
- Supporting colleagues in tough times
- Giving up valuable personal time to complete a project
- Spreading the credit for a successful project amongst the team.



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A lot of research suggests that trust benefits relationships in a myriad of ways. We can influence the way in which we are seen as trustworthy by focusing on the three component elements – competence, integrity and benevolence. To find more about the results of our survey please visit www.brilliant-selling.com.

Finally we would be delighted to find out more about trust in your own firm – please let us have some war stories!