

# How **Trustworthy** Are You?

Trust in the workplace is a measure of the quality of the relationships between team members. It is the glue that holds the team together. Trusting teams create an environment where it is safe to admit weaknesses, ask others for help, share ideas and opinions, and offer feedback to colleagues without fear of being judged or rejected. Without trust, teams often fall into some predictable dysfunctional behaviors.

Trust is defined in two ways. There is predictive trust, earned when people do what they say they will do, and there is vulnerability-based trust, where people are open and honest with one another. Without vulnerability-based trust, team members spend their time and energy concealing their weaknesses and mistakes from one another, and they jump to conclusions about the intentions, aptitude, and character of colleagues. Teams without trust fail to fully utilize the skills, expertise, and experience of colleagues which, in turn, prevents the team from achieving the best possible results. Trust matters.

## **✓ PERCEPTIONS OF TRUST**

Research shows we generally judge others to be less trustworthy than ourselves. In other words, it is likely that those you work with judge you to be less trustworthy than you judge yourself to be. What creates this perception? Trusting others is a choice we make. Trust comes quickly to some while others find it more difficult to establish.

Social psychologists say there is a complex mix of personality, experiences and culture that impacts the trust we have in others that has little to do with the other person. Our perspective on life, such as the glass half empty or half full, is another way to think about it. The glass half full individual finds trusting easier because they see the world as benign while the glass half empty person sees the world as full of threats. Each interaction is an opportunity to build or erode trust with colleagues.

## ✓ DEMONSTRATING TRUSTWORTHINESS

There is an intriguing line from a 1971 Ringo Starr song, “I don’t ask for much, I only want your trust. And you know it don’t come easy.” Perhaps trust doesn’t always come easy, but through our words and actions we can prove ourselves worthy of another’s trust. Take a few moments to answer the following questions and gain insight on how consistently you demonstrate trustworthiness.

### 1 DO YOU INTENTIONALLY CONNECT WITH OTHERS?

All relationships, even workplace relationships, have an emotional component that is critical to building trust. People need to know you care about them beyond the job title and their role and responsibilities. Get to know the interests and passions of your colleagues and share yours. Show you care by listening well, being empathetic, and offering your support. Remember that simple gestures – a warm hello, a nod, a smile – go a long way in making a connection and showing others they matter.

### 2 DO YOU SHARE YOUR SHORTCOMINGS?

No one gets it right 100% of the time. Each of us brings a set of strengths and a set of weaknesses to the team. Your colleagues know you are not perfect, so why pretend? Admit your mistakes, acknowledge you don’t have all the answers, ask for help, and recognize that other ideas may be better than your own. People will respect your honesty and willingness to be vulnerable about your shortcomings. Humility is an important virtue.

### 3 DO YOU KEEP YOUR PROMISES?

Delivering on your promises increases believability and believability builds trust. It lets others know they can rely on you. Be responsive to requests and hold yourself accountable to do what you say you will do and you will establish a track record of results. Avoid excuses to justify inaction and finger pointing or blaming when things go south and you will position yourself as a trustworthy colleague.

### 4 DO YOU TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH?

Perhaps you have met individuals who seem to exaggerate or spin the facts just enough to tip the scales in their favor. Or maybe you know someone with a habit of conveniently leaving out the details that don’t support their position. Communication that is a little less than honest erodes trust and creates doubt about your intent. Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and you will be respected for your honesty.

## 5 DO YOU WALK THE TALK?

People trust others who demonstrate consistency in what they believe, say and do. Ensure your actions are congruent with your values and beliefs. Model the behaviors you expect of others. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” When you consistently practice what you preach, you act with integrity and others will know they can count on you to do the right thing.

## 6 DO YOU GIVE OTHERS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT?

A trusting colleague will give others the benefit of the doubt and assume positive intent. Avoid jumping to conclusions and the cynicism it creates. Take the time to better understand others and the way they might think and act in work situations. When you acknowledge and accept the uniqueness of each individual, you create a whole new level of respect and admiration for what they bring to the team.

## 7 DO YOU AVOID BACK CHANNELING?

While it may be tempting at times to vent your frustrations with a colleague behind their back, it never leads to good outcomes. Go directly to the person who ruffles your feathers to show you value the relationship and are willing to have an uncomfortable conversation to make things better. Avoid office gossip and refuse to participate when others want you to engage in behind-your-back conversations.

### ✓ UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS OF TRUST

Trustworthiness is in the eye of the beholder. It’s important for teams to understand the personal triggers that create perceptions of trust and distrust among their colleagues.

The insights gained in understanding how perceptions of trust are formed can be a significant step in moving the team to higher levels of trust.

### ✓ BE COURAGEOUS

It is courage, not time, that allows us to build trust.

How courageous are you willing to be?