

REBUILDING TRUST: META'S TOP TEN PRINCIPLES

Restoring trust is the most difficult enterprise any leader can undertake. Trust eroded takes a long time to rebuild and demands maximum effort. It is unfortunate that trust does not arrive in our portfolio of skills when we accept our role as leader. Here are Meta's Top TEN Principles.

1. **Model The Way: The Who Is More Important Than The What**

Leaders have to show the way. When a CEO's trust is broken, he has to come clean with his mistakes and failures. In more serious scandals like the one committed by Tyco's CEO Kowalski, a new CEO has to be installed to restore trust in the organization. As Max De Pree, former Chairman of Herman Miller Company, has so eloquently put it, *"Trust cannot be bought or commanded, inherited or enforced. To maintain it, leaders must continually earn it. Trust grows when people see leaders translate their personal integrity into organizational fidelity. At the heart of fidelity lies truth telling and promise keeping."*ⁱ

The new CEO's first task is to listen and get a good grasp of the factors that have eroded the trust. Don't lose sight of what counts in business: leadership, strategy, value propositions, and customers. *"For trust to be maintained over time, leaders must demonstrate competence in their jobs – like anyone else,"*ⁱⁱ says Max De Pree.

2. **Watch Your Trust Quotient: Don't Let Down In Creating A Trust Climate**

Admitting mistakes or changing the CEO is an important first step. The next thing to do involves promoting a trust climate: credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie. Leaders must be vigilant in rebuilding these trust factors. They must be intentional, sincere, and be pace-setters in this. Once again, from the wisdom of Max De Pree, *"Trust springs from a serious pursuit by both leaders and followers... Trust in organization depends on the reasonable assumption by followers that leaders can be depended on to do the right thing."*ⁱⁱⁱ

3. **Major In The Major, Watch The Minors: Small Things & A Clear Vision count**

Recreating a clear vision and setting fresh goals are critical in restoring confidence and making staff become more committed. This must be communicated consistently. Research shows that people need to hear at least six times before they understand the meaning of visions and goals. At the same time, don't neglect small things like affirmation, kindness and support. These are like glue to bonding relationships.

4. **People Matters: Back To Basics**

Caring for people is the leaders' primary responsibility in rebuilding trust. They need to have a genuine concern for their staff by challenging them to be part of the rebuilding process, by reorganizing the teams to get their best input, by coaching them in their areas of strengths, and by investing in redeveloping their competencies.

As one employee says about her company, *"Rebuilding trust involves everybody. It must cascade down to the middle management. The company takes care of people first, and the people in turn will take care of the profits."*^{iv}

5. **Step Down To Step Up: Breaking Down The Hierarchy**

In the Asian context, informality & friendship are important components of change acceptance. Command and control will only make us lose control. Gone are the days of top-down, do-as-I-say communication patterns. People value genuine, sincere, informal relationships.

Managing by walking around is still a good principle to follow. In other words, for people to step up, leaders must step down.

6. **Watch Your Nonverbal: How You Say Is More Important Than What You say**

So often, CEOs are unable to regain trust because of how they communicate. Aggression, harshness, shouting, anger, vulgarity and unkind words rub people the wrong way. People refuse to be bullied. They want to be respected.

Losing one's cool consistently at meetings not only create fear but make leader lose his credibility and finally destroy trust. Remember, people don't leave organization, they leave bad bosses.

7. **You Say, I Say: Allow Feedback Loop**

Skepticism and cynicism will not go away. Feedback is important. In rebuilding trust, provide as many feedback channels as possible. Honest and transparent two-way communication must be built into the system and at all levels.

Staff must be given the chance to give constructive feedback. They must also know that opinions do not always result in agreement. It is okay to agree to disagree. And it is incumbent on leaders, when they disagree and undertake a course of action contrary to staff feedback, to communicate the rationale of their decision and why the feedback cannot be adopted. Failure by leaders to do this will only create more distrust.

This is what one employee says, *"I know that when I have a concern or difference of opinion with my supervisor, I can count on him to give me unbiased feedback and a different perspective. Whether he supports me or not, I know that he will give honest opinions and offer as many solutions as possible."*^v

8. **Fail Once, Improve Twice: Failure Admission & Failure recovery**

In restoring trust, failures and mistakes will continue to be made. No strategy is fool-proof, no plan can be guaranteed to succeed. But failure is not final. Failure may be the backdoor to success, if we respond appropriately. Just as there is service recovery, there must be failure recovery: Admitting failure, Uncovering the factors of failure, Conducting a failure repair exercise, Communicating the reasons for our failures, Modifying systems and, Implementing the failure recovery plan.

9. **Feeling Good About Ourselves: The Lost Art Of Pride**

Leaders restore trust by trudging along the long arduous road of making people feel good about themselves again. Great Place to Work Institute, a research-based organization, defines a great place to work as one in which you *trust the people you work for, have pride in what you do, and enjoy the people you work with.*^{vi}

Pride in work means a relentless commitment to excellence. Sloppiness erodes human dignity and finally destroys trust. The culture, "If anything has to be done, it must be done well" should be implemented consistently. Excellence involves rebuilding capability and capacity of each worker. Finding the right job fit, placing people in right work culture and developing people systematically become key drivers to rebuild pride.

As research has found, when companies become great, "the division between management and labor fades. The workplace becomes a community. Employees take

pride in their job, their team, and their company. They feel that they can be themselves at work. They celebrate the successes of their peers and cooperate with others throughout the organization. People take pleasure in their work - and in the people they work with - in a deep and lasting way. They want to stay around for their careers."^{vii}

10. Register Quick Wins: Recognize & Reward Small Successes

Rebuilding is a long process. People want to see movements. Ensuring quick wins and recognizing small successes give people the confidence and impetus to pursue the long road to recovery.

It is not enough to push. It is more important to affirm successes and communicate them to the whole organization.

In conclusion, breaking trust is easier than building it. Rome was not built in a day but it was destroyed within a very short time. Rebuilding trust is not easy or cheap. Neither does it happen quickly. It requires hard and demanding work. But trust only comes with genuine effort applied consistently.

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ⁱ De Pree, M. 1997. *Leading Without Power*. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco, USA.

ⁱⁱ De Pree, M. 1997. *Leading Without Power*. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco, USA.

ⁱⁱⁱ De Pree, M. 1997. *Leading Without Power*. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco, USA.

^{iv} Great Place To Work Institute, 2003. Website, [www: Great Place To Work Institute.com](http://www.GreatPlaceToWorkInstitute.com).

^v Great Place To Work Institute, 2003. Website, [www: Great Place To Work Institute.com](http://www.GreatPlaceToWorkInstitute.com).

^{vi} Great Place To Work Institute, 2003. Website, [www: Great Place To Work Institute.com](http://www.GreatPlaceToWorkInstitute.com).

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