

# Using Emotional Intelligence to Build Trust

BY CASEY MULQUEEN, PhD

The concept of “the speed of trust” has become common business parlance. Steve Forbes calls trust the “bedrock of democratic capitalism.” When companies go to market with a product or service, they are actually competing for potential clients’ confidence in their expertise, their execution, or the exceptional nature of the offering.

Once an organization has garnered a customer’s trust, and the client has confidence in the company, the emotional hurdle of selling has been cleared and that customer is much more likely to buy.

Just as it is essential to establish trust in the marketplace, it is also critical to establish and maintain trust in the workplace. Employees who believe in their organization’s values, actions, and goals are more productive and tend to stay put. Research on trust bears this out:

- There is a **strong relationship between trust and job performance**. It’s as strong as or stronger than relationships with other variables (e.g., job satisfaction and job performance).

- There is also a **strong relationship between trust and “affective commitment”** (this refers to a person’s emotional commitment). This type of commitment predicts important factors such as absenteeism and turnover.

- Trust in a person’s direct leader is particularly important, often more so than trust in the organization. **Having trust in the direct leader is highly predictive of job performance, job satisfaction, and intent to leave the organization.**

- Trust in the leader helps people focus on team results. **Individuals are willing to suspend personal doubts or apprehensions if they trust the leader,** which helps commitment towards the team goals.

***“People want their leaders to be honest, ethical, and competent.”***



Without trust, the converse is true. In a company where trust is low, it’s only a matter of time until employees abandon ship, either by unwanted turnover or presenteeism: direct reports spend their time watching their backs, or grouching about leadership, rather than completing meaningful work. No one takes risks, and no one takes responsibility. The chance of innovating or meeting business goals is slim.

## THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN BUILDING TRUST

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) has become more common in the workplace as businesses try to harness its promise of improved performance by individuals and teams. After two decades of research, multiple studies have shown that EQ abilities often account for the difference between star performers and average performers across a variety of industries and occupations, including sales and leadership.

Emotional Intelligence initially focused on insight and awareness of oneself, and awareness of others’ emotions. The current emphasis is on taking such awareness and translating it into meaningful action. The goal is to understand and develop a small number of high-impact behavioral skills. These behavioral skills are the best predictors of job performance and success—and the skills that help develop trust.

Think about EQ as behavioral skills related to oneself and to others:

### Behavioral EQ Skills—Self

**Self-control:** the ability to control emotions and impulsive urges is an indicator of ability to stay composed and focused

**Stress Management:** the ability to withstand pressure and regulate reactions

**Conscientiousness:** the capacity to take personal responsibility for performance

**Optimism:** the ability to maintain a positive perspective and achieve goals

***“Leaders should ... share their vision in a personable way that connects the goals of the team to the work of the individual.”***

**Behavioral EQ Skills—Others**

**Building Relationships:** the ability to develop and maintain meaningful and positive relations with others

**Influencing Others:** the ability to persuade others

**Motivating Others:** the ability to motivate and guide others toward a vision or goal

**Flexibility:** the ability to adapt to new circumstances and changing priorities

**Innovation:** the capacity to generate novel ideas and be open to new information

These behavioral EQ skills directly affect trust in both its forms:

■ **Cognitive trust:** actors such as reliability, consistency, and integrity that promote confidence in leaders

■ **Affective or emotional trust:** having a good relationship and showing interest and concern for someone engender this type of trust in leaders

In order to earn both types of trust, it is incumbent upon leaders to manifest behavioral EQ skills regarding their own actions and in their interactions with others. Leaders must exercise self-control and conscientiousness, for instance, in order to meet their commitments and help their teams meet goals. In this way, leaders build a reputation for being reliable and consistent, which creates cognitive trust. Leaders must also work to establish relationships with their direct reports, which shows employees their leaders understand them, are aware of their interests and aspirations, and will support them within the organization. This creates affective trust.

The genius of EQ—and the finding of most recent EQ research—is that leaders can practice one or two behaviors at a time. In this way their efforts are not scattered in many directions and they can consistently focus energy and attention on behaviors that have the greatest impact.

**RESULTS-BUILDING TRUST WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT WORK STYLES**

Some aspects of effective leadership, and of building trust, are universal. People want their leaders to be honest, ethical, and competent.

But people respond to their leader's behavior in somewhat different ways, depending on their personal work style, and this influences the trust they feel for a leader.

There are four reliably distinct work styles, and each style has unique behavioral patterns and work orientation. Accordingly, the most effective way to build trust is to take individuals' work styles into account. Below are strategies for interacting with each work style in such a way that trust naturally develops.

**RESULTS-ORIENTED** Results-oriented people look to their leaders to be confident in their own abilities, and likewise to be competent in their performance. It is the nature of these people to place less emphasis on personal relationships, at least initially. So, leaders should focus on establishing cognitive trust with these individuals by showing competence. Because they are focused on results, these people want others to show commitment to achieving goals. They don't like to waste time, so they want their leaders to be efficient, particularly when their own goals are directly affected by the leader's efforts. They also want their leaders to be direct and to share their opinions in a straightforward way. They appreciate no-nonsense communication and efficiency from leaders.

**RECOGNITION-ORIENTED** Recognition-oriented people are highly sociable and seek attention. They value leaders who are open with their emotions, who show a sense of humor, and who are enthusiastic about their work. Affective trust is particularly important for them. Leaders should be energetic and show excitement about working and collaborating with them. This will directly appeal to their emotions and hence to their commitment. These people are also motivated by personal recognition, so leaders can strengthen their relationships by publicly acknowledging these individuals' contributions. This helps them feel connected and valued by the leader, which is important for them to feel trust.

**RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTED** This style of person likes to form personal connections with others, so they appreciate when leaders make an effort to establish sincere relationships. Like Recognition-oriented people, they especially value affective trust. They look for leaders to be personable and team-oriented, and they want their leaders to have the team's best interests in mind. They value open lines of communication, and it's important that their leaders are genuine and sincere. If leaders will share something interesting or unique about themselves, it communicates that they are open and trusting and it will help these individuals to have confidence in the relationship. Leaders should also share their vision in a personable way that connects the goals of the team to the work of the individual.

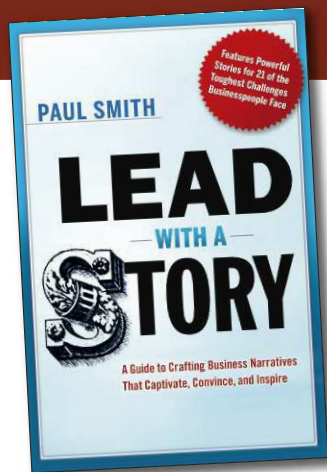
**ACCURACY-ORIENTED** These individuals prefer to work in an orderly and logical way. They are not focused on relationships initially, so it may take some time to get to know them personally. Similar to Results-oriented people, cognitive trust is important for them, especially early in a working relationship. Because they tend to be orderly in the way they do things, they will look for patterns and predictability in their leaders. They tend to control their emotions at work, so they appreciate straightforward and professional interactions.

Leaders should approach them in a businesslike way, and work to build a solid relationship over time by helping them open up through seeking out their opinions or experiences in areas that are of particular interest to them. These individuals will have trust in leaders who provide visions that are ambitious but also grounded in reality.

**ACCURACY-TRUST TAKES WORK** Trust cannot be mandated; it can only be earned. Leaders can gain trust by being consistent, competent, and by practicing EQ behaviors related to understanding others and building authentic relationships. This is best done by understanding different work styles. This tailored approach to working with others leads to employees' support for the team's efforts—and to meeting business goals, as employees who trust their managers are more engaged in their work, are more committed to staying with the organization, and are better performers. *MW*

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