

FC EXPERT BLOG

Why Your People Don't Trust You, And How To Fix It

BY FC EXPERT BLOGGER KAIHAN KRIPPENDORFF WED SEP 28, 2011



I am writing this from a resort in the Mayan Riviera, the Caribbean Ocean crashing to my left, a cool breeze washing away the traces of a hot Mexican sun. It's Monday. The day when last week's tourists are replaced with this week's, and as the day floats on, I see them coming in, pale skin, dropping their bags, filling the beach chairs, taking in the ocean air.

How strange it must be for the people who work here, I think, to learn a new set of names every week. But then it occurs to me: this is not unlike most other jobs. Your boss arrives. You learn his name and adapt your routine. But within three years he is done, whether because he did a good job and moved on or performed poorly and...moved on.

Don't we all seem to live in a revolving world? How can you manage, how can you create consistency, when the people you work with come and go so frequently?

[Linda Stewart](#), president and CEO of [Interaction Associates](#), thinks the problem is even worse: "The average manager stays less than a year," she says.

This creates a huge problem for anyone seeking to lead, to drive change, to make things happen. If your managers keep leaving, how can you keep up momentum without having to restart every 12 months?

Interaction Associates has an interesting solution. This consulting firm specializes in driving "business success by developing collaborative work cultures and leadership at all levels." They believe that in today's rapidly turning environment it is no longer enough to build employee engagement; one needs to build involvement. You need employees who not only believe in their leader, but who are actively involved in achieving your company's vision.

Imagine that. You recruit a team and they get passionately committed to the work, so much so that if you leave and someone else takes over, the employees do not skip a beat, they keep on pushing toward the goal. That seems to me to be the entrepreneur's nirvana. You build a machine that keeps growing and growing, even after you leave.

How can you build involvement that lasts?

[Andy Atkins](#), head of R&D for Interaction Associates, shared with me some research the firm recently completed that points toward an answer ([read more](#)). Two years ago the firm launched a survey that looked into the business strategies and employee involvement practices of about 100 companies. The survey revealed a number of interesting insights, including showing how many companies practically dropped their efforts to involve their employees during the economic crisis. But what I found most insightful and useful was the finding that there are three key reasons for people to trust your leadership:

- 1. PAST BEHAVIOR.** They saw you did the right thing in the past, so they trust you will do it again.
- 2. EXPERTISE.** You have expertise or special knowledge that they trust.
- 3. SHARED GOALS.** They believe you are both pulling in the same direction. They trust you after the same thing as them.

The first type of trust is what most game theorists underscore — the power of past behavior to shape others' expectations of your future behavior. This is managing your reputation through your actions. This has traditionally been a critical aspect of leadership, but how useful is it in a world in which when your managers move on every 12 months?

The second gives you the kind of power that doctors and lawyers command. You go to your doctor, he tells you have X, and you trust him because you do not know enough to question him. Heck, he went to medical school for 10 years and practiced for another 20, he must know what he is doing. But in an age of unlimited information access, people are growing more skeptical of the experts. This type of power is waning.

In the fast-paced, continually changing work environment of today, the first two cannot win your support. What you need is the third. You need to show your people that "we are both pulling in the same direction." This is the force that pulls together soldiers in battle. They must trust their lives to people they barely know. But they trust they share the same goal — to survive — so they operate as a cohesive team.

Interaction Associates' researched showed that of the companies that succeeding in building a collaborative culture, 93% focused on the third type of involvement.

The pace of organizational change is accelerating. The methods that worked in the past to build team cohesiveness are unable to keep up. Your people will not follow you because of your reputation (they haven't been here long enough to know you) or because of your expertise (they don't care). To win their support you must show them we are pursuing the same goal, hold the same interests, we are after the same dream.

TODAY MAKE A POINT TO SHARE WITH 10 PEOPLE (OR MORE) THE MISSION AND VISION YOU ARE COMMITTED TO.