

Why building trust in the workplace is mission critical

By [Vukani Mngxati](#), issued by [Stone](#)

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I was asked recently to participate in a discussion about what should be done to improve or bridge the perceived trust deficit that exists in South Africa. My first question was do we have such a problem and the second was if we do, why? There is no doubt we have a problem.



Vukani Mngxati

Earlier this year the global communications firm Edelman in its excellent annual [Trust Barometer Survey](#) found that close on seventy percent of those surveyed tended not to believe information until they saw evidence it was trustworthy. While a degree of caution is cynicism is perfectly acceptable, the upshot of this high-percentage finding is that our inherent mistrust of each other means economic and societal progress is likely to be impeded by suspicion at all levels and the negative consequence for economic growth is obvious.

And if the survey wasn't enough, our national trust problem has been courageously highlighted by President Cyril Ramaphosa who told lawmakers in the aftermath of the floods in KwaZulu-Natal that government faces a trust deficit and that it was a "great source of shame that when this disaster struck, the most burning public debate was around fears that the resources allocated to respond to this disaster would be misappropriated or wasted."

As to why we find ourselves in this position, the answer is multi-faceted, incorporating the institutionalised disparities of our colonial and apartheid past, right up to the environment of graft and corruption that all businesses operate in. And so, to the fix. I cannot show instant solutions, suffice it to say they should begin internally within an organisation's staff complement and making sure they have a real voice and are heard. It is not about seeking consensus but achieving a level of trust in which all

people are heard and valued. It is about constantly recalibrating the internal climate to make sure that balance is achieved. That comes when you trust the right people and know how to delegate. It's about finding employees who are outspoken about their needs and the needs of the company, who are willing to tell you the hard truths that you might not want to hear, who are willing to put the company first and push for changes that benefit customers and shareholders in the long run, who will make those tough decisions with you and implement them with conviction.

So, that balance is about finding the right people to trust and having the courage to trust them and their decisions. But on the flipside to have enough confidence to change a decision even if it will not meet universal approval. It is also about allowing them to make mistakes without feeling the heavy hand of failure and fear. This I believe is achieved by applying key leadership principles: establishing an environment where employees feel valued; setting clear goals and enforcing them; not being afraid to assert your authority and encouraging meaningful feedback from your team in an enabling environment.

To make those principles work and from my experience as a leader of a multinational company these lessons will achieve consistency and predictability which makes trust a whole lot easier to achieve. A trusting environment also has

much to do with tone. because of our history as a country, we are prone to passionate and emotionally driven responses. I think that as a nation if we adopt a more sober-minded and reflective approach to our issues, we might be better off. When it comes to making incremental progress, patience is essential. I am also a great believer in the notion of less ego means more success. I think if we all strive for the common good without seeking accolade, and acknowledgement the job will be done a lot quicker.

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