

Building Trust in a Virtual World

By Natalie Doyle Oldfield



“How do I meaningfully engage and support others in a virtual world? My relationships are slipping away and I’m starting to feel disconnected, how can I reconnect?”

“How do I strengthen my relationships in this current environment?”

If you’ve wondered any of these things, you are not alone. Worldwide, COVID 19 has changed the way we work, we live and we learn. The good news is, even in a virtual world, everyone can learn how to build and strengthen relationships. And it starts by focusing on trust, the foundation of every relationship.

Many believe that trust is a vague feeling, that is earned by those who have a long history together. It is not. Trusting others, and being recognized as trustworthy by others, starts from within each of us. Building interpersonal trust with colleagues, co-workers, students and customers benefit everyone.

Steps to Building Trust Equity with Colleagues and Co-workers

Building trust virtually requires us to think about how we do what we do. Building “Trust Equity” requires that we behave, communicate and serve in a deliberate and purposeful manner. Foundational to building trust is the intention and willingness to listen to others with empathy and compassion.

Practice Empathy and Compassion

Empathy can be defined as the ability to understand the feelings of another person and “place ourselves in their shoes.” Compassion moves us to act on these sentiments, with a desire to alleviate the distress. Listening attentively, with empathy and compassion is foundational to engendering trust in our relationships. Suspending our judgement of others through empathic listening allows us to gain greater insight and understanding of others and creates stronger and more trusting relationships.

Be Visible and Show up Regularly

In a virtual environment, you can’t take your presence for granted. Don’t let virtual become “out of sight out of mind.” A video call can amplify the emotional connection and offer a quick and effective way to engage others in a conversation. With more personal contact comes more emotional connection. It’s easy to hide behind a text, email, chat message or social media post.

About the Author

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Natalie works with business owners and leaders to build relationships of trust, improve customer experiences and grow revenue through a proprietary framework. She is the author of *The Power of Trust: How Top Companies Build, Manage and Protect It*, and creator of The Client Trust Index, an evidenced-based diagnostic and the *Becoming a Trusted Advisor* online course. Natalie has been recognized with a Lifetime Achievement Award as one of the world’s Top Thought Leaders in Trust by Trust Across America—Trust Around the World.

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Invest Time and Effort in Connecting with Others

For many of us the opportunity for impromptu and informal interactions in the cafeteria, lunchroom, hallway, lobby and parking lot are when we connect with others. Since we are not able to do this in a virtual world, we must now intentionally reach out to our colleagues.

Consider hosting a fifteen-minute virtual coffee chat with someone every day. There is no need for an agenda; it's about connecting, checking in and catching up. When we feel connected, understood and safe, new innovative ideas often surface and engagement and productivity increases.

There are lots of stories of new ideas coming out of chance meetings. It's been said that the water cooler area was one of

the most productive and interesting areas in the workplace. In a virtual world, we need to create these informal discussions.

A Culture of Trust

Leaders understand the critical importance of having trusting relationships to support the success of their organizations. As organizations experience a kaleidoscope of complex and difficult challenges, everyone risks harsh consequences if trust disappears.

High trust companies are 2.5 times more likely to experience high revenue growth compared to those identified as low trust companies. Building trust is a skill that can be learned. Building a culture of trust will set you and your organization up for long term success.

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Good-to-Know Soft Skills: Being Cooperative



Are you a cooperative employee? It's not a simple question. For example, are you able to hold back pointing out the flaw or spotting the shortcoming in a project or process and instead listen to others, join with the team, and play a crucial role in an activity at work? Right now may not be the best time to point out problems, but instead, wait for a more appropriate time. Can you check yourself, gauge the environment, see the larger purpose, and participate in an organizational effort where your work style matches the tempo of your team?

If you are bright, keen on taking action, and a great organizer or leader, holding back may be difficult, but these skills in self-control are the sign of a mature employee. Skills at cooperation show others that you are also self-disciplined, empathic, self-aware, and patient. All these traits, which are linked to cooperation, help make being cooperative a highly valued soft skill for your career.

Avoid After-Hours Job Creep



Work-life balance is critical to health and well-being. A recent study showed that unwinding after work and stepping away from work activities helped participants

return their bodies to “pre-strain” and “pre-stress” levels. They also experienced better sleep and improved productivity.

Employees who check their phones, read and/or respond to their emails, and involve themselves with work activities while off work have lower performance quality at work and start work the next day in a “suboptimal” state. You may not be able to detach from your job easily, but be more mindful of the need for doing so.

Source: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov [Search: PMC6164214]

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