

AF Negotiation Center Quick Tips on Trust

Drawn exclusively from *Common-Sense Practices for Building Trust and Preventing Escalation of Workplace Tensions*, John Settle, Copyright N.D. (John) Settle & Settlement Associates, LLC.

John Settle, an attorney and expert mediator, provides ideas below on building trust. Trust is a key factor in negotiations and your perception of trust will guide you through the process.

- **Hold people accountable for quality performance, but be clear on expectations.** (“If you don’t know where you’re going, you might not get there!”) Remember that expectations are far more “in the moment” than an annual performance plan.
- **Try for transparency in your objectives, actions, and reasons for your actions.** Explain the “what” and the “why.” People who don’t understand your reasons may make up their own.
- **Be honest.** Tell the truth, even if unpleasant or painful – but display respect and use good communication techniques. Talk straight, “walk your talk,” keep promises, & take responsibility for mistakes. Continuous self-inquiry: “how do I do the right thing?”
- **Don’t let manageable concerns blossom into difficult problems.** Respond timely to issues and complaints -- link your responses clearly to their actions, and be specific.
- **Show interest & get to know the people you work with,** let them get to know you, and be continuously accessible, both physically (“MBWA”) and emotionally.
- **Recognize that employees differ from each other (and you), but --**
 - Avoid or suspend your preconceptions
 - Base decisions on objective factors and behaviors
 - Be aware of how things look -- appearances count (“perceptions become a person’s reality”)
 - Strive for consistency in the way you treat people.
 - “Inconsistent treatment based on impermissible factors” is the definition of an EEO violation.
- **Be human, be positive, and keep your sense of humor.** Try to keep some perspective, and display appropriate empathy (put yourself in their shoes for a moment).
- **“Take heat, shed light.”**
- **“Sleep on it”** before reacting to provocation -- angry and threatened people (including you!) can react provocatively (especially true for e-mail -- more below).
- **Show gratitude, recognize good work, and do so timely** (“catch people doing something right!”).
- **Make it easy for the other person to see things as you see them.**
 - Be careful of the natural tendency to become defensive in response to complaints (can lead you to over-reaction and retaliation).
- **Treat people respectfully and maintain their sense of self-worth.**
 - “Praise publicly, reprimand privately.” Criticize behaviors rather than the people. Stay objective; avoid acting on speculation about their motives. Extend your trust to them.
- **Emphasize the future and solutions, and try to escape problems and the past.**
- **Seek the best outcomes for people and the organization, not merely winning!**
- **LISTEN,** and use your active listening skills to find out and feedback information on other people’s real interests and needs.
- **Cautions on use of E-MAIL**
 - Advantages of e-mail: You can send it instantly, you create a record, and the message easily can be distributed widely.
 - Disadvantages of e-mail: You can send it instantly, you create a record, and the message easily can be distributed widely.
- E-mail eliminates major, valuable aspects of direct human interaction (tone of voice, body language, eye contact, and “just-in-time” feedback and clarification). Thus, E-mail can be like a Rorschach (ink-blot) test -- an ambiguous set of squiggles which the reader interprets with his/her own meaning, history, preconceptions, and suspicions. This can create misunderstanding, particularly for messages that occur in the context of tensions. Also, E-mail may give a busy manager a too-easy excuse to avoid personal contact in the name of efficiency and time-saving.

So: while e-mail is here to stay and is great for simple, purely informational messages –

Try to speak directly with a person if there is any environmental tension or emotional byplay between you and that person; or

- If you must send an e-mail, don't fill in the "to" line until you have taken a moment to re-read your message and think about it, and perhaps have someone else read it and react.