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16A Journey, Suite 200
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656-3317

toll-free 877·626·2776
local calls 949·859·4040
fax 949·855·2973

MANAonline.org

IN 'BLANK' WE TRUST

RETHINKING TRUST AND ITS ROLE IN BUSINESS

WHILE TRUST IS A FLEETING THING, THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL POWER IN IT. IF YOU LEARN TO **BUILD TRUST** AND **INCREASE YOUR COMPANY'S TRUST FACTOR**, YOU WILL ULTIMATELY ENHANCE YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

EDITORIAL | DANIEL BURRUS

DANIEL BURRUS

Daniel Burrus is CEO of Burrus Research and author of six books, including **Technotrends**. Over the past two decades he has established a reputation for his record of accurately predicting the future of technological change and its direct impact on the business world. For more information, visit **burrus.com**.

With billions of dollars in taxpayer bailout money, how much do you trust the leadership of the banks that, after record losses, gave themselves unprecedented raises? How much do you trust the leaders of Wall Street? **How much do you trust our government's ability to manage the money they have given to the banks or the auto industry?** How much do you trust the leaders of the auto industry to do the "right thing" with the bailout money?

This growing lack of trust can have serious consequences as we try to reverse the economic meltdown and bring about positive change and growth.

The one thing every business professional should be certain about, regardless of industry, is that **the future is all about relationships**. And the **one thing all relationships need to survive is trust.** In fact, trust is the glue that holds the net-enabled knowledge economy together. The more trust you have with someone, the more powerful the relationship. The less trust you have, the weaker the relationship.

In business, trust is something you must earn. You do so by displaying three universal values: **honesty, integrity, and delivering on promises.** In fact, no matter where you travel around the world and regardless of religion or culture, those three values are the same.

Because people worldwide place such a high emphasis on trust, many companies cite "trust" in their list of organizational values. And by nature, most people are indeed trusting of others. But because trust is assumed, many companies have a tendency to implement strategies that undermine trust. They fail to make trust a conscious part of their strategy. Instead, trust stays in the back of their mind, and that's when problems begin.

For example, call your telephone company or Internet service provider today and tell them you're going to cancel your service and go with a different provider. Chances are that in order to keep you as a customer, they'll respond by offering you a lower rate. Does that make you trust them more? No. In fact, you'll probably feel that you've been getting ripped off all these years and should have gotten that lower price all along. Policies such as these train customers to distrust the company.

But **trust mishaps** don't just happen with external customers and the public; **they also happen internally with employees.** A few years ago one major company laid-off a few thousand employees. Rather than meeting with people individually, laying them off with dignity and providing support services, the company had their security guards tell those being laid-off the bad news, gave them their paperwork, watched them clean out their desk, and then escorted the former employees out the door. The employees still working there learned one important lesson that day: Never trust upper management.

Despite their actions, companies that violate trust are not evil. Rather, they're simply not thinking about trust when they lay out a course of action or outline policies. Therefore, in order to foster trust in your organization, consider the following strategies.

NEVER ASSUME TRUST.

Whenever you're bringing about any change, either internally or externally, create a "trust meter." **Think of this trust meter as an old fashioned gas gauge**: On the far left is no trust, and on the far right is full trust. Before you implement any change, ask yourself, "Between us (the company) and the people who will be impacted by this decision or policy, where is trust currently?" Mark it somewhere on your trust meter. Then ask, "If we implement this change in this way, what will happen to that trust?" Mark whether you think trust will go down, stay the same, or increase.

If trust will go down, *don't implement the change in that way*. This doesn't mean don't enact the change, decision, or policy. It simply means not to do it in the way you've outlined. Change how you implement the decision or policy so trust stays where it is. And if anyone on your team can come up with a way to get the trust meter to increase when implementing the change, reward that person openly, because you want that behavior repeated. Remember, **when you raise the bar on trust, your organization will thrive.**

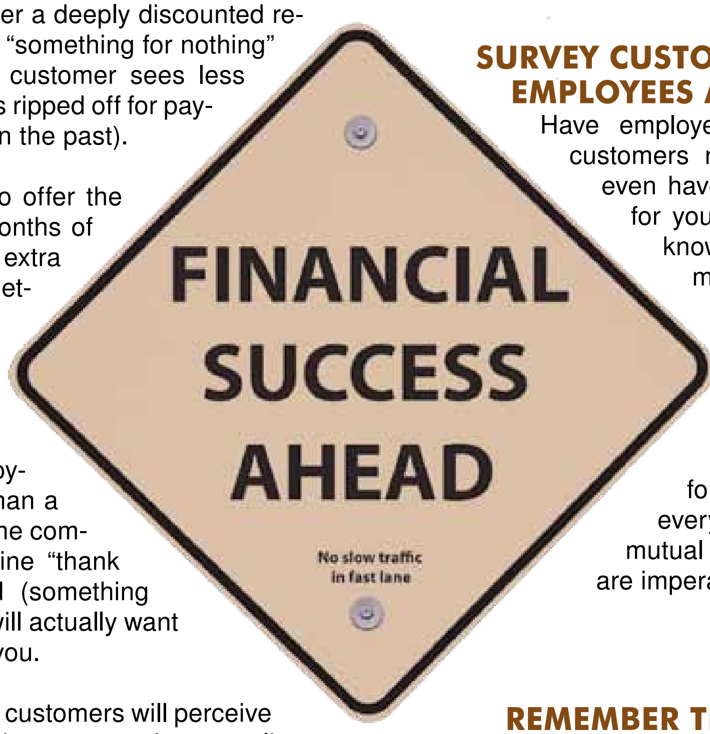
WHEN YOU RAISE THE BAR ON TRUST,

WHEN THINGS ARE BAD (IN THE ECONOMY),
RELATIONSHIPS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT!

OFFER MORE VALUE TO REWARD LOYALTY.

As you decide what policies and changes your company will implement, think in terms of adding value rather than giving something for nothing. For example, one newspaper publisher sent out a $190 yearly renewal notice to customers. Those customers who didn't renew by the deadline received a phone call about the renewal. The newspaper employee offered the customer a deeply discounted renewal rate of $90. This is the "something for nothing" mentality, because now the customer sees less value in the product (and feels ripped off for paying the higher renewal price in the past).

A better strategy would be to offer the customer a few additional months of newspaper delivery for no extra charge. So now instead of getting 12 months of newspaper delivery for a certain price, the customer gets 15 months of service for that same price. When you think in terms of rewarding loyalty with more value rather than a lower price, people feel that the company is giving them a genuine "thank you." They feel appreciated (something everyone wants to feel) and will actually want to keep doing business with you.



Therefore, pinpoint what your customers will perceive as added value and make that a part of your policy change.

THINK IN TERMS OF THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE.

No matter how hard you try, sometimes mistakes will happen and trust will decrease. But rather than accept the lower level of trust, see this time as an opportunity to raise the bar on trust with those who are feeling less of it. For example, suppose you have a major disagreement with one of your key principals. You both think the other is wrong. This is when you need to step up and say to the principal, "We've had a long and trusting relationship with you and we don't want to lose that. What can we do to make you happy?" The answer you'll hear will likely be more than fair because the conversation has now shifted from a confrontational to a relational one. Everyone will come out a winner.

SURVEY CUSTOMERS AND EMPLOYEES ABOUT TRUST.

Have employees, business partners, and customers rate you on trust. You could even have them fill out the trust meter for you. With this feedback, you will know where you stand and can make adjustments. All too often, trust is undermined and the company and its leaders are the last to know, and this can be disastrous. If you are the first to know, you can make corrections before it is too late. This also shows everyone that relationships and mutual trust are not just words, they are imperatives.

REMEMBER THAT TRUST PROVIDES A BIG ADVANTAGE IN ANY ECONOMY.

Too often, customer service and support are cut back when the economy heads south. People are laid off with no warning or support. Face-to-face customer meetings are cut back or canceled. But this is a time to do the opposite. When things are bad, relationships become more important! Doing things *better* stands out more. Becoming a trusted advisor versus a salesperson stands out. Going the extra mile is more unique.

When you increase trust, your relationships will deepen. This will allow you to bring about change faster and more effectively, and to improve your business.

YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL THRIVE.