

Viewpoint

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OPINION

Why trust matters most during times of uncertainty

The pace of work is relentless, and trust inside organizations is eroding. We're navigating reorgs, layoffs, acquisitions and the growing fear that AI will replace jobs.

Leaders are making high-stakes decisions faster and more publicly than ever before. People are watching closely and wondering what it all means for them.

We are not OK.

And yet – this moment presents a real opportunity. As Sun Tzu said, "In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity." Right now, that opportunity is trust.

We are in a trust recession. And the organizations that choose to create a trust boom will win. Because trust is the currency of the workplace.

When it's strong, everything moves faster – decisions, innovation, performance. When it's weak, everything slows down.

Low trust looks like stalled decisions, shifting priorities and missed deadlines. It shows up as micromanagement, risk aversion and a lack of creativity.

Teams hesitate. Leaders over-explain or under-communicate. Energy drops.

At its core, trust is confidence – confidence in yourself, your role, your leadership and your organization. Think about a time when you lost confidence in yourself. You likely overthought decisions, avoided risks and questioned your instincts.

Your performance didn't just dip – it stalled. Now scale that across an entire organization. That's what low trust does.

The good news? Trust is not a sentiment. It's a system. And systems can be rebuilt.

It starts with commitment. Leaders must decide – clearly and visibly – that trust is a priority, especially when it's hardest to maintain. From there, define what trust looks like in your current season. Because trust is not one-size-fits-all.

If you're navigating layoffs or restructuring, trust is built through



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"When trust is shrinking, your opportunity is expansion. Double down on trust – and everything else will follow," writes Vitale Buford Hardin.

clarity, transparency, and how you treat people on the way out. Are you communicating early and often? Are you honest about what you know – and what you don't? Are you treating people with dignity?

If you're in a season of growth, trust looks different. It's about equipping your people – providing the resources, structure and support they need to succeed. It's about clear expectations and consistent communication so growth doesn't turn into chaos.

Different seasons. Same principle. Trust is built in how you show up.

After you define trust – determine the specific behaviors and then assign metrics to these behaviors. For example, maybe a behavior of clarity is to communicate decisions to all involved parties 60 minutes after the meeting is over. The metric is how often you meet that 60-minute goal.

Or, maybe a behavior of collaboration is to enforce monthly 1:1s with cross-departmental peers



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– so VPs with VPs, directors with directors, and so on.

Your metrics could involve meeting completion rates and decision velocity. Define trust and the assigned behaviors and metrics. Then track, evaluate, pivot where needed, and repeat.

In uncertain times, leaders often focus on strategy, cost and speed. But the real differentiator is how well you protect your people while you execute. Because when trust is high, people don't just stay – they engage. They take risks. They solve problems. They move the business forward.

Uncertainty isn't going away. It's the environment we're operating in now. So, the question isn't whether your organization will face disruption – it's whether you'll use it as an opportunity to strengthen trust or allow it to erode.

When trust is shrinking, your opportunity is expansion. Double down on trust – and everything else will follow.

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