



THE 2025 TRUST OUTLOOK™

RETAIN TOP TALENT WITH TRUST

POWERED BY



TRUST EDGE
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

IN TODAY'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT, trust is more than just a soft skill—it's a measurable driver of success. Our latest research in the 2025 Trust Outlook® highlights a fundamental truth: trust determines whether employees stay, customers remain loyal, and organizations thrive. Yet, many leaders overlook how trust is built—or broken—within their teams.

Consider this: 80% of the Baby Boomer generation and 76% of managers believe they can immediately tell whether they trust a salesperson. Meanwhile, 45% of all employees have left a job due to distrust in leadership. These findings underscore the crucial reality that trust impacts hiring, performance, and retention at every level of an organization.

When trust is absent, the effects ripple throughout a business. Employees who lack trust in their employer report feeling helpless, disengaged, and even physically unwell. Additionally, mid-tenure employees—those with 6-10 years at a company—are significantly more likely to feel stuck and unappreciated, often leading to costly turnover.

Leaders who prioritize trust, however, gain a competitive advantage—attracting and retaining top talent, fostering innovation, and building stronger relationships. Through greater transparency, creative contributions, and steadfast integrity, trust-based leadership drives long-term success.

The 2025 Trust Outlook®, through the 8 Pillars of Trust™, offers solutions to help business leaders embed trust into their hiring, management, and decision-making processes. By addressing trust head-on, leaders can create an environment where employees feel valued, customers remain loyal, and their organizations thrive in an ever-evolving marketplace.

A LETTER FROM THE CEO



*“A lack
of trust
is your
biggest
expense.”*

DEAR FRIEND,

Trust isn't just a workplace ideal—it's the foundation of business success.

This latest research reveals that nearly half of employees have left a job due to distrust in leadership. Even more striking, employees who feel unheard or undervalued are significantly more likely to disengage, leading to costly turnover and lost innovation.

The good news? **Trust is actionable.** Leaders who invest in transparency, ethical decision-making, and employee contribution build stronger teams and outperform competitors. High-trust organizations don't just retain talent—they foster creativity, improve customer relationships, and drive sustained growth.

The 2025 Trust Outlook® outlines key insights and solutions based on real data from executives, managers, and employees across industries. It provides a clear roadmap for embedding trust into your leadership approach—so you can strengthen your workforce, enhance performance, and future-proof your business.

Take advantage of these findings. Your people—and your bottom line—will thank you.

Stay trusted,

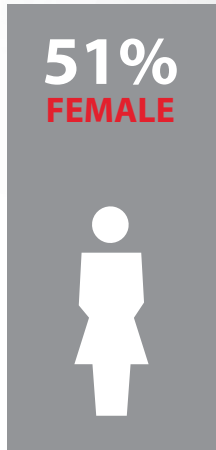
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "David". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

David

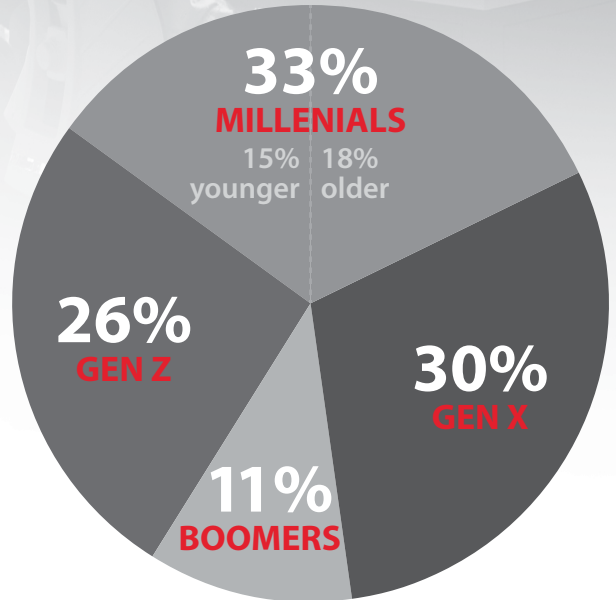
Trust Edge Leadership Institute (TELI) is a Saint Paul, Minnesota-based company with a mission to develop trusted leaders and organizations around the world. Since 1999, TELI has pioneered trust development through research, speaking, human capital development, and consulting, all on trust and its proven impact on the bottom line. The Trust Outlook® is produced annually by TELI and CEO David Horsager.

750 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

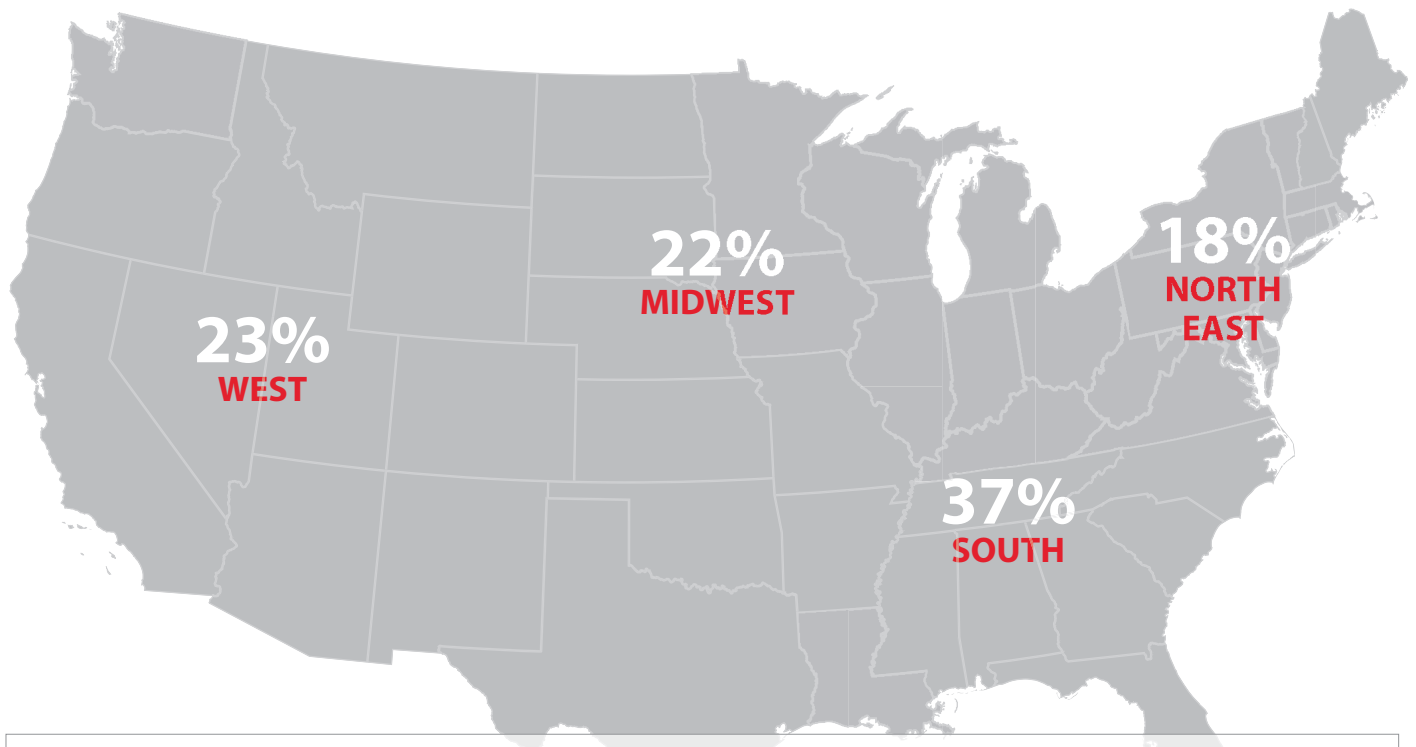
GENDER



GENERATIONS



REGION



Survey was conducted online from July 22, 2024, to July 26, 2024. 750 U.S. participants, ages 18-65, currently employed full-time or part-time. Weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity. Figures are statistically significant at the 90% and 95% confidence level. Margin of error is +/-3.58 percentage points. In an instance that a chart total for a single select question does not add to 100%, please note that this is due to the minimal effect of rounding. Instances where a chart total equals greater than 100% is due to respondents being able to select more than one response.

THE 8 PILLARS OF TRUST™

CLARITY

People trust what is clear and distrust what is ambiguous or overly complex.

COMPASSION

People put faith in those who care beyond themselves.

CHARACTER

People notice those who do what is right over what is easy.

COMPETENCY

People have confidence in those who stay fresh, relevant, and capable.

COMMITMENT

People believe in those who stand through adversity.

CONNECTION

People want to follow, buy from, and be around those who connect and collaborate.

CONTRIBUTION

People respond to results.

CONSISTENCY

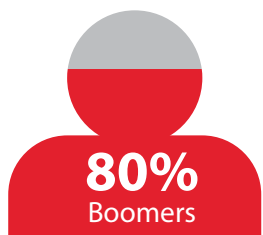
People love to see the little things done consistently.

YOUR CUSTOMER'S FIRST DECISION? TRUST.

The first seconds are crucial! 80% of Boomers, 76% of managers, and 68% of executives agreed with this statement: “As a customer, I can tell whether or not I trust a salesperson right away.”



“I can tell immediately if I trust a salesperson.”



TODAY, Baby Boomers, executives, and managers still make the bulk of hiring decisions. But when it comes to building high-performing sales teams, one crucial question is often overlooked: *Can this candidate build trust fast?* And just as important—*Do they **value** trust?*

The early moments of a sales conversation are make-or-break. If a prospect senses even a hint of insincerity, it can trigger skepticism that's tough to overcome. They might still make a purchase out of necessity—but without real trust, they won't buy more. They won't refer. They won't return.

Salespeople who value trust and know how to build it quickly don't just perform better—they stick around. And so do their customers.

But remember—trust is earned, not demanded. No price point, pitch deck, or product can outperform the impact of a trusted relationship over time.

If you want to drive lasting commitment within your team, it starts with how you lead. It means modeling the very thing you want to see, whether you're closing a small sale or steering a massive reorganization.



**EVERY SALE BEGINS
—AND CLOSES—WITH TRUST.**

COMMITMENT

People believe in those who stand through adversity.

THE COMMITMENT PILLAR APPLIED

Are your salespeople truly committed to earning and keeping trust at every stage of the relationship? Dependable team members don't just represent your organization—they **reinforce** it.

Salespeople who consistently follow through and put others first build more than short-term wins; they create a network of trusted relationships that serve as a steady foundation when challenges arise.

*“One of your opportunities
to build trust the fastest is in
the middle of conflict.”*

from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

CREATE SPACE FOR CREATIVITY.

“Being creative” was selected by executives as essential for building trust **FOUR** times as much as it was selected by employees.



“Creativity helps me build trust.”



executives



employees

WHAT LEADERS INTEND as guidance often arrives to employees as non-negotiable policy. Somewhere between the executive suite and the front line, the message shifts—and trust erodes.

C-level leaders are rarely involved in the organic creativity that happens throughout the organization, but without intentional visibility and support, that creativity can wither. When people don't feel seen or heard, innovation stalls and trust suffers. Despite growing awareness, too many organizations still fail to make space for ideas to take root and grow.

One major American tech company famously encourages employees to spend 20% of their time on passion projects—work that fuels energy and innovation. The payoff? Industry-shaping breakthroughs. When leaders actively recognize and reward creative thinking, they don't just inspire innovation—they earn trust.

As an executive, never underestimate the creative power already inside your organization. Trust grows when people feel empowered to bring their best ideas forward—regardless of title, tenure, or department. Great ideas can come from anywhere!



UNLOCK CREATIVITY TO ACCELERATE RESULTS.

CONTRIBUTION

People respond to results.

THE CONTRIBUTION PILLAR APPLIED

Are you creating space for your employees to contribute beyond just completing tasks? True innovation happens when people have the **time and resources to think creatively**—not just execute under a tight deadline. Consider what you can offer: time to collaborate, budget for experimentation, tools to explore new ideas, or access to mentorship and learning.

When leaders invest in their teams' ability to contribute meaningfully, they ignite creativity, strengthen connection, and fuel the growth of trust across the organization.

“Higher engagement scores are the natural outcome of a high-trust culture.”

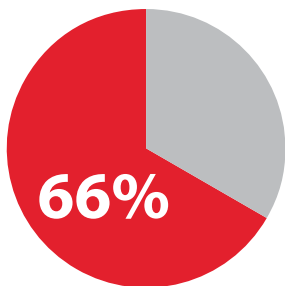
from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

SHARED IDEAS CREATE STRONGER LOYALTY.

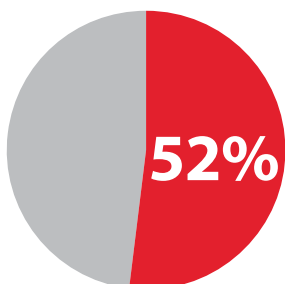
Almost a full two-thirds of low wage earners (making >\$20,000) believe that increased diversity will cause more trust in an employer. More than 50% of them want more freedom to express ideas with their employers too.



“Increased diversity would increase my trust in an employer.”



“Freedom to express my ideas would increase my trust in an employer.”



EXECUTIVES ARE SEEKING innovation—and front-line employees are ready to deliver. Our research shows that more than half of employees want greater freedom to share their ideas with leadership. When employers create space for those ideas and foster inclusive environments, they not only build trust, but they also increase retention.

This is especially critical for entry-level and lower-wage roles, often filled by younger employees navigating the workforce for the first time. These employees frequently report to leaders from a different generation, and with that comes a natural gap in communication styles. Wise leaders close that gap by seeking connection—not control.

Diverse backgrounds bring fresh thinking. Pairing experienced team members with newer hires creates mentoring moments that boost confidence and cohesion. Teams with a variety of perspectives generate stronger solutions than those relying on a single point of view.

The cost of high turnover is real. Training and retraining front-line staff adds up fast; trust accelerates when employees feel safe to speak up, work together, and contribute toward a shared goal. Create that kind of culture and watch both innovation and loyalty grow.

“HEARD” TEAMS ARE HIGH-TRUST TEAMS.

CONNECTION

People want to follow, buy from, and be around those who connect and collaborate.

THE CONNECTION PILLAR APPLIED

A connected culture starts with listening. When employees feel heard and valued, trust takes root. Foster connection by creating intentional spaces—whether through structured forums, regular feedback sessions, or cross-team collaborations that invite diverse voices to share their ideas.

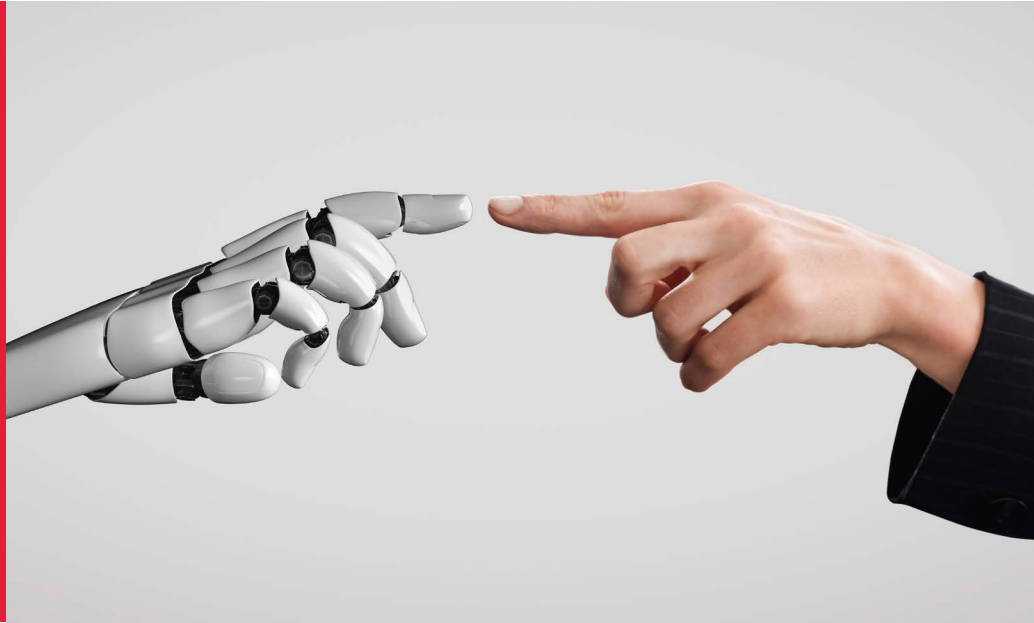
But don't stop at listening; **act on what you hear**. Recognizing and responding to employee contributions fuels engagement, drives innovation, and builds lasting trust across your organization.

“When trust levels at an organization are high, people report 74% less stress, 50% higher productivity, and 40% less burnout.”

from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

BIOTECH BACKS IT. FINANCE FEARS IT. WHAT ABOUT YOUR INDUSTRY?

Depending on the job sector, some fields—biotechnology, technology, and the military—rank AI highly as a trust builder, while others—like finance—believe it’s a trust killer.



“Yes, the use of AI will build trust in my industry.”

biotechnology

technology

active-duty military

financial services

OUR LATEST RESEARCH reveals a sharp divide across industries when it comes to trusting artificial intelligence. In biotechnology, 80% of respondents view AI as a valuable trust-building tool. The technology sector follows closely at nearly 70%, and 60% of active-duty military personnel also express confidence in AI’s potential. In contrast, just 36% of employees in the financial industry trust AI—a clear signal of hesitation.

Those most familiar with AI’s capabilities and risks—often in tech-driven roles—are more likely to see it as a force for good. Whether it’s supporting life-saving innovations in healthcare or boosting operational readiness in the military, AI is gaining ground. Yet, sectors like finance, where trust is paramount and regulation is strict, remain cautious.

That caution isn’t without cause. Misuse of AI has already shown the potential to disrupt not just businesses, but entire economies. Recognizing this, organizations like UNESCO have issued global ethical guidelines to promote the responsible and trustworthy use of AI.

Momentum is building. Across industries, employees are asking for AI integration to make their work more efficient and impactful. Organizations that embrace this readiness—while upskilling their teams and ensuring ethical use—position themselves to lead. Those that resist may risk losing both innovation opportunities and employee trust.

As technology evolves, trust must keep pace!

USE SKILL-BUILDING FOR TRUST-BUILDING.

COMPETENCY

People have confidence in those who stay fresh, relevant, and capable.

THE COMPETENCE PILLAR APPLIED

Just as elite athletes train to stay sharp, employees must continually grow their skills to remain relevant—especially in today's fast-changing job market. Does your organization actively support ongoing learning? Whether through upskilling programs, tech training, mentorship, or educational benefits, investing in your team's growth builds more than capability—it builds trust.

Employees who are empowered to stay current become confident contributors, ready to meet today's demands and tomorrow's challenges. Competency isn't a one-time achievement, it's a **culture you create**.

*“When competency is high,
trust increases, attrition goes down,
and productivity goes up.”*

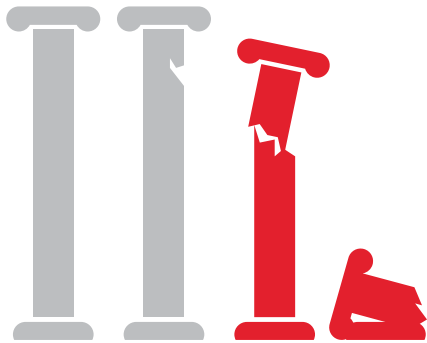
from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR MATTERS.

More than half (54%) of all executives in the study have lost trust in their employer because the employer allowed a colleague to do something unethical.



“Seeing a colleague get away with unethical behavior has damaged my trust in my employer.”



54% of executives agree

IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE, even the *perception* of unethical behavior can quickly erode trust—and the erosion spreads fast. Whether actions cross a legal line or simply raise red flags, how they're observed and addressed impacts morale across the organization. When questionable behavior goes unchecked, word gets out and trust breaks down.

Leaders may hesitate to respond due to financial pressures, resourcing issues, or fear of negative publicity, but teams built on integrity expect more. How leadership responds to poor behavior—immediately and visibly—either strengthens or weakens the trust of the entire team.

Even more damaging than the initial incident is what happens next. If nothing is done to prevent future misconduct, employees begin to question where the line is—or if one exists at all.

One unethical decision can ripple into a culture-wide problem. Eventually, high-character team members may choose to walk away, unwilling to compromise their own integrity for a workplace that doesn't uphold it. Great organizations don't just talk about values—they protect them.



**CHOOSE CONVICTION
OVER CONVENIENCE.**

CHARACTER

People notice those who do what is right over what is easy.

THE CHARACTER PILLAR APPLIED

Don't sacrifice short-term comfort for long-term consequences. Character is not only critical to lead your current teams in the present, but it's also essential in acquiring trustworthy employees in the future.

Make it clear about which values you will deliberately cultivate or prune and why. Your business reputation and success depend on **doing the right thing.**

*“Values become reality when they
truly guide our decisions.”*

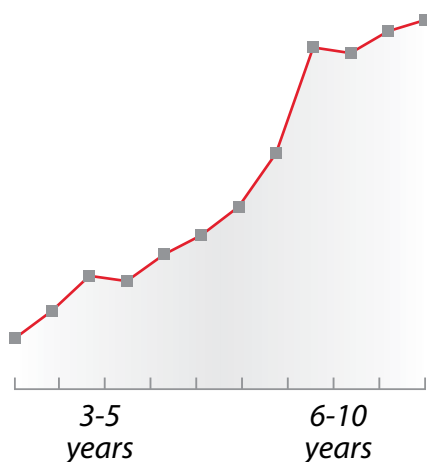
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RETAIN THE BACKBONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

Employees who have been with their company between 6-10 years were twice as likely as employees who had been with the company 3-5 years to say they felt “helpless” when they didn’t trust their employer.



“I feel helpless when I don’t trust my employer.”



SOMETHING SHIFTS around the 6- to 10-year mark for many employees. After years of contributing ideas, taking initiative, and believing in the mission—often with little recognition or visible change—doubt begins to creep in. Hope turns into hesitation. For many, this stage of tenure aligns with middle management—the vital bridge between executive vision and day-to-day operations.

Far from expendable, these individuals are essential. They carry out leadership directives, mentor team members, and hold invaluable institutional knowledge. When they feel overlooked or unheard, they begin to disengage—or worse, they leave. And when they do, it’s not just their role you lose. It’s the trust, relational equity, and deep expertise that take years to rebuild.

Replacing that level of insight is never simple. A new hire may bring fresh energy, but they can’t replicate the earned credibility and historical context long-time employees carry. Organizations that want to build lasting trust don’t just invest in onboarding—they double down on retaining seasoned talent.

Trust grows when long-term employees feel seen and supported. That synergy produces job satisfaction and commitment!

INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS LEAD TO ENDURING TRUST.

CLARITY

People trust what is clear and distrust what is ambiguous or overly complex.

THE CLARITY PILLAR APPLIED

Meaningful change doesn't always happen overnight, but consistent, visible progress helps people believe it's possible. Incremental improvements, communicated clearly and followed through faithfully, reinforce a culture of trust.

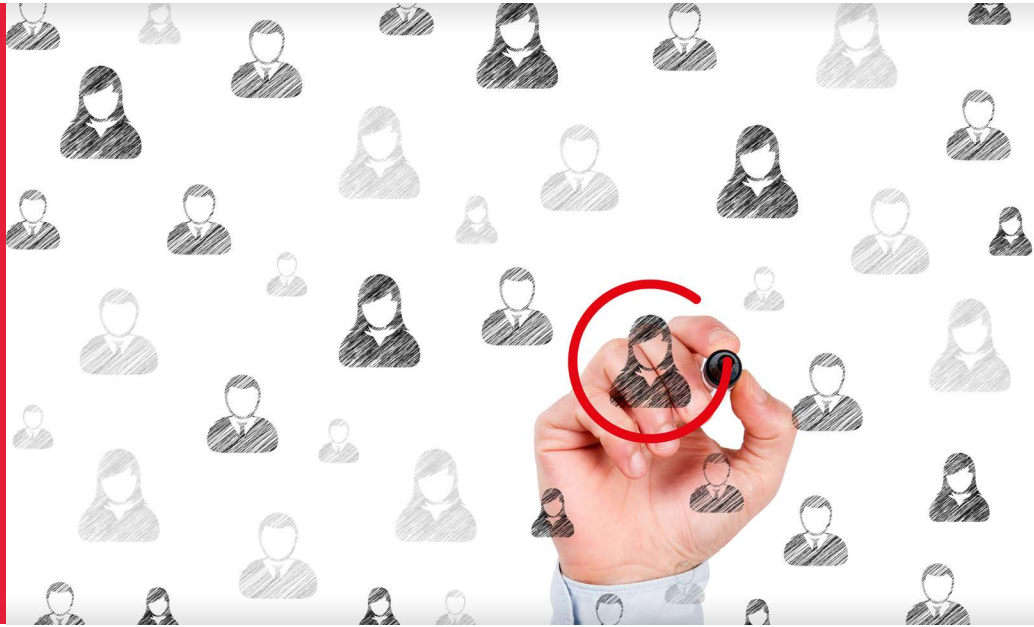
Strategic communication is key. Even if a change doesn't directly impact every team member, sharing the "why" and the "how" behind each step builds clarity and reinforces transparency. Over time, these small actions compound—proving to your people that their leadership is listening, evolving, and committed.

"Taking and applying feedback can be the fastest way to positive change."

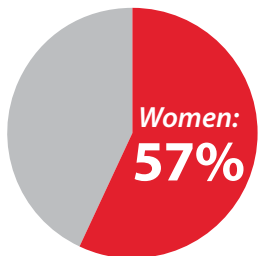
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WHAT ARE THE BAD BOSS BEHAVIORS?

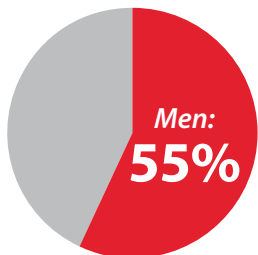
Men and women differed in which “bad boss” behaviors they considered the worst. While 57% of women ranked favoritism as one of their top three “bad boss” behaviors, 55% of men selected “inconsistent communication.”



“Favoritism reduces my trust in my boss.”



“Inconsistent communication reduces my trust in my boss.”



NOT ALL “BAD BOSS” BEHAVIOR looks the same, but the impact is often the same: lost trust, reduced morale, and high turnover. Whether it’s blatant favoritism or subtle inconsistency, both can quietly chip away at culture and performance. And make no mistake—people notice.

Favoritism can take many forms: preferential job assignments, flexible schedules, access to resources, and uneven career growth opportunities. It also affects how and when information is shared. If one team consistently gets updates before others, or one employee always seems to be in the know, it may not just be poor communication—it may be bias.

Left unaddressed, these behaviors ripple through teams and departments, creating frustration, division, and disengagement. The cost? Productivity drops. Collaboration stalls. Top performers leave. In more extreme cases, favoritism can even open the door to legal risks.

The good news? This isn’t irreversible. Leaders who commit to fair communication, transparent decision-making, and consistent behavior can rebuild trust and reinvigorate their teams.

CONSISTENT EXPECTATIONS RESULT IN ENGAGED EMPLOYEES.

CONSISTENCY

People love to see the little things done consistently.

THE CONSISTENCY PILLAR APPLIED

If you're looking for fast ROI on your leadership efforts, start by identifying where favoritism and inconsistent communication are showing up. Establish clear, standardized criteria for recognition, promotion, and celebration. Ensure updates and communications happen consistently—shared at the same time, with the same level of transparency, and across teams.

When employees know what to expect, trust grows. When communication feels fair and predictable, friction decreases. The result? Higher engagement, stronger performance, and greater contributions from every corner of your workforce.

“Trust is grown or diminished in every interaction, whether you know it or not.”

from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

WELL-BEING AFFECTS ENGAGEMENT.

When they don't trust their employer, women are two times more likely than men to feel physically sick and are 66% more likely than men to feel fearful of being fired.



“I feel physically sick when I don't trust my employer.”

women



men

“I fear being fired when I don't trust my employer.”

women



men

HERE'S THE REALITY: Nearly 57.5% of the U.S. workforce is made up of women, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. And like all employees, they need more than a paycheck to stay engaged—they need to feel safe, supported, and trusted.

Employee retention and engagement are critical to business continuity, but neither can thrive without a foundation of physical and emotional well-being. When absenteeism rises, both the quantity and quality of output decline. It may seem like simple math, but the ripple effect is massive—especially when more than half of your workforce could be impacted.

No one does their best work under stress or fear. When trust in leadership erodes, it affects not just morale—but health. And when employees begin to feel unwell, undervalued, or unsafe—when they sense a lack of trust, they WILL look elsewhere. Whether to protect their health or secure their future, a lack of trust becomes a compelling reason to leave.

On the other hand, leaders who invest in trust-building create a workplace where employees feel well, stay longer, and perform at a higher level. The bottom line? Healthy trust powers healthy people who power thriving businesses.



GIVE YOUR TEAM WHAT THEY NEED MOST.

COMPASSION

People put faith in those who care beyond themselves.

THE COMPASSION PILLAR APPLIED

What's getting in the way of your team's well-being? Whether it's a demanding schedule, unclear roles, or outdated processes, identifying and addressing these factors is essential to creating a healthy, high-performing culture. When leaders take time to notice and respond to what their people truly need, they demonstrate more than awareness—they demonstrate care.

Compassionate leadership builds trust. When employees feel supported, both professionally and personally, they're more likely to stay engaged, perform at their best, and contribute to long-term success—for themselves and the organization.

*“An institution can have a great vision
and capable employees, but it will still fail
if its leadership is not trusted.”*

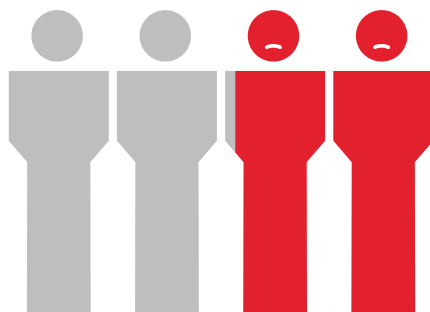
from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

HIGH TURNOVER AND TANKING RETENTION? HERE'S WHY.

45% of all respondents—regardless of age, gender, or company position—have quit a job due to a lack of trust in their employer's leadership.



“I have quit a job because I didn’t trust my employer.”



45% of respondents agree

WHY DO PEOPLE really leave? The numbers are clear: nearly half of working Americans have left a job because they couldn't trust their company's leadership. That kind of turnover is costly—and it's avoidable! Consider the recruiting, hiring, and training expenses that could be saved by addressing trust issues with just one or two misaligned managers.

The ability to build trust isn't a soft skill, it's a required skill for leading well and retaining your talent. In fact, as revealed in last year's *Trust Outlook*, 54% of U.S. employees said they would take a lower paying job if it meant they could fully trust their boss. Compensation matters, but it's not enough.

Building a high-trust culture starts at the top. Leaders must model the very behaviors they expect from their teams: accountability, clear communication, and consistent character. They must also provide real opportunities for growth, offer support during setbacks, and communicate with clarity and care.

Leadership takes intention, but when leaders do the work, trust grows, and people stay.

LEVERAGE TRUST TO ENGAGE, RETAIN, AND TRANSFORM.

THE 8 PILLARS OF TRUST™

THE 8 PILLARS OF TRUST™ APPLIED

Trust isn't built on one strength alone—it's the result of **all 8 pillars working together.**

To retain top talent and reduce costly turnover, leaders must be intentional about weaving each pillar into their leadership approach. From Clarity and Compassion to Consistency and Contribution, each pillar offers a distinct advantage.

But when integrated collectively, they form a powerful foundation—one that strengthens your leadership team, supports your culture, and sustains your organization's long-term success.

“The top reason people want to work for an organization is trusted leadership. It is rated higher than a raise, good benefits, more autonomy, or a fun work environment.”

from *Trust Matters More than Ever* by David Horsager

BECOME A CERTIFIED PARTNER.



YOU'LL LEARN tools, frameworks, and the common language required for teams and organizations to build high-trust cultures! Getting certified will equip you to:

- ✓ Attack high employee turnover
- ✓ Reduce unclear communication
- ✓ Build healthy accountability
- ✓ Eliminate disengagement
- ✓ Improve inconsistent performance

*"Our Trust Edge work led to a reduction
in turnover rates from 40% to 10%.
The material gave me tools
and a path forward as a leader."*

—David Cameron, city administrator

START BUILDING TRUST NOW!

- ▶ Learn more or sign up to get started!
Visit www.TrustEdge.com/certification or call 651-340-6555.

THE 2025 TRUST OUTLOOK®

DATA SUMMARY



80% of Boomers agree that they can tell whether they trust a salesperson right away. 76% of those in managerial roles agree. Executives are slower to agree at 68%.



"Being creative" was selected by executives as essential for building trust 4x as much as it was selected by employees.



Almost a full two-thirds of low wage-earners believe increased diversity will increase trust in an employer. More than 50% of them want more freedom to express ideas.



Some fields—biotechnology, technology, and the military—rank AI highly as a trust builder while others—like finance—believe it's a trust killer.



More than half (54%) of all executives in the study have lost trust in their employer because the employer allowed a colleague to do something unethical.



Employees with 6-10 years at their company were twice as likely as employees with 3-5 years to say they felt "helpless" when they didn't trust their employer.



While 57% of women ranked favoritism as one of their top three "bad boss" behaviors, 55% of men selected "inconsistent communication."



When they don't trust their employer, women are two times more likely than men to feel physically sick and are 66% more likely than men to feel fearful of being fired.



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