

Fostering Relational Trust

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RELATIONAL TRUST: The “What”

Relational trust refers to the confidence and mutual respect that exists between individuals within a relationship or group. It's built over time through consistent, honest, and supportive interactions. This type of trust is not just about the individual's reliability or competence but also about the strength of the interpersonal connection. In organizational or team contexts, relational trust plays a crucial role in fostering collaboration, open communication, and positive working environments.

Key elements of relational trust include:

- **Competence:** Trust that others can perform their roles and responsibilities effectively.
- **Integrity:** Belief that others will act with honesty and fairness.
- **Benevolence:** Confidence that others have positive intentions and will act in the best interest of the group.
- **Vulnerability:** Willingness to be open and share personal thoughts, feelings, or challenges, knowing that others will respect this vulnerability.
- **Consistency:** Regular, predictable behavior that reinforces trust over time.

In schools, workplaces, and communities, relational trust is often a key factor in creating a sense of safety and belonging, allowing people to take risks, innovate, and work together effectively.

RELATIONAL TRUST: The “How”

Building Relational Trust requires language that fosters openness, respect, and a sense of safety. The language we use in our interactions can significantly impact the level of trust in a relationship.

By incorporating these types of language into your interactions, you demonstrate trustworthiness, approachability, and genuine interest in creating a positive and supportive relationship. This approach encourages others to engage openly and builds relational trust over time.

BIG IDEA	WHAT TO SAY	WHY IT HELPS
Acknowledging and Validating Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say more...• So, what you're saying is...• An assumption you are holding is...• A belief/value you have is...• It sounds like you're frustrated,• I can see why that's important to you.	Acknowledging others' emotions helps them feel heard and understood, which is essential for building trust.
Expressing Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That must have been difficult for you.• I can imagine how you feel,• I'm sorry you're going through that.	Demonstrating empathy signals that you care about the other person's experiences and emotions, helping to create a supportive environment.

Clear & Honest Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let me be transparent with you, • Here's what I'm thinking, • I want to be honest about my thoughts on this. 	Being open and transparent fosters trust by showing that you have nothing to hide and are willing to share important information.
Encouraging Collaboration & Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your thoughts? • I value your opinion. • How do you see it? • What are ways we can partner on this? 	Involving others in decision-making shows respect for their input and fosters a sense of shared ownership, which strengthens trust.
Appreciating & Showing Gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I really appreciate your help because... • Thank you for your insight. This helped me/others to... • I'm grateful for...because 	Expressing gratitude helps reinforce positive behavior, showing that you value and respect others.
Offering Support & Help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support might you appreciate? • I am always here as a thought partner. • I'm confident we/you can make this happen. 	Offering support signals that you are there for the person, creating a foundation for trust, particularly in challenging situations.
Being Transparent About Mistakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I made a mistake, and I'm sorry, • I take full responsibility for that, here's what I'm doing to fix it. • I will try to do better next time. 	Acknowledging mistakes and being accountable builds trust because it shows that you are honest, self-reflective, and committed to improving.
Being Respectful & Nonjudgmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I respect your perspective. • I understand where you're coming from. • I don't agree, but I respect your opinion. • Would you mind explaining that another way so I can better understand? 	Using language that shows respect for differing views encourages trust by fostering an environment where people feel safe to express themselves.
Encouraging Vulnerability & Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I trust you and your thoughts. • I'm thrilled that we can trust one another. • I'm happy to share my thoughts if you would like to hear them. • I'm struggling with...and would appreciate your thoughts. 	When you are willing to be vulnerable and share your true thoughts and feelings, it invites others to do the same, building deeper trust.
Offering Constructive Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think this could be improved if we..., • You...which led to... • When thinking about...something you may want to consider is... 	Giving feedback in a respectful, supportive, and solution-focused way encourages growth without damaging trust.
Following Through on Commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will follow up on this, • I'll make sure this gets done, • You can count on me to handle this. • What's the timeline? 	Consistently delivering on commitments shows reliability and builds confidence, which are fundamental to trust.

Sources:

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- When can you trust "trust"? Calculative trust, relational trust, and supplier performance; L Poppo, KZ Zhou, JJ Li - Strategic management journal, 2016