

**THE PROVEN**  
**TRUST**  
**FORMULA**



**ZENGER FOLKMAN**

## The proven formula for building and restoring trust.

While there could be hundreds of behaviors that impact trust, just three can account for the vast difference in the impact between individuals with high levels of trust and those who are not trusted at all.

These are the core behaviors that create and reinforce trust:

1. Displaying expertise and the good judgment that comes with it
2. Demonstrating consistency
3. Building relationships

These three pillars support the foundation of trust, regardless of culture, industry, race, or gender.

It's hard to describe the remarkable impact that comes when a person is trusted or when the trust that was lost has been restored. The connection of trust binds people together, not just for a job assignment, but for a lifetime. Through these statistics and examples, I hope to illustrate the impact of trust and a clear path for you to follow.

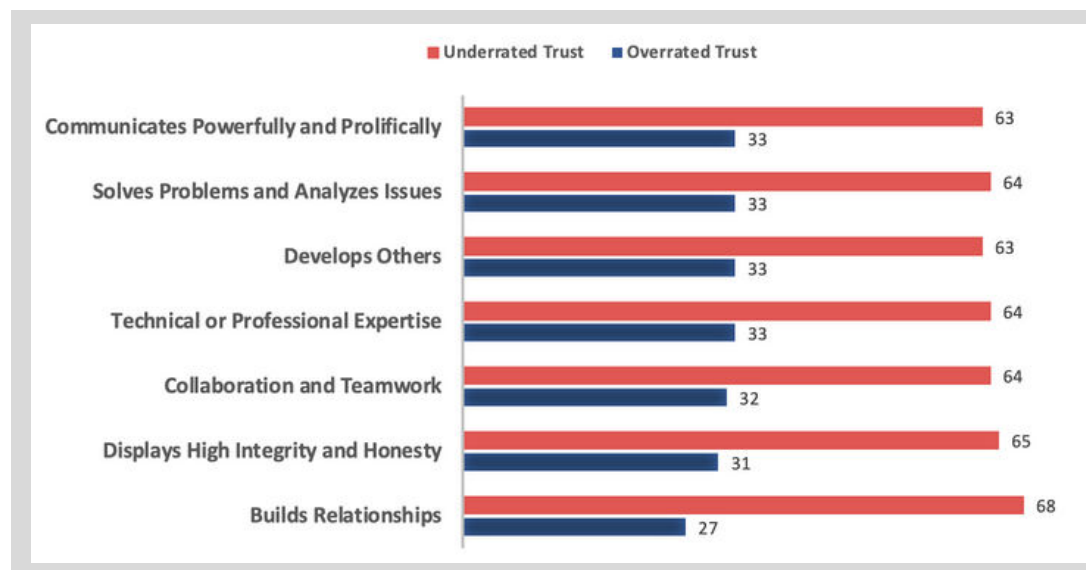
Improving trust with others will help you be more effective, successful, appreciated, and valued.

—Joe Folkman

# Do You Really Know if You're Trusted?

## People may not trust you as much as you think they do.

How do we know this? By looking at the self-assessments of leaders and comparing them with the scores from other raters. Rather, the leaders themselves are, on average, 3.2 times better at predicting the level of trust. This is so common that **27% of leaders overrate their levels of trust.**



# The Research



Trust is a leading indicator of whether others evaluate leaders positively or negatively.

*But creating that trust, or reestablishing it when you've lost it, isn't always straightforward.*

Looking at data from the 360 assessments of 87,000 leaders, we identified **three key clusters of items** that form the foundation for trust. We looked at correlations between the trust rating and all other items in the assessment; we performed a factor analysis that revealed these three elements.

# 1

## Pillar of Trust

# Expertise



This is the extent to which a leader is **well-informed and knowledgeable**. They must understand the technical aspects of the work as well as have a depth of experience.

This means:

- They use good judgment when making decisions.
- Others trust their ideas and opinions.
- Others seek after their views.
- Their knowledge and expertise make an essential contribution to achieving results.
- They can anticipate and respond quickly to problems.



Trust in experts is our compass in the maze of life, guided by their seasoned judgment, unwavering in the face of bias, and honed by time, study, and experience.

—Joe Folkman

# STRENGTH BUILDERS FOR EXPERTISE



There are four statistically linked behaviors that help people to increase trust by building upon their expertise:

- 1 Being a role model**—In order to create an atmosphere where others share their expertise with you, demonstrate that you are reliable and will do what you say and say what you do.
- 2 Anticipating problems**—If you take the time to plan, organize, and consider what might go wrong before jumping to action, good results become more likely.
- 3 Connecting your work to a vision**—To improve your ability to connect your work to the big-picture direction of the organization, link the vision to individual jobs and everyone's current reality.
- 4 Keeping others informed**—Keeping others informed helps those around us trust our expertise no matter how limited it might be.

**EXPERTS CAN HELP PEOPLE REDUCE ANXIETY AND FEEL A GREATER SENSE OF HOPE WITH THE INSIGHTS THEY PROVIDE. THEY MAY NOT HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, BUT YOU CAN **TRUST IN THEIR JUDGMENT.****

# 2

## Pillar of Trust

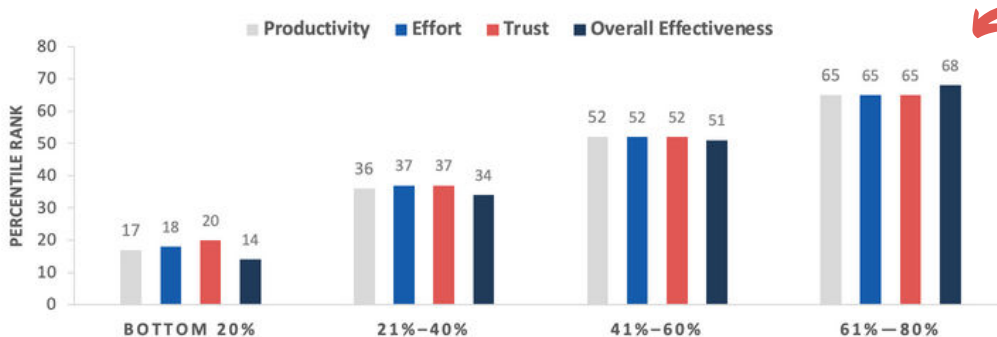
# Consistency



What kind of reputation do you want to create in your team and with your colleagues? Consistency is the extent to which leaders **walk their talk** and do what they say they will do.

People rate a leader high in trust if they:

- Are a role model and set a good example.
- Walk the talk.
- Honor commitments and keep promises.
- Follow through on commitments.
- Are willing to go above and beyond what needs to be done.



This study measuring consistency in leaders shows how increased consistency impacts trust, productivity, effort, and overall leadership effectiveness.

# STRENGTH BUILDERS FOR

# CONSISTENCY



There are four statistically linked behaviors that help people to increase trust by cultivating consistency:

**1 Deliver on Your Commitments**—Failing to meet commitments damages your reputation and adversely affects those depending on you. Be realistic about deadlines to avoid this.

**2 Managing Your Commitments**—Develop a clear plan by addressing the fundamental questions: why, who, where, when, how, and the associated costs. Accept personal accountability for the outcomes of your tasks.

**3 Insist on High Standards**—Setting high standards may make goal attainment challenging, but striving for excellence ensures greater effort and achievement.

**4 Continually Improve**—Evaluate your performance in terms of quality and quantity against past achievements and aim to surpass them.



People don't expect you to be perfect, but they do expect you to be consistent.

—Joe Folkman

# 3 Building Relationships

Pillar of Trust



Positive relationships must be developed with sincerity and boundaries. Trust is, in part, based on the extent to which a leader is able to create positive relationships with other people and groups.

To instill trust, a leader must:

- Stay in touch with the issues and concerns of others.
- Balance results with concern for others.
- Generate cooperation between others.
- Resolve conflict with others.
- Give honest feedback in a helpful way.

“

Cultivating positive relationships is a cornerstone of trust and fulfillment—enhancing not just how others perceive you, but enriching the very essence of your life and work.

—Joe Folkman

# STRENGTH BUILDERS FOR

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



There are four statistically linked behaviors that help people to increase trust by improving their relationships with others:

- 1 Coach and Develop Others**—One of the greatest gifts you can give to a person is helping them build a new skill. Mentor team members according to their unique goals and celebrate their progress to build trust.
- 2 Inspire and Motivate Others**—Forge genuine connections, convey a compelling shared vision, and empower individuals with autonomy to boost motivation and trust.
- 3 Cooperate Rather than Compete with Others**—Competition influences people to look inward rather than outward. Focus on team victories, nurture team cohesion, and lead by example in collaborative efforts to enhance trust.
- 4 Ask for Feedback**—Establish a receptive environment for feedback, respond with constructive actions, and maintain open dialogues to strengthen trust.

**THERE IS NOT A QUICK-FIX SOLUTION, BUT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF VERY BASIC ACTIVITIES THAT CAN HELP. IMPROVE HOW YOU GREET PEOPLE, DEMONSTRATE A GENUINE INTEREST IN THEIR WORK, AND INVEST YOUR TIME IN GETTING TO KNOW THOSE AROUND YOU.**

# Do you need all three elements of trust?

We did a test where we split leaders into groups based on whether they were good or not so good in each of these three areas, and then we looked at how much people trusted them.

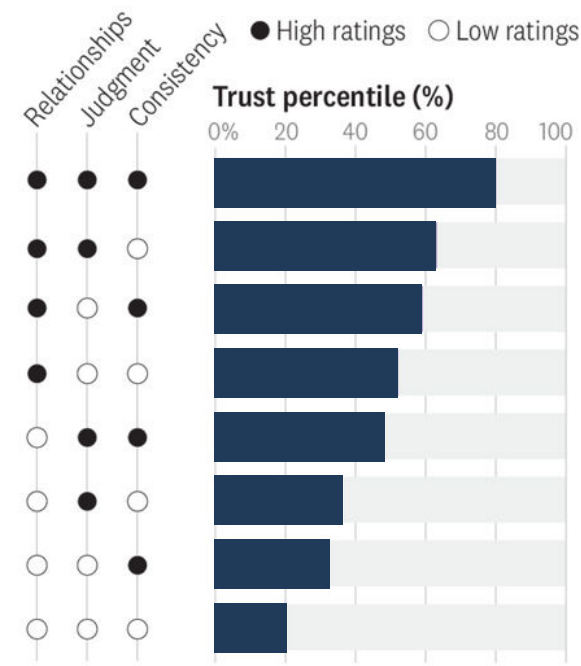
While our analysis showed that inconsistency does have a negative impact (trust went **down 17 points**), it was relationships that had the most substantial impact.

When relationships had low ratings, but both judgment and consistency had high ratings, trust went **down 33 points**.

## One Element of Trust Is More Important Than the Others

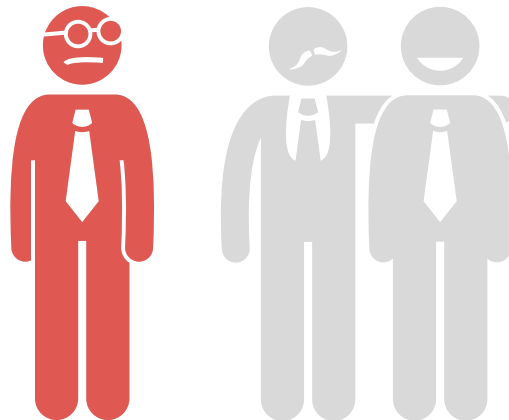
Relationships seem to matter more than judgment or consistency.

### Combinations of the three elements of trust



Source: Zenger Folkman

HBR



## Relationships Matter

We all intend to do things that don't get done, but once a relationship is damaged, or if it was never formed in the first place, it's difficult for people to trust.

**When it comes to trust, all three of these elements, Judgment, Consistency, and Relationships, need to be above average.**

Source: Harvard Business Review, *The Three Elements of Trust*, by Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman

# CONCLUSION

We gathered data on trust from a group of leaders who participated in a trust 360-degree assessment and a post-assessment a year later. In the group, a large number received alarming scores on trust from colleagues, with an overall score for the group at the 6th percentile.

On the three pillars of trust, they scored:

- 20th percentile in good judgment and expertise
- 20th percentile in consistency
- 14th percentile in building relationships

There was substantial work that needed to be done. By focusing on these three areas over the next 18 months, this group moved their trust score from the 6th to the 38th percentile.

Their scores on the three pillars greatly improved:

- 46th percentile in good judgment and expertise
- 44th percentile in consistency
- 45th percentile in building relationships

Trust takes time, but the gains from this fatal flaw group show that improvement—and significant improvement—is possible.

Whether you have a fatal flaw or are just doing OK, **you owe it to the people in your life to establish a strong foundation of trust.**

Trust can be felt, trust can be measured, trust can be built, and trust can be repaired. Understanding trust in its most simplistic form comes down to expertise, consistency, and positive relationships—the trifecta of trust.

Learn more about Zenger Folkman's **Trifecta of Trust** development experience for leaders and teams.

Excerpts from: *The Trifecta of Trust*, by Joe Folkman, River Grove Publishing, 2022.

# TRUST

## NEXT STEPS

**1** LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TRIFECTA OF TRUST DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

**2** ORDER THE TRIFECTA OF TRUST BOOK

**3** SCHEDULE A CALL TO SEE HOW TO IMPROVE TRUST IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.

Z E N G E R F O L K M A N