

Maximize

YOUR LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL



University of Florida Training and Organizational Development, Office of Human Resource Services

Building Trust through Advocacy

A very important competency within the Building Trust quadrant of our Leadership Model is this simple word “advocacy.” Unfortunately, it is when advocacy is noticeably absent from our workplace environment that many of us become keenly aware of its significance. If you have ever worked for a leader who did not “have your back,” you understand firsthand the impact this absence of advocacy may have had on your own sense of loyalty and engagement as an employee. The following is an excerpted summary from a report produced by TalentKeepers®, an employee engagement and retention company in Orlando, FL (with permission).

Leaders play a critical role in how employees feel about their workplace environment. Effective leaders model integrity and consistently demonstrate ways for employees to trust them. The greater the trust, the more engaged, productive, and optimistic employees are. TalentKeepers® identified three key trust and advocacy strategies for leaders to develop that promote this culture of engagement:

- Demonstrate personal trustworthiness
- Ask employees about their needs and goals
- Take responsibility for company [department] decisions and actions

Demonstrate Personal Trustworthiness

There is nothing as powerful as a leader who keeps his or her promises. When employees can consistently count on that precept, it sets the bar for them to take responsibility for their own behaviors and actions. The leader’s ability to demonstrate and acknowledge mistakes without blaming or making excuses shows humility in action. The example this sets is foundational to building and sustaining trust, inspiring a sense of ownership, engagement, and retention of talented team members. Strategies that build trust and strengthen working relationships are:

- Intentionally find ways to demonstrate your support for your employees
- Share credit, not blame
- Thank messengers for bad news so they will keep you informed in the future
- Represent team member interests, defend them from unwarranted criticism, and lobby for resources critical to their jobs
- Respond to problems with a “let’s fix it” attitude and own your mistakes completely
- Initiate “mistake reversal” as quickly as possible, without assigning blame, shame, or guilt (see bullet above)

*Why it matters?
Employee engagement, productivity, and retention often hinge on whether or not we feel a sense of trust in our leadership. Without trust, relationships and performance are compromised.*

Ask Employees about Their Needs and Goals

Effective leaders also create a space for open dialogue and invite employees to express not only needs and concerns, but also hopes and expectations for their future and their career path. Wise leaders intentionally seek to understand their team's needs and goals and then advocate for them. The following strategies are important in ensuring that team members feel you care about, and are invested in, their development and advancement:

- Ask for, don't assume, what team members need and want
- Make it a practice to ask each team member on a regular basis if there is anything you can help them with, or if there is anything he or she needs
- Ask them what tools they want to resolve issues, concerns, and fears
- At the end of meetings, confirm that the team member's needs have been met
- Listen with empathy and compassion, seek first to understand, and practice trust-building behaviors

Take Responsibility for Decisions and Actions

Most leaders confront numerous daily demands and struggle with trying to do the right things for their employees. When faced with organizational challenges or constant change, it can be difficult to know how much or how little to share with employees. While transparency is often cited as one of the most admired traits of effective leaders, sharing good news is much easier than sharing news employees might not want to hear. But, trust is enhanced when leaders tell the truth, even when it's not easy to do so, and with this increased trust comes higher motivation and an appreciation for a leader who operates on a no-surprise basis. The following strategies help leaders deepen their advocacy for their team by making sure they are informed and empowered:

- Accept and express your responsibility to your team
- Avoid blaming upper management for the decisions
- Walk the talk by expressing understanding and empathy for difficult situations
- Acknowledge the impact of a situation and take responsibility even if you may not have played a direct role in creating it
- Share information in an honest and straightforward manner and in a timely manner
- If you can't share information, tell team members that you can't share it
- Don't under or overstate the significance of something

In Summary

Advocating builds trust between employees and leaders. Great leaders commit to applying many of the strategies described here as well as others they know deepen trust and openly demonstrate their support of their team members. They deliver on their promises, demonstrate integrity and honesty, and take responsibility for decisions and actions. When leaders practice advocacy by speaking the truth and consistently campaigning for the best possible resources and conditions for their employees, employees are more likely to engage and remain high-performing team members for a long time.

To read the full report, visit www.talentkeepers.com. Excerpt reprinted by permission January 2017. *Which Comes First ... Building Trust or Being an Advocate for YOUR Team?* Orlando, FL.