

Why is it that when I buy a pair of hands, I always get a human being as well?"
Henry Ford

You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime.
Babe Ruth

The Bottom Line on Commitment and Trust

Obedience, compliance, and "going through the motions" are desirable traits.... in a machine. However, if your employees are anything more than cogs in a machine, then your success depends on their active engagement, commitment, and understanding.

Responsiveness, inventiveness, collaboration, judgment, persuasiveness, and attention have become requirements of most jobs. And yet, these characteristics cannot be bought or forced. Peter Drucker says, "Organizations are no longer built on force, but on trust." Force can only compel compliance, and compliance is not enough. Commitment is required, and commitment cannot exist without trust.

What Drives this Need for Commitment and Trust?

Complexity: It took Henry Ford two hours to train a new employee to be fully productive on an assembly line. Jobs were that simple then. Times have changed. Jobs today have a much larger "knowledge quotient"—driven by the increased complexity of products/services and of the technologies used to produce/provide them. Knowledge work requires that people engage their intelligence and imagination, and these qualities can't be forced. They only come with commitment.

Interdependence: Technology has driven us to become experts and knowledge workers, but most of us are painfully narrow in our expertise. We can only be successful if we draw on the experts around us. Tom Boyle of British Telecom has coined the term NQ, or network quotient—a person's ability to form connections with others. He argues that a person's NQ is now more important than their IQ. Networking and collaboration are essential given the scope of today's organizations. And collaboration is the opposite of coercion—it is given freely or not at all.

Challenges to Commitment and Trust

Turbulence: Commitment is derived from shared interests and shared tasks, but its key ingredient is trust. And trust cannot be manufactured or wished into existence—it must be built up over time. Today's business environment allows little time for trust to grow. The rapid pace of technological change, the mobility of employees in the "war for talent," and the volatility involved in mergers and acquisitions all threaten to overturn the promises and predictions that are the basis for trust.

Distance: Today's organizations are global and virtual. Distance can challenge the connections and conversations that are needed to maintain trust. It is hard to maintain open dialogue with people you never see, and who live in radically different time zones. The hope is that technology can overcome these challenges, but we are still learning how to build trust and commitment within the virtual environment.

Leadership: Managers are under increasing pressure to produce results at the same time that many of their skills have become suddenly obsolete. The skills that were appropriate to mass manufacturing, "plan, organize, direct & control" can actually undermine the performance of knowledge workers. Accountability and performance are more important than ever, but they must be obtained through explanation and involvement—much more conversation and communication than many managers expect. Managers now find that they must "manage without authority." They need new skills that can handle the intense involvement and give-and-take required in today's business environment.

Commitment, Trust and Bottom Line Results

Story #1: A family watches in sadness as firefighters mop up the remains of their burnt out home. A pizza delivery van pulls up next to them, and the driver jumps out with a couple of tasty smelling pizzas. "Those pizzas can't be for us," the mom says. "We've been sitting on this curb watching our home burn for the last two hours."

"I know," says the driver. "I saw you when I was driving by earlier. I figured you'd need something to eat about now. Take these. They're on the house."

Dennis McCarthy, author of *The Loyalty Link*, tells this story, then asks a couple of questions: First, "How loyal will this family be to the pizza parlor that helped them in their time of need?" And second, "What did the manager of the pizza parlor do to stimulate or encourage the kind of caring shown by the driver?"

McCarthy argues that the kind of initiative shown by the driver is either supported or undermined by the level of trust in the work environment. The employee needs to feel able to take a risk—will she be supported for winning a lifelong customer or will she be punished for giving away a pizza?

The bottom-line results of low commitment are all too apparent in most organizations. We call it "spiritual turnover" when a person has left in spirit, but their body keeps showing up for work. This kind of turnover is even more costly than physical turnover. The person goes through the motions of the job, but shows no initiative, creativity, or effort—unless you count efforts to extract revenge.

Story #2: The man in front of me was rude and obnoxious to the skycap who was checking luggage. Despite this, the skycap maintained a professional politeness, and sent the man running to catch his plane to Boston. When it got to be my turn in line I asked the skycap how he managed to stay so calm—whether he had a trick. His reply, "I just keep repeating to myself, 'Bags to Japan, Bags to Japan, Bags to Japan.'"

The World Wide Web has seen a proliferation of "lousy boss" sites, many of which describe how employees "strike back" when they feel mistreated. Check out <http://www.toxicboss.com>, for an example.

Building Commitment and Trust

As a rule, trust is earned one interaction at a time. People judge reliability, honesty, and common purpose over many interactions or "tests" in a rational way. However, there are a lot of exceptions to this "rational testing" model.

People never enter interactions or organizations with blank slates. Everyone begins with a reputation that is influenced by a wide variety of factors: ethnicity, gender, appearance, profession, job title, background, etc.

Laboratory experiments show each of these factors plays a role in whether a person will be trusted—sometimes this role is strong enough to be considered a prejudice. However, in most experiments a person's reputation recedes in importance as people gain actual experience working with him/her.

Measuring Trust

Researchers consider three dimensions of trust: breadth, depth, and resiliency. These dimensions do not always correlate. For example, public-relations strategies can increase the breadth of trust, but have little impact on its depth or resiliency. One-on-one meetings and time together during a crisis can increase the depth and resiliency of trust, but not its breadth.

Breadth: How widely the person or group is trusted. Is the person trusted at several levels of the organization? Across several divisions? Across different groups?

Depth: The risks taken on the basis of trust. Do you trust this person with your life? Do you trust this person with your career? Do you trust this person to order lunch for you?

Resiliency: The maintenance of trust in the face of countervailing evidence. How many times can this person surprise you or draw down on your relationship without losing your trust?

Organizational Variables that Affect Trust

Many organizational variables channel interactions in ways that can either build or undermine trust. Some of these factors include:

Frequency of Interaction: How often do you interact with a person? If the interactions are rare, then there are few opportunities to correct inaccurate prejudices or overcome bad interactions.

Formality/Structure: Does the organization turn interactions into rituals that communicate very little about the individual? Formality—formal garb, formal speeches, one-way communication, and an emphasis on titles and positions—take away from the kind of individual expression that is required to overcome mistrust.

Transparency: Are decisions made in an open and visible way? Is there free access to data? Openness and transparency go a long way in creating trust. Open decision making prevents some abuses, corrects others, and verifies that still others haven't occurred.

Communication Networks: Groups that are close-knit, share lots of information, and have dense social ties tend to gossip—and, contrary to its reputation, gossip tends to fix faulty judgments about trust.

Outside Pressure: Pressure from outside can force people to trust one another—as in a lifeboat. This “swift trust” is often repaid—making it a self-fulfilling prophecy, and a virtuous feedback loop—so this swift trust builds into deeper trust.

Actions that Increase or Decrease Trust

Actions that show distrust, violate expectations, or show intent to harm generally undermine a person’s willingness to trust in return. However, some actions have more impact than others.

Vivid, Memorable Actions: “Read my lips. No new taxes” Actions that stand out in memory—or get repeated on the nightly news—have a greater impact than other day-to-day activities. If managers rarely ever meet with front line employees, then every time they do, their actions will be vivid and memorable. Anger and humor are always vivid and memorable.

Significant Actions: Actions that have an important impact on a person’s life or career will have a greater effect on trust. Promotions, layoffs, and reorganizations are examples of these significant actions.

Defining Actions: When people behave against type or against their own self-interest, they define themselves for others. When the Malden Mills factory burned, and the CEO, Aaron Feuerstein, decided to rebuild the plant and to pay employees’ salaries during the downtime, he defined himself as worthy of trust.

Day-to-day Trust Building Activities

Interact’s training programs focus on the nuts-and-bolts activities that build trust. Our customers desire the kind of work environment that comes with trust and they need the bottom line results that can only be achieved when there is commitment and trust.

Addressing, not Avoiding: When people avoid problems—and the people causing the problems—then barriers grow. There is a Jamaican saying that, “If you don’t know someone, you will invent them.” Instead of addressing issues head-on, getting to know one another, and solving problems, people assume the worst, invent ogres, and let trust suffer. Interact participants learn positive ways to confront issues before they grow out of control.

Listening, not Presuming: When problems happen, people have a built-in bias to blame. This bias is so pervasive that social psychologists call it the "Fundamental Attribution Error". This blaming—when undeserved—is very destructive of trust. Interact participants learn models for listening and diagnosing the causes of problems—so that they don't "shoot from the hip".

Explaining, not Demanding: When you make a demand without explaining the reasons for the demand—"Because I'm the boss," "Because I told you to," "Just do it, I don't have time to explain,"—you are drawing down on your trust. It's fine to draw down on trust when situations require it, but the reservoir of trust is not bottomless. Interact participants learn to fill the reservoir by explaining, not demanding. Each time you explain the reasons behind a request, you show that you are reasonable and trustworthy. Little by little you fill the reservoir—knowing that emergencies will sometimes force you to draw down on it.

Asking, not Telling: When you show respect and trust, you also elicit it. This is one reason why employee involvement is so successful. Asking the employee to be involved shows respect and trust, and we tend to trust people who trust us. We certainly don't trust people who don't trust us.

Showing Concern, not Contempt: When a person is angry with you, you are facing a defining moment. The person expects you to match anger with anger—to strike back. Interact participants learn to calm the situation by showing concern instead of contempt. This is a tough skill, and requires extensive practice, but it transforms you from an enemy to a potential ally in the blink of an eye.

In the information age organizations turn knowledge into profitable goods and services. But how does knowledge become profitable? Through positive interactions among people—interactions that require commitment and trust. This commitment and trust underlies the initiative, creativity, and effort that are required for bottom-line success. Interact would be excited to help you achieve this success.