

Facing the Storms of Change

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Employee trust and loyalty are the cornerstones of any successful business. Employees who trust their employers are more innovative, productive and participate more fully in quality initiatives. The challenge many managers face is that trust is being eroded as more organizations face restructuring and ongoing change. When so much of what we once relied on is uncertain, it is more important than ever for managers to make a conscious effort to build trusting relationships within their own departments.

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Employees fear for their futures

Trust was once a natural result of the security employees felt as part of a solid and often expanding business. Unfortunately, times have changed. It is no longer easy to guarantee even top performers a long and secure future with any organization.

As a result, many employees no longer trust their employers. The loss of trust is particularly problematic for managers who are faced with the arduous task of motivating employees who fear for their futures.

Any restructuring has an unsettling effect on employees' trust levels, even if it is a one-time occurrence. Unfortunately, what we are experiencing now is chronic change. Before employees can recover from one exercise in reorganization, another sweeps through. Eventually, rather than focusing on recovery

they brace themselves for the next wave and learn to second-guess the messages that are being given to them in the meantime.

The role of trusting relationships

For employees, the most frustrating part of this process is that exceptional performance and seniority no longer guarantee them a place in the new plan. When employees can't predict their own futures, they disengage emotionally and withhold part of their willingness to commit themselves totally to their jobs. Managers cannot expect disengaged workers to operate as if they are fully connected when they know they may not even be around for the final outcome.

For managers, the most challenging part is how to help employees who are facing such uncertainty. One way is to build trusting relationships. A manager may not be able to predict the future any better than employees, but managers can demonstrate that they can be trusted to act with integrity, state the truth and act on behalf of employees. When managers and employees develop trusting relationships, they find they can face the storms of change more directly and successfully.



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