

Trust is the essential ingredient for successful teamwork. How can we avoid misunderstandings and build strong professional relationships?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. collaboration
2. a trainee
3. to lack
4. to boast
5. in good hands
6. a scholarship
7. competence
8. to bond with someone

Definition

- a. to develop a close connection or relationship with someone
- b. to speak too proudly about what you have done
- c. a person who is receiving training in how to do a job
- d. in the care of someone who is able to do something well
- e. the ability to do something well
- f. to not have something or not have enough of it
- g. an amount of money given by a school or university to an excellent student, so that he or she can afford the school fees
- h. working together with another person or group of people to achieve something

Building trust

Successful business requires collaboration and teamwork. For team relationships to work well, we need high levels of trust. But how we build trust can differ from person to person, culture to culture. Becoming aware of this can help us see how to improve trust with the people we work with.

When Valeria first met her international clients, she tried to bond with them by telling them about her family and her parenting style. She showed them photos of her children on her phone. Her clients felt that her behaviour was unprofessional and it was difficult for them to trust her.

During a team-building exercise, employees at a British firm were asked to share some personal facts. Kelly wanted to make a good impression on her new colleagues. She talked about how she was the top student of her year at high school and how she won a scholarship to university. The following day her colleagues spoke to each other about how uncomfortable they felt about her boasting.

On the first day of a course, trainer David aimed to reassure his new trainees that they were in good hands. He talked enthusiastically about the big corporations he had previously worked in and the famous clients he had trained. He mentioned the good feedback he'd received and showed the results he was able to provide for his clients. The participants on the training course found this information boring and irrelevant. They wanted him to begin the training and not waste time talking about his previous achievements.

Why did this happen?

There are many ways of building trust, and the approach we choose might depend on the relationship we are building, the culture we are used to and our personal preferences. However, if the methods we choose do not match the expectations of the people around us, it can lead to misunderstandings and negative assessments.

Let's consider different approaches to building trust. Author and speaker Richard Barrett suggests that there are two main components of trust: character and competence. One way of building trust is to show that we are caring, fair, open and honest human beings. In other words, we can build trust by showing our character. Another way to build trust is by letting others know that we are capable, experienced and have achieved excellent results. This way of building trust emphasises our competence.

It can be a useful exercise to analyse specific work relationships in terms of the character/competence model. You might think about the type of trust your relationship has and the type of trust your relationship lacks, in order to see how you can develop. Many of us use both approaches, depending on the context. For example, in a job interview, we might focus on establishing trust by demonstrating our competence through work experience. When we are working within a team, we might prioritise showing our character to form close professional relationships. By becoming aware of the context and how our conversation partners are responding to our trust-building efforts, we can adapt the way we build trust to better suit them.

When working at new professional relationships, it is important to remember that there is no one correct way to build trust. Making quick judgements about the speaker, like Valeria's clients, Kelly's new colleagues and David's trainees did, could stop trust developing and damage our chances of forming positive relationships. Instead, if we assume the best intentions behind what is being said and are generous in our judgements of other people, we create positive conditions for building trust at work.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. Cultural differences can mean that people try to build trust in different ways.		
2. Valeria hoped that talking about her private life with her clients would help them get to know her better.		

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| 3. Kelly's colleagues thought that she was lying about her achievements. | True | False |
| 4. David started talking about his previous experience in order to waste time. | True | False |
| 5. When people are used to different ways of building trust, it can cause problems in relationships. | True | False |
| 6. Richard Barrett argues that the only real way to build trust is to show your true character. | True | False |
| 7. You should be confident with your trust-building style and not worry about what other people think of you. | True | False |
| 8. We should remember that other people usually want to do good or helpful things. | True | False |

Task 2

Write the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Trust is very important for effective teamwork and (COLLABORATE)
2. Some people think it is to share too much personal information with colleagues. (PROFESSION)
3. David's trainees were not impressed when he talked about his previous feedback and results. (ENTHUSIASM)
4. People can have different about how to build trust at work. (EXPECT)
5. When people have different expectations about building trust, it can lead to (UNDERSTAND)
6. One way to build trust is to let people know about your past (ACHIEVE)
7. In a different context, we might showing our personality. (PRIORITY)
8. To give ourselves the best chances of building lasting trust, we should avoid making quick about other people. (JUDGE)

Discussion

Do you have a preferred way of building trust at work?

Answers

Preparation task

1. h
2. c
3. f
4. b
5. d
6. g
7. e
8. a

Task 1

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. False
7. False
8. True

Task 2

1. collaboration
2. unprofessional
3. enthusiastically
4. expectations
5. misunderstanding / misunderstandings
6. achievements
7. prioritise
8. judgement / judgements