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Soft skills: how to make people trust you at work



The key to clear communication and effective collaboration at work is trust – but how can we inspire trust in others and learn to trust them in turn ourselves? Here, we'll look at some training methods that can help develop these skills.

As more and more work becomes automated, we need to consider the qualities human beings have that machines cannot replace. Trust is one quality I would place high up that list because human beings can inspire trust in a way that computers cannot.

I don't mean trust in the sense of reliability - for that, computers probably have the edge over us. I'm referring to the kind of trust that can spark life-long loyalty and lead people to do extraordinary things for one another.

Trust is a highly desirable quality, from a commercial and personal point of view.

First, it leads to a better working environment. When people do not trust one another, the work atmosphere can become poisonous. Looking over your shoulder in fear of being stabbed in the back is gruelling and wastes emotional energy.

Second, trust leads to better relationships. If people trust you, they are less likely to be offended by a poorly worded email sent in haste. They will be more inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt and support you in times of need.

Finally, trust leads to better results. When I trust my leader, I feel more motivated and engaged, and I therefore produce better work. I am also more likely to enjoy work, and therefore less likely to get stressed, move jobs or take time off.

The big question is whether the ability to trust and inspire trust is something we are born with, or whether it can be acquired and developed like any other skill.

Sharing your values

Thinking back over my own experiences, I realise the people I trust most are those whose vision or values resonate with my own.

Something about the way they are, the way they think or the way they act touches me. I feel a connection at a personal level and that connection triggers extra loyalty, motivation, productivity and goodwill.

Can we train ourselves to inspire this kind of connection? Some people seem to inspire trust with no apparent effort, often without being aware of it.

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For the rest of us, however, there is hope. There are ways we can increase our chances of inspiring trust in those around us.

One way is to work on our self-awareness. The more aware I am of my own vision and values, the more likely it is that I will live in tune with them, and they are therefore more likely to be felt by those around me.

Personality profiling and psychometrics are useful tools that can help us know ourselves better.

Life coaching is another: a skilful coach can help us reflect on our experiences and get clearer about what matters to us most.

Learning to communicate better

In addition, our vision and values need to be conveyed. When it comes to communication skills, there are many ways to work on ourselves.

Through presentation training we can get better at speaking and conveying our vision with passion. This includes the way we use words and the way we express ourselves verbally and non-verbally.

Conflict management and courageous conversations training also strengthen our ability to communicate about matters that are important and that lead to stronger teams and better morale.

One way to speed up the process of building trust is through group work.

Group experiences such as outward-bound activities or team sports can fulfil this role.

There are also very effective group coaching and team facilitation programmes which invite participants to open up to one another, for instance by discussing their life experiences, or sharing their hopes and dreams.

As well as building trust, this kind of training directly works on participants' communication skills.

Trusting others

All the approaches above not only build the ability to inspire trust, but they are equally effective at building the capacity to trust.

It can be hard to trust others, especially if we have had negative experiences in the past that now make us habitually suspicious of other's intentions.

Through coaching, conflict resolution training, and other personal development, we can dig into the root cause of our fears and unlearn unwanted habits.

Trust may sound like a nebulous quality whose laws cannot be predicted, but as standards of emotional intelligence rise and the sophistication of available training programmes grows, we are increasingly able to enhance levels of trust in the workplace and reap the benefits at a commercial and personal level.