



# 7 Ways to Engage Your Employees Through Trust Building

A Brief Guide to Organizational Trust Management



**Borealis Consulting**  
Consultancy & HR Tech Solutions

[borealisconsulting.hu/en](https://borealisconsulting.hu/en)  
[info@borealisconsulting.hu](mailto:info@borealisconsulting.hu)  
+36 30 445 3487

Would you have ever thought that the main reason behind today's employee engagement challenges is the low level of trust?



**Many companies strive to reach, get and retain talents by focusing on employer branding, introducing recruitment tools, improving its on-boarding program, or trying other methods to build engagement and loyalty to keep them on the long term.**

But wait a minute. What do you think really lies behind the employees' decision on whether they would like to stay or move on and find a job somewhere else? What makes them join and go with you further? Think of your colleagues of the young generations. They would like to feel good and feel free, following their own values, choosing what to work on and whom to work with. They would like to create great things and try new ones, while having fewer rules and more experiences. They will work for you as long as they can trust you can provide all of these. As long as they can trust you. If they leave you, it probably means their faith has been broken.

We at Borealis Consulting have found that the lack of trust is the root cause of many company difficulties, including engagement problems and low performance. As Stephen M. R. Covey tells us in his famous book *The Speed of Trust*<sup>1</sup>, trust is an important ingredient of performance and business success in general. Thus, high organizational trust level is not only a nice-to-have characteristic of companies, but something that can save you the costs of slow processes, extensive bureaucracy or disloyal employees (which costs Covey calls "trust tax").

Trust is becoming even more important in today's VUCA world. According to the latest *PWC Annual Global CEO Survey*<sup>2</sup> CEOs around the world are much more concerned of uncontrollable threats than a year before. In uncontrollable situations trust is what keeps your employees stay with you and believe in their ability to create a positive future.

So how can a company engage employees through trust building and active their inner drivers to stay and contribute to achieving company goals on the long term? How can you reach a high level of trust in your organization, what should you watch and measure, what are you supposed to do, what actions should be taken and when?

Covey defines five waves of trust in his book and argues that trust building needs to be started at the first level (which is self trust) and then can be extended to other levels (such as the second level relationship trust and the third level organizational trust). Our experience is very much the same.

We believe that engagement through trust building begins with individual employees.

**"As trust is manifest in each successive wave, the effect of trust becomes cumulative and exponential."**

- Stephen M. R. Covey

<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. R. Covey: *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*, 2008

<sup>2</sup> PWC Annual Global CEO Survey, 2019



#1

# Let employees do what they are ready to do

## Empowerment

*"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them."*  
- Ernest Hemingway

Begin with yourself! – an important rule for almost everything you start, but it is definitely important when it comes to trust building. There is no high organizational trust, no relationship trust without people who have self-confidence. True engagement builds on self-confidence, on the conscious decisions and operation of employees. People of strong self-confidence are more optimistic, have more trust in the future and are able to get more engaged.

Self-confidence gives you the courage to believe that no matter what happens, you will be able to handle the situation and will not be afraid of uncertainty or changes. You dare to tell your opinion and to admit when you make a mistake, you take responsibility for your actions. You rarely feel stressed, as you can prioritize your tasks and can make decisions even in hard situations. If you have strong self-confidence, you are more flexible and resilient and also more able to trust others (accepting their mistakes and outcomes which are not always exactly what you expected). As you have no need to defend yourself and you take responsibility, others also have faith in you.

How can you encourage your employees to strengthen their own self-confidence? Where does self-confidence come from? Self-confidence emerges when you experience your own abilities; self-confidence comes from the feeling "I can do it". Feedbacks from others can also support you on your way of building skills and competencies, however, your inner driver is the main factor.

If you let your employees try to do things, which they have not done before and in which they have a good chance to succeed, they are going to get this "I can do it" feeling. Let them do what they are ready to do and let them take the responsibility which they are already prepared for. Give them opportunities to move out of their comfort-zone, empower them, every time a little more and more. This way you will improve not only their skills, but also their self-confidence and their engagement.



#2

# Let employees be themselves

## Personal authenticity

Everybody is more motivated if they can do what is really important for them and work on topics they are touched by personally. They need to live and work in accordance with their own values.

This is an inner driver that is much stronger than any outer drivers can be. If you would like to engage your colleagues on the long term, building on their inner drivers is essential.

Living according to one's own values (personal authenticity) goes hand-by-hand with self-confidence. If you are independent, making your own decisions and following your own values, your self-confidence (the "I can do it" feeling) gets stronger.

If your self-confidence is stronger, then you are more able to make your own decisions and create a life based on your values.

Self-confidence and personal authenticity are key factors in how much employees are engaged, how much they are willing to cooperate and support the organization's mission.

If you are following your own goals and you also believe you are able to reach them, you are definitely at the right place, aren't you? Why would you go anywhere else?

Find out what really touches your employees and activate these inner drivers! Give them opportunity to choose, and trust their choice.

Get insight in their values and real motivation and find ways to get these harmonized with the values of the organization.





#3

# Encourage employees to express their thoughts

## Self-expression

Self-confidence and personal authenticity mean engagement and trust building on the individual level. This is the core of trust building, the beginning of creating an organizational culture where engagement is strong. To lift trust building a level higher, we focus on relationships, connection between colleagues.

The first building block of a healthy, trustful atmosphere between colleagues is open, honest self-expression. Nobody can be engaged if they can't express their opinion or don't feel free to share their thoughts. It is not only about the existence or lack of consequences. It is also about whether employees are encouraged to represent what they believe in and how their different opinions are accepted and integrated. Are leaders and colleagues open to listen to the various ideas that come up from employees? Do they trust that every thought is valuable, useful and can contribute to the learning of the organization?

Create and maintain continuous dialogue between colleagues and ensure everybody can express their thoughts. Ask for opinions and feedbacks as frequent as you can. If something goes wrong, talk about it on the spot, asking for the point of view of all parties. Talk about all those topics that can be important for employees, there should be no taboos or issues never discussed.





# Inspire employees to show respect for others and have faith in win-win solutions

## Respect for others

Expressing oneself – a basic need of employees whom we would like to engage. But it will not work without the other side of the conversation put in place. Honesty and sharing one's opinion doesn't mean insisting on our ideas no matter what. Being flexible is just as important. Not only should we be listened to, we should listen to others, as well, in order to build mutual trust.

Assertiveness and cooperation are key components in mutually operated trust. If we respect the thoughts of others, if we have trust in them, then we create the foundation of long lasting connections with continuous dialogue and feedback.

Based on this synergy, we can continuously improve our skills and strengthen our engagement, while also contribute to those of the others.

Encourage your employees to show respect towards each other, to ask for and give feedbacks in a trustful way.

Strengthen self-confidence so that everyone could be able to receive feedback in a healthy way, too, regarding it not as criticism, but an opportunity of learning and improvement.

Have trust and encourage employees to have trust in win-win solutions, believe in your abilities that you can always find a common solution to conflicts.

Engagement is not only the way how an individual employee connects to the organization. Engagement comes from trustful teams, where individual motivations strengthen one another. Teams of mutual trust are the basis of an engaged company culture.

# Build a trustworthy culture

## Authentic organization

Fully engaged teams are the best foundation for a healthy, trustful culture. What is going to hold them together to establish a trustworthy organization?

Building trust begins at the individual level, but integrating trust into a big organization also needs a top-down focus. Organizational trust is more than trustful connections between colleagues, just as employee engagement is more than whether colleagues feel good at their place or not.

Beyond personal motivations and connection to others, employees need to have trust in the organization as a whole in order to be engaged. The way how they see the company and how they perceive communication and operation of the organization day by day, plays a key role in whether they believe they work at the right place.

One of the most relevant factors in building trust in an organization is transparency and open, honest communication. Whatever communication employees get, they will see beneath the surface and can sense how high the company *say/do ratio*<sup>3</sup> is.

As a part of authentic employer positioning and communication, authentic leaders are also of critical importance. Trustful teams can only be achieved with trustworthy leaders. "Lead by example" should be an imperative.

The authenticity of the organization is especially important regarding new comers. They don't know about inner conditions yet, they have just started to get to know their leader and team. But they already have a lot of impressions of the company as a whole, they have ideas of how authentic the organization is. Employer branding and successful on-boarding programs are a good start when competing for talents on the job-market, however, a transparent and trustful organization is the one that can keep them in the long run.

Create open, honest and frequent inner communication towards employees and form a free atmosphere where everybody feels safe to tell what they think. By doing this, you are on your way to create employee engagement and high trust level.

<sup>3</sup> What proportion of company commitments gets realized.

# Create a clear vision

## Trust in the future

As said before, letting employees be authentic and live and work according to their personal goals is essential when building a trustful company culture. But how can you let them follow their own values while you would like them to follow those of the organization? You definitely need to get these two in accordance.

First of all, be aware of the values of the organization. Plus, be aware of the strategic goals the company would like to achieve. It probably needs more than having mission and vision statements. If you have clear company goals, make sure all the employees understand it.

They need to know what they support with their work day by day, what principles and values they are supposed to follow. When you look for new colleagues, try to find people who are in line with your values.

Talk about your goals and values with your employees many times. Make discussions, let them question these goals and express their opinion.

Revise the goals. Let them understand you have trust in the future and they can have a positive impact on it, too. In this process company goals can become real common goals that people regard as their own. In order to engage your employees you need them to stand by you, your values and goals with their full heart.







#7

# Take one step at a time

## Step by step trust building

Engagement through trust building is not something that happens overnight. On the contrary, gradualness is what makes trust building stable, authentic and long lasting. It is hard to give faith to enormous, ambitious and strange plans, isn't it?

It is hard to believe we can do magic and make radical changes in a short time. But every change begins with one step and you can easily trust the success of the first step. Then the success of the next one. And the next one.

The main idea is not about making huge plans, but realizing and implementing little steps one after the other, while always keeping the right direction. This is true for each step of engagement from empowerment to clear common goals.

If you give too much responsibility to someone who is not ready for that, or you expect your employees to be loyal to your values by tomorrow, you are likely to fail.

You don't actually need to get your employees fully engaged right now. You need to get them a little more engaged each day.

Take a step, look back, revise and go on. And don't forget to celebrate together your little successes underway.





**Interested in our digital  
solutions supporting  
engagement and  
trust building?**

Check out our website for more information



**Borealis Consulting**

Consultancy & HR Tech Solutions