

TRUST ME— WATCH YOUR TEAM EXCEL WHEN THEY BELIEVE IN YOU

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Do you trust your team? Do they trust you? Practices with low trust levels rarely reach or sustain even modest success, let alone enjoy best-practice status. To get the most out of your team—to inspire exceptional loyalty, respect, productivity, and teamwork—it is essential that practice leaders routinely embrace and display the characteristics, traits, and actions that make trust a meaningful core practice value.

Trust must be a cornerstone of your practice culture for staff and business operations to excel.

CASE STUDY

A longtime administrator states his intentions to retire in 12 months. While this announcement is expected because of the practice's thoughtful, ongoing emphasis on succession planning, the leadership team is acutely aware of how difficult it will be to replace the effective, efficient, and popular administrator. They know the challenging

recruitment/hiring process needs to begin immediately. As part of the initial steps, the leadership team decides to survey staff to see why the retiring administrator is so respected and liked by those in his charge. Their goal, of course, is to obtain insight that will help them hire a qualified individual who can effectively assume the administrator position with minimal disruption. When reviewing the survey results, the practice leaders are amazed to find that the word "trust" appears in almost every staff comment. "Wow, that's interesting," says the managing physician. "We are so focused on building external trust with our patients that I think we sometimes overlook how important trust is to our own team members. I know I implicitly trust those I work with, but it certainly would be helpful to call out the ways we can build — and sustain — internal team trust."

TIPS FOR BUILDING TRUST

Building trust is hard work. As many fallen or ineffective leaders have

discovered, trust takes significant time and effort to establish, but it can be lost in an instant. To build and keep trust as a firm, foundational cornerstone of a work culture that inspires team members to do their best and to look forward to coming to the office every day, practice leaders should:

Look for ways to make the staff's lives a little easier. Sometimes a small effort on the administrator's part can make a real difference, allowing staff to see that you support them. One of the best ways practice leaders can make staff's lives easier—and demonstrate respect for what they do—is to start on time and follow a consistent schedule that allows them to establish complementary routines and patterns that result in providing outstanding patient care.

Apologize if the fault is yours. There is great respect in owning a mistake. Do not be afraid to admit that you are responsible for an outcome or result (good or bad). Nothing turns off

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a coworker quicker than someone who is not accountable. Plus, necessary corrective steps are more likely to be taken immediately or within a meaningful time frame when everyone can focus on possible solutions and moving forward.

Follow through on verbal commitments. Outstanding leaders say they are going to do something ... and they follow through. Staff trust levels soar when everyone does what they say they will do. Ultimately, leaders have the power to cover up a lack of follow-through if they want, but staff will notice and respond accordingly if such a pattern persists.

Seek out opinions of the team. Inviting staff to be part of the solution demonstrates a leader's confidence, respect, and trust in employees. Make it absolutely clear to everyone that you realize great ideas and solutions can come from anywhere in the company. Let all team members know that everyone has a specific area of expertise that they understand better than anyone else ... and that you want them to help you improve the practice and the care it provides to patients.

Roll up your sleeves occasionally. Nothing says "trust me" more than pitching in to help when a need arises. Periodically, roll up your sleeves and work side by side with everyone on the team to learn their jobs and show that you respect their position and contribution to the team. While you may think you know the details, tasks, responsibilities, and challenges of every position

in your practice, reality says you might have lost some of this knowledge or insight over time. Working in the trenches puts you in close contact with your team and how it functions. It is a great way to build camaraderie and trust.

Always be honest. Staff can't trust someone who isn't always truthful. It is important that your team understands you mean what you say ... always. While changing information or circumstance may alter a strategy or force reconsideration of a plan, staff needs to know you are always going to approach all personal interaction in a candid, open, transparent, and truthful manner.

Show staff you care about them. Treat each staff member fairly and with respect (even when discipline or even termination is needed). Show them you want them to be successful in whatever they choose. Conduct regular work performance reviews and make it known that you embrace professional and personal growth. Encourage all staff members to "own" their career path. Offer them mentoring and other ways to advance professionally. Also, show genuine interest in your employees' families and what they like to do outside of work. Let them know you see them as more than just employees.

Live the values you preach. Earning respect and trust is relatively easy if you "walk the talk," and your staff knows and sees it. Act the part. Dress the part. Lead by example. Be visible and engaged. Interact in an open and

honest manner; however, learn to do so with greater sensitivity and compassion for others. Don't be aloof. Be ready to roll up your sleeves and get it done. Be accessible and available. Everyone has a life outside of work; understand that it will enter the work environment once in a while. Be there for your staff; they will gladly follow your example ... with an increased level of trust.

Celebrate regularly. Respect and trust are nurtured when leaders regularly acknowledge and celebrate individual and team successes. It is amazing how far even a little expression of gratitude can go when it is timely and sincere. While everyone may want a \$1 million raise, all it really takes to enhance trust and respect are a few kind words at a team meeting, a personal email, a handwritten note, or a small token of appreciation (e.g., movie tickets, flowers, dinner out, a special parking space, or a small gift card). Showing appropriate gratitude is a proven way to cement desired actions and improve moral.

CORE VALUE

Making trust a core value and a meaningful part of practice culture starts with the leadership team. Thoughtful leaders who manage by example and make trust-building an integral part of their practice philosophy will likely find that their team willingly embraces and emulates that course of action. The result of this trust-building partnership will be a happy, efficient team that is able to focus exclusively on providing patients with the best care possible. **AE**



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