

10 Steps to Building Trust with Remote Teams



The Dinghy Effect

Remote employees can feel like a dinghy tethered to the main ship. The small boat has its purpose but is ignored until needed. Quite often, remote workers are away from the hubbub of office activities. They can feel isolated or perhaps think they are seen as non-essential. Add to the equation the lack of trust which has a negative impact and they feel worn out and dried up.

Without trust, performance will most likely be at an all-time low. A high turnover rate and low morale follow. When a team is not co-located, mistrust intensifies. Remote workers can become apprehensive about how they are perceived in an organization and feel they must overly prove their value. Self-doubt can creep in. They wonder what the next phone call is about.

Without trust, a remote team will be afraid to work together to help solve an issue or tough problem. Nobody wants to be seen as a failure or liability. Being afraid to share because others might think they are stupid or will steal their idea is as real as the fear that someone else will fix the issue and then promote themselves as having more value. People will become self-serving. Likewise, suggestions feel like personal attacks. People won't speak up or contribute. Even worse, follow-through drops due to lack of buy-in on whatever the team has decided. Being able to depend upon each other and hold each other accountable weakens. Tension grows. Burnout abounds. Mistrust leads to a toxic work environment.

We are better together. A transparent team has the best interest of others at heart and is willing to give others credit when they deserve it. Trust must flow throughout an organization regardless of where employees are located. Having strong relational and competence-based trust are foundational principles of any organization's success but especially in working remotely.

When an organization decides to enable remote work, a major focus should be to cultivate a solid foundation of trust. Creating a healthy remote culture, with trust at its core, is the most powerful way to not only enable high performance across an organization but to be the best organization you can be.

Taking ten simple steps, will help you build trust with remote teams and ultimately lead to high performance and revenue growth.

1

Be Present by Implementing Transparent Distance

For those working remotely, it needs to feel as though there is no distance between the them and those who are co-located. Build trust by making the distance disappear. Eliminate what I call 'The Dinghy Effect' by making remote workers feel they are an active part of the main ship.

Practice principles of engagement. Keep your team in the loop. Be present and easily available. Have on-going 1:1 video chat sessions and weekly team huddles. Meet more often with shorter check-in times just to connect. Prevent cliques at the office. Remote employees can feel left out and concerned about their future. Water cooler chats are gone and so is going to grab lunch together on a whim so, be more intentional about engaging those who are remote. Use creative and use technologies such as video conferencing and socialization tools to deliberately to replace important relationship building activities. When remote team members feel you and others are virtually present, the distance becomes transparent.

2

Lead and Serve with Honesty and Integrity

A culture of trust begins with authenticity, integrity, kindness, and good humor. A place where everyone feels valued. It fosters a strong rapport with the belief that we are all in this together. Regardless of your role in the organization, it is important to be a person who has a reputation of being honest and full of integrity. Others can trust that what you say is true. Knowing that you don't play games and are consistent and direct is a good foundation for building trust. Equally important is open communication. Being able to trust each other particularly at a distance requires greater communication and an honest relationship, one where others can depend on knowing you will do what's right even when nobody else is looking.

3

Create a Safe Place

Creating a safe place for those around you starts with honesty and integrity as its foundation. Trust grows as others learn they can be real with you and know they will be understood. Knowing they won't be made to feel inadequate or used as a rung in the corporate ladder matters. Nobody wants to be around someone who sucks the energy out of the room and drags them down every time they interact. Feeling as though you are on your own and can't depend on others is miserable. Issues become more magnified for a remote person left on their own. Create a safe place; one that is connected. A healthy culture is based on mutual trust, respect, and accountability. Be dependable, consistently following through with what you said you would do. Show you care. People trust when they feel respected without fear of humiliation; where they feel understood and others have their best interest at heart. Speak kindly. Create a virtual environment filled with joy where everyone feels safe.

4

Give Room to Excel

A healthy remote team does not allow the distance to drive wedges across their connected community, but instead uses the flexibility and autonomy so remote employees not only have a healthy work/life balance but have the freedom to excel. The worst way to

kill trust is to micromanage and try to retain a tighter control simply because you cannot physically oversee your remote team. Stringent rules kill productivity and trust. Show you trust your team to get work done. Take it one step further, make room for them to excel. Encourage individuals to try new ideas. When working remotely, people discover processes or strategies which don't work unless you are co-located. Give room for solutions to be found. In addition, encourage others to become proactive innovators, to shine as they develop new products and solutions for customers. A healthy remote environment built on trust not only empowers each team member to flourish in their giftedness and passions but gives room to excel.

5

Honor One Another

Who would not want to be on a team that takes delight in honoring each other?

When you honor someone, you are showing them respect. Work to understand each other and offer compassion. When remote, you more than likely have no idea what someone is going through nor can see how overwhelmed they may be. Give grace in case! Maybe they are frustrated by their disrespectful teenager. Maybe the workload just doubled, and they are overwhelmed. Be patient and show empathy. Focus on supporting as best you can when help is needed. Offer encouragement, speaking only what builds others up. Find something you admire in others and let them know. A kind word or virtual pat on the back goes a long way in honoring someone. Honor the flexible schedules of others. Perhaps a co-worker takes their kids to school and puts in more time after they are in bed. Since, the idea of working remotely is to increase productivity with the added benefit of a better work/life balance, show respect of their time with this in mind. If you honor one another, you will have a strong team bond and a culture of trust. If people care about one another, imagine what can be accomplished.

6

Be a Student of Those on Your Remote Team

Beyond knowing someone well enough to honor and respect them, dive deeper to understand. Getting to know your team well can lead to high-performance teams. While special thought needs to be put into developing healthy work relationships across teams, a deep trust will come when each person is invested in one another's' success.

Be a student of each person on your remote team and encourage your team to get to know each other. Learn about the competencies, giftings and passions of each team member. You will know who to call upon for support or when to give it. Work to know the intent and heart of others. By matching tasks or projects to various members' strengths makes for a much more enjoyable work environment and increased productivity.

7

Delegate according Skills, Competencies & Passions

Being a student of those you manage and serve not only enables you to delegate assignments accordingly but can build trust because they know you have their best interest at heart. Your team can trust you will not delegate a task they can't handle. Though you might give stretching assignments, they trust support will be provided. They also know you are working to delegate according to their passions, what they love doing. The best

composition of a remote team comes by understanding and leveraging the difference in personalities, giftings, and work styles.

8

Know Their Goals and Aspirations

In addition to time spent learning about passions and giftings or moving obstacles and providing support, trust will grow when you keep an individual's future in mind. Listen intently and learn about aspirations, hopes and dreams. Everyone aspires to be or become something better than where they currently are; to live a life of purpose. Be aware of what they see as most important. Is it traditional career success? Is security or financial freedom most important? Are promotion opportunities or salary increases? Is a more flexible work/life balance what matters most? Know what your remote team members want to achieve in life. Support others in their career trajectory or personal achievements. Not only does knowing goals and aspirations of each team member drive the growth of human capital for the organization and for your team, but managers can help them convert aspirations into specific measurable goals with a timeline for achievement. As you help them reach their goals, you are investing in their future thus deepening trust.

9

Offer opportunities to grow

Remote workers worry about being “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” when it comes to career advancement. Offer opportunities to grow through mentoring and upskilling or volunteering. Give room to make mistakes without the fear of being blamed or shamed. Organizations should take advantage of the next generation learning pathways of flexible and accessible online learning to enable their employees to upgrade their knowledge and skills. Remote workers can easily stack credentials by taking advantage of badging and certification programs available for upskilling. People trust in an organization that invest in them.

10

Seat on someone else's bench

By knowing the aspirations and goals, you can help others get noticed. Sometimes you can open a door of opportunities for them in their career. Get them a seat on someone else's bench. If you lead a team, it is easy to keep your eye out for recognition opportunities for your team members as well as to recommend them for new positions. In doing so, you will gain a reputation as a trusted leader and someone who helps others succeed.

Creating a culture of trust not only leads to retaining all of your best employees but it serves your customers with the highest level of quality. Greater job satisfaction equals less attrition; it generates a rich talent pool. A culture of trust makes working remotely a precious gift.