

"Do my employees trust me?" The answer may surprise you.



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One in 3 employees doesn't trust their own company or leaders to do the right thing. That's the startling conclusion from the recently released 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer, an annual global trust and credibility survey of more than 33,000 respondents.

More than two thirds of people say that CEOs are too narrowly focused on short-term financial results and not enough on societal issues, a behavior that drives distrust. Conversely, the study found that trust increases when CEOs talk about their personal views and involvement in societal issues beyond profit, as does employees' willingness to advocate for their company.

"If your employees trust you, they're more likely to say positive things about your company," says Tamara Snyder, senior vice president of employee engagement in Edelman's Chicago office. The study indicates that consumers trust employees over CEOs when talking about how a company treats its people, conducts business ethically and reacts to crises and problems.

"Depending on whether they trust the company, your own people can be your most passionate champions or your fiercest detractors," Snyder says, "and the outside world will believe them."

Building trust can be tough, but it's essential.

"The data from this year's study is clear: When employees trust their CEO and see their company engaging in broad social issues beyond the core business, they are more motivated to perform, treat customers well and deliver on the company's strategy," Snyder says.

Executives can turn the tide and build stronger relationships with employees by being candid and connecting on a human level.

"Be honest. Do what you say you'll do. Admit when you're wrong. Provide context. Listen," Snyder advises.

Talk about values

Values are of paramount importance to today's employees, and the best way to gain trust is to talk about yours. Nearly 80 percent of survey respondents said that hearing information about personal values is important to building trust in a leader.

"Each interaction with employees is an opportunity to reinforce what matters to you," Snyder says. "People want to hear what you stand for."

Employees love stories about their leader's climb to success, particularly if he or she had to overcome obstacles.

Executives should curate a personal story album with a collection of anecdotes from their past, Snyder suggests. "If you're truly brave, talk about your past mistakes or failures. This takes tremendous courage, but employees will respect you for showing your humanity and resiliency."

The 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer is the firm's 16th annual trust and credibility survey. The survey was conducted by research firm Edelman Berland and consisted of 20-minute online interviews conducted Oct. 13, 2015, through Nov. 16, 2015. The 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer surveyed more than 33,000 respondents in 28 countries. [Click here for more about the 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer.](#)

—Teresa Meek, Tribune Content Solutions

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