CREATE A CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION

Forbes magazine cited a *Net Impact* survey that found "employees want to work at a company whose values match their own." 58% of the survey's respondents said they would take a 15% pay cut to work for an organization "with values like my own."

But how can organizations and employees know they share the same values? Through open and honest communications designed to build trust. Here we speak to industry experts about how organizations can create this culture of transparency.

Can You Spot Transparency?

Transparency is a lofty word. And within organizations, it's not always easy to identify. As defined, transparency involves open and honest communication that flows in two directions. But does that mean leaders must share everything? Is it possible to overshare? What does it look like to be transparent?

Shannon Rios Paulsen, executive coach and author of *The Connected Exec: How to Increase ROI with Coaching*, explains that a better way to look at transparency is to look at how its presence (or absence) makes people feel.

"Having a culture of transparency, at a foundational level, means people feel safe. They feel secure in being creative, innovative, and contributing to the organization and its goals," she says. "That sense of safety creates a connection with leadership and the team so that the team can be most productive."

Safety allows employees to relax. If employees feel safe in a setting and, there is a sense of calm, then there is little need for anxiety. That she says, leads to better performance.

Jackie Bartoletti, a senior communications executive and the owner of Bartoletti Communications, says that transparency occurs "when there is an alignment on goals and priorities and when values are woven into your day-to-day."

That requires leadership to talk about values and reward or recognize employees for embodying them. It's the process of having those conversations that leads to trust. When employees feel comfortable enough to speak up and to be involved, when they aren't scared to ask questions—and leaders aren't afraid to provide answers—then you have achieved a culture of transparency.

Is There Enough Trust within Your Team?

Take this quick test. Does your team practice these 5 characteristics of transparent communication on a regular basis?*

- **Communication**–If your team members don't have a habit of open communication and information sharing, your team lacks trust.

- **Honesty**–If your team members hide things, calculate or manipulate information, your team lacks trust.

- **Feedback**–If your team members defend themselves when being evaluated, your team lacks trust.

- **Respect**–If your team members don't clear up conflicts and arguments right away, your team lacks trust.

- **Admitting wrong**–If your team members are afraid of making mistakes, your team lacks trust.

https://blogin.co/blog/transparent-team-communication-why-and-how-to-embrace-it-69/

Common Barriers to Building Trust

91% of Millennials expect to stay in a job for less than three years, according to the Future Workplace *"Multiple Generations @ Work"* survey of 1,189 employees and 150 managers. That means they will hold 15–20 jobs throughout their working lives. That also means the companies that they will be rotating through will lose significant sums of money in recruiting and training costs. Organizations today need to find ways to encourage employee loyalty.

Employees with a high confidence level in their company's senior leadership are 5 times as likely to remain with their employer more than 2 years compared to employees with no confidence *(Qualtrics)*

"No company will ever have enough money to keep all the employees it needs," cautions Rhonda Morgan, former vice president of employee communications and engagement at a computer software company. "You have to rely on a culture that makes people want to stay."

One way to do that is to build trust; employees are hard-pressed to leave organizations and teams where they feel empowered, valued, and heard.

Ms. Morgan cites two common barriers to building trust:

1. Beliefs about who should be entrusted with information. Often, there will be a misconception held by top management, especially at the president and vice-president levels, that people at lower levels of an organization cannot be trusted with certain information.

2. Fears related to position and standing. Some also believe that knowledge is power. Holding information close or being "in the know" assures people of maintaining a certain position within an organization.

Unfortunately, employees are observant.

"If you're telling people that there isn't going to be a layoff, but they see you are cutting back on expenses and not buying the donuts, they'll draw their own conclusions," Ms. Morgan says. Better to be straightforward and direct by explaining that the company needs to tighten the purse strings to compensate for budget shortfalls. When employees are given details about the day-to-day, they do not have to read between the lines or divine the tea leaves.

Ms. Rios Paulsen agrees. "Sometimes when leadership isn't transparent, it's a control issue, and it's about job preservation. They're thinking, 'It makes me valuable if I don't tell other people what I'm doing or what's going on.' Ironically, when leaders are truthful, things operate well, and employees can live up to their full potential. But when leaders say one thing and do another, that leads to uncertainty and low performance."

"As an employee, if I know I'm in the loop, and I'm clued in, then I know what I need to do to help the company or team get there. I'm motivated to do my role to make it happen," Ms. Bartoletti adds.

46% of employees said they were not confident that the information provided by their employer regarding the overall health of the business is a fair representation of reality.
(Kimble Applications)

Removing Common Barriers

Here are three tips for removing those barriers and moving closer towards transparency and trust.

1. Start small

Showing and developing trust can be applied to all types of situations and at all levels of an organization. Ms. Morgan gave a simple example of trusting employees to report and manage their paid time off (PTO). While she wants to know when her team members will be out and unavailable, she sees no need to micro-manage the process. Companies that offer unlimited PTO, for example, send a strong message of trust to their employees.

She also describes simple ways to weave trust into workflow expectations.

"We write a lot, and we have team reviews of everything we produce. What I don't let them do during reviews is to change something for stylistic reasons. They can only make changes for factual reasons or clarity because that builds trust. It shows everyone on the team that their work is going to be valued. It will only get corrected. You can start in little steps like that to build trust at all levels."

2. Ask for help

Being transparent doesn't mean wildly or randomly sharing information. Your organization may have a policy that supports transparency, but you will encounter individual scenarios where you must plan how you will be transparent. This may involve creating mini communications plans and analyzing the implications and timing associated with sharing information.

"Every situation is different," Ms. Rios Paulsen says. "You need to decide, 'How can I do this well?' One option might be to ask the team what they think. It might not always be positive but hearing them out is essential to gaining their trust."

"Be deliberate about what you're sharing. Understand your reason for doing it and the actions you anticipate as a result," says Ms. Bartoletti. "Also, be intentional in how you deliver information, whether it's spoken in a townhall format or written in an email or memo."

If you're not comfortable determining what needs to be said, or how the information should be presented to employees, Ms. Rio advises working with the HR and internal communications teams to shape the message.

3. Guard it with your life

Most people enter relationships with a relatively trusting nature, although a select few may be skeptical from the start. Yet in nearly all cases, when people give you their trust, and you do something to lose it, it will take an inordinate amount of time and energy to recover and build it back. Additionally, if you haven't adequately built up trust within your organization and you face a crisis, then you will likely have two distinct problems on your hands.

"If your team doesn't know about an issue and a crisis hits, then they're not going to be ready to flex. You'll end up with an internal and external crisis happening at the same time. Instead, if you have been sharing details all along, it's more about focusing the conversation. You'll have your tools and support in line to weather the crisis and safeguard trust," Ms. Rios Paulsen says.

The good news is that trust isn't a quality you either have or don't have. It's a skill that can be learned and improved upon at all levels of an organization. And while it may take some hard work, organizations that operate with a high degree of trust and transparency at the core of their culture will find their employees appreciate those efforts – a full 69% of those surveyed in the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer think that building trust should be a top priority for businesses today. Why not make it yours!

For additional information, please call 1-888-440-7126 or visit business.hughes.com.

HUGHES®
An EchoStar Company

business.hughes.com

11717 Exploration Lane
Germantown, MD 20876 USA