

Maritz Research poll shows employees don't trust management

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In a still-challenging economic environment, employers remain focused on balance sheets in assessing the financial health of their organizations. Although trust is not one of the dollar figures listed on these statements, it can have a significant positive or negative impact not only on the bottom line but also on overall organizational success.

A July 2011 press release titled, "Americans Still Lack Trust in Company Management Post-Recession," summarized the results of a [poll conducted by Maritz Research](#).

Among its findings, the poll indicated that despite a slight improvement in business conditions, approximately 25 percent of employees reported having less trust in management than they did the prior year. Slightly more than one in 10 employees (14 percent) believed that their company's leaders were ethical and honest. Only 10 percent trusted management to make the right decision in times of uncertainty. Just 7 percent said that senior management's actions were consistent with their words. Poor communication, lack of perceived caring, inconsistent behavior and perceptions of favoritism were cited as the largest contributors to the lack of trust in senior leaders.

The poll underscores the crucial role that senior leadership and all levels of management play in developing and maintaining trust with employees. It also reinforces the understanding that trust is fragile and requires ongoing attention. While trust involves multiple interactions and takes considerable time to build, it can be damaged or destroyed far more rapidly, even by a single action. In the event that trust is undermined, relationships may not be salvaged or can take a lengthy time to reestablish.

Although management is expected to set the tone for creating an environment of trust, that environment cannot be maintained without the attentiveness of every employee. Through the efforts of all employees to facilitate trust in their day-to-day interactions, there will be a positive impact on workplace relationships and the organization as a whole.

The following are a number of questions to consider in assessing whether you are having a positive influence on trust in your workplace interactions:

1. Are you truthful in your communications? Honesty is essential in establishing trustful relationships. If you knowingly make false statements and provide incorrect information or are deceptive by omitting facts, you can rapidly undermine any trust that you have established.
2. Do your actions mirror your communications? If you fail to “walk the talk,” your actions will speak louder than your words, and others will not believe what you have said. Be cautious in using terms, such as empowerment and transparency, to create a positive focus unless they accurately describe actions that can be observed on a regular basis.
3. Can you be counted on to do what you say? Fulfill commitments by preparing and taking the necessary steps to meet deadlines. Communicate in advance if a delay is necessary due to unforeseen circumstances.
4. Do you acknowledge mistakes rather than shifting the blame to others? Take responsibility for your actions and view these incidents as opportunities to learn and improve.
5. Do you honor your agreements to keep information confidential? Others will find that their trust in you has been betrayed if they learn that you have not kept promises of confidentiality.
6. Have you adopted a practice of avoiding gossip and making negative comments about others who are not present? Before engaging in conversations that can harm workplace relationships and morale, consider the Spanish proverb, “Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.”
7. Are your actions in compliance with organizational policies? Avoid using rationalizations and other excuses as justification for conduct that violates policy requirements.
8. Do you recognize others for their ideas and contributions rather than seeking credit solely for yourself? Understand the impact that you will have on morale and the ability to gain future input if individual and team accomplishments are overlooked.
9. Are discussions involving criticism of others held in private? Be aware that negative feedback given in public, even if intended to be constructive, can embarrass all who are present and cause your judgment to be questioned.
10. Is your message consistent regardless of the audience? Understand that your credibility will be diminished if your comments are inconsistent and your opinions flip-flop in an attempt to tell listeners what you believe they would like to hear.
11. Is your approach in resolving differences of opinion to maintain objectivity and not personalize the issues? Guard against emotional reactions and personalizing conflicts while focusing on preserving feelings of self-worth among all involved.
12. Are you willing to listen to diverse points of view? Listening allows others to feel that you value their opinions. It also provides an opportunity to gain an understanding of differing perspectives, exchange ideas and information, and learn from one another.

[BARBARA RICHMAN](#), SPHR, is a senior consultant with HR Mpact, a Memphis human resource consulting firm, www.hr-mpact.com. She can be reached at (901) 685-9084, (901) 496-0462 or barbara@hr-mpact.com.