

May 26, 2016

LOL Journal - Trust Repair Kit for putting out Kitchen Fires

Last LOL on “Treat Trust issues like kitchen fires” sparked a lot of interest. (Couldn’t resist 😊) And with good reason. Trust is essential to a culture’s “workability.” That is, the ability for people to work well. My short definition of culture is workability. If your firm has created an environment where staff members can work well—few distractions, limited whining, clear assignments—then you have good workability. And a key ingredient is trust.

The last LOL suggested that a major problem with organizational trust is maintenance. Most of us maintain our health (annual check-ups), our cars (oil changes), and our teeth (flossing, brushing), but we ignore trust maintenance. Don’t. (So, pause for a minute and ask yourself, “Do I have a trust issue with any colleagues?”)

If so, treat minor trust issues like kitchen fires: tend to them. Put them out. If you don’t, they tend to worsen. Think of trust issues more like cancer than the common cold. The former needs treatment, the latter gets better on its own. I included in the prior LOL the research of John Gottman, who identified four ways that trust predictably erodes: defensiveness, criticism, stonewalling, contempt.

So, curious readers responded: “We agree. Trust maintenance matters. What’s the prescription?” Remember, “Stop, Drop and Roll?” Well, for trust issues, it’s a little more complicated. But FCG has designed a Trust Repair Kit which will help.

Trust Repair Kit

1. Step one is to understand the main factors that build or destroy trust. They are given below and are pretty self-explanatory.¹ Nothing tricky here:

¹ Adapted from Hurley’s “The Decision to Trust” article in Harvard Business Review. For a copy of the article, ask Liz at lseveryns@focusgroup.com

Situational Factors: These factors concern aspects of a particular situation and of the relationship between the parties. These are the factors that a trustee can most effectively address in order to gain the confidence of trusters.

“Trustee” Factor	Description	Score (1=low, 10=high)
Alignment of Interests	When people’s interests are completely aligned, trust is a reasonable response. People have both common and unique interests. A good leader will turn critical success factors for the company into common interests that are clear and superordinate.	
Benevolent Concern	Trust is an issue not because people are evil but because they are often self-centered. The manager who shows benevolent concern – who shows employees that he will put himself at risk for them – engenders not only trust but also loyalty and commitment.	
Capability	Similarities, aligned interests, and benevolent concern have little meaning if the trustee is incompetent. Managers routinely assess capability when deciding to trust or delegate authority to those who work for them. Capability is also relevant at the group and organizational levels (are there processes for fair compensation, uncovering unethical behavior, consistently meeting customer needs, etc.?)	
Predictability & Integrity	A trustee whose behavior can be reliably predicted will be seen as more trustworthy. One whose behavior is erratic will be met with suspicion. Here the issue of integrity comes into play – that is, doing what you say you will do. Trustees who say one thing but do another lack integrity. The result is distrust.	
Frequency of Communication	Open and honest communication tends to support the decision to trust, whereas poor (or no) communication creates suspicion. Miscommunication causes employees to feel betrayed, which leads to a greater breakdown in communication and, eventually, outright distrust.	

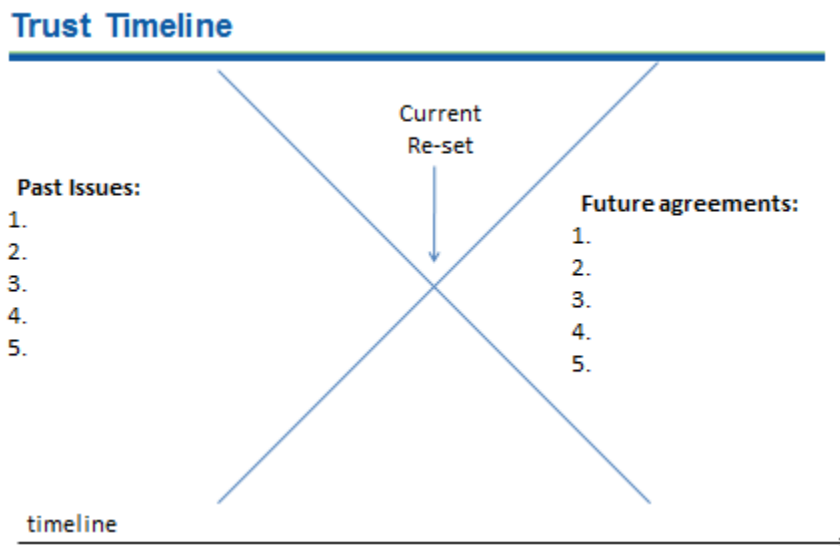
- Step two is to create a grid that has these factors on one axis and the names of your team mates on the other. The grid in our Trust Kit looks like this (the kit is available from Liz at lseveryns@focuscgroup.com):

Factor								
Alignment (common interests)								
Concern (caring)								
Capability (competency)								
Predictable (consistent)								
Communication								

- Step three is to assess your trust relationship with each team mate. Use the grid to think through the trust factors with each team member. Rate each factor using a simple 1-to-10 scale. If all the trust factors are “9 or 10” then good. But be very honest with yourself in this

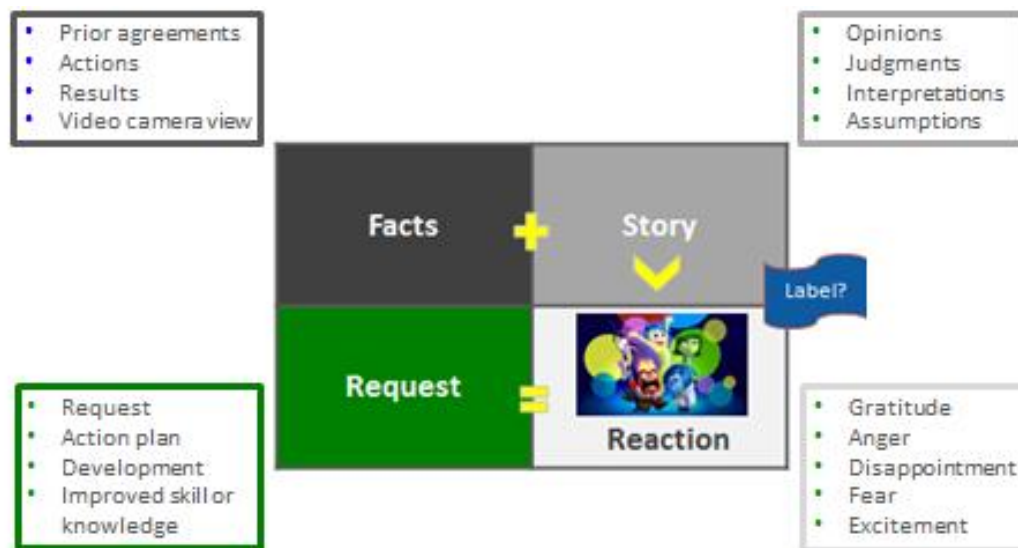
assessment. No grade inflation! Only an honest thumbs up counts. In the event that you've given one or more team mates an "8" or lower rating, then use the worksheet below for each of these scores. Write down specifically the nature of the trust issue, such as:

- late to meetings consistently
- takes credit for other people's work
- overpromises and under delivers



Use the trust factors to identify which "category" the trust issues falls in. For example, "overpromises, but under delivers" feels like an "integrity" issue. Words and actions are not lining up. The goal of the Trust Timeline worksheet is to clarify your thinking before you discuss the issue with the other person. When cleaning up trust issues, be sure to do your homework. Know your facts. Be able to "cube" the discussion, which is described in the next step.

4. When you've reflected on and written down the incident that affects trust, then use the "cube" to get it precise. The elements of the cube are:



Using the cube with the overpromise/under deliver story might look like this:

- a) **Facts:** “I’ve noticed a pattern of failure to deliver on promised assignments. Two of the most recent examples are the ABC report and XYZ report. Do you agree with my facts?” (If yes, continue. If no, you need to discuss until you can agree on what you both consider facts.)
- b) **Story:** “My story is that you really want to please everyone, so you say YES to all requests.”
- c) **Reaction:** “I have two reactions. I get frustrated when you don’t deliver. And, more importantly, I notice I’m beginning to not trust your word. You say you will deliver, and I think, ‘we’ll see.’ I want to replace that with a high trust relationship.”
- d) **Request:** “My request is that you get more mindful around your agreements, so that you can deliver as promised.”

After you’ve cubed your trust concern and expressed it to your colleague, then you can hear their response and see if there were any misunderstandings. Remember to take full responsibility for your share of the relationship. Perhaps you have been unclear in your agreements. Or perhaps you’ve developed a reputation that suggests, “You’d better say YES to whatever I ask for...or else!” In other words, you may be unintentionally creating the problem. People see you as a bully. The goal of the Trust Timeline worksheet is to discuss and “let go” of the past issues, so that you can do a re-set. In the example we’ve been using, the re-set might take the form of a future agreement which sounds like, “I will be careful not to overpromise. I will deliver on the assignments I’ve agreed to.”

From that moment of re-set, the key is to monitor and track the new agreements and make sure they are kept. “Trust but verify” is appropriate. Remember to appreciate people who are

honoring their agreements. As with any behavior modification, reinforcement is crucial to success. Immediate feedback—using the cube—is important in either direction: success or failure in keeping the new agreement.

You can understand why trust often breaks down in organizations. This maintenance work is not glamorous, and it is work. It takes time and attention. And courage. Most of us are conflict avoidant, and this repair work may feel confrontational. So, to be effective you must remind yourself continually that high trust environments are crucial to success. And low trust environments fuel drama and feel toxic. Then summon your courage and address the issue.

In most cases trust can be repaired if addressed early.² Be smart enough to put out the kitchen fires before they become 5-alarm blazes. Early detection and treatment is the answer. Hopefully, this Trust Repair Kit will help. Let Liz know and she'll send you the soft copy of it. lseveryns@focuscgroup.com.

Curiously,

JW

² If the trust issue has reached the “stonewalling” or “contempt” level, then a third party may be needed. FCG has facilitated sessions like these successfully. So, don't give up hope. But if things have gotten really bad, bring in a neutral and skilled third party to repair the trust issue.