

Six ways to get people to trust you

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It's one of the most critical - and sometimes ephemeral - aspects of business. So how do you get it?



Trust: can you still shake on it?

Money may make the business world go round – but hot on its heels comes trust; the belief that the person we're dealing with is honest and will act in good faith.

Most of us like to think of ourselves as "trustworthy" – but what does it actually mean and how do we go about convincing others that we merit the description?

Northeastern University psychology professor David DeSteno, author of *The Truth About Trust*, says trustworthiness is a situational rather than static commodity.

His research suggests around 90 per cent of people, the majority of whom would normally be viewed as upstanding and honest, would break an agreement to benefit themselves over another – provided they could do so anonymously.

Here are a few tips for helping clients and business associates feel confident you won't do them down if they put their faith in you.

Don't sell what you wouldn't buy

Want people to feel like you're on the level? Start by not pushing products and services or a business deal that you wouldn't sign up to yourself, former Brumby's managing director and franchising consultant Michael Sherlock says.

"I've never tried or had to sell something I haven't fully researched and understood and believed to be worthwhile," Sherlock says.

"You need to believe in what you're selling – if you believe in it, you don't have to sell it."

Make that two

I'll have what she's having ... not just an immortal line from *When Harry met Sally*, it's also a smart tactic when you're getting a business relationship going and need to build comfort and trust, Marketing Eye founder Mellissah Smith says.

"Mirror their behaviour and tastes," she advises. "If they drink black coffee, drink black coffee. If they dress in suits, wear a suit. If they dress preppy, dress preppy. Everyone is a narcissist at heart!"

Strut your stuff

Like your clients to feel confident entrusting their business to you? Earn a reputation that reassures them they're smart to do so, Bench PR managing director Jocelyn Hunter advises.

"Make sure that whoever your client talks to has good things to say about you and your business," she says.

Key to building credibility and a name that shines in your profession or industry is finding an area where you excel, Hunter adds. "Try not to be a jack of all trades – it rarely works and spreads you and your business too thin. Pick one [area] and really work at that."

Deliver the goods

Got a relaxed and comfortable approach to deadlines and figure your client won't notice if the report you promised for the weekend arrives the following Tuesday?

Think again, careers coach Edwin Trevor-Roberts cautions. In business, trust is built upon reliability and that means making good on your promises. Every. Single. Time.

"If you say you'll do something by a certain date then do so," Trevor-Roberts says. "It's called a deadline for a reason. If the date was flexible, then it would be a 'liveline'."

Screwed up? Fix it fast!

Delivered your customer an unexpected lemon? Don't bother trying to convince them it's a sweet smelling orange, unless you want your credibility to evaporate, BRW Rich Lister Steve Baxter, an ICT entrepreneur and investment angel, says.

Better to retain their trust by owning up and offering a solution.

"I come from a technical world, stuff breaks, be it software or hardware," Baxter says. "Fix it fast in a professional manner and be honest in your reporting of the fault, proactive even. Admit if something went wrong but tell people what you did to fix it and why it won't happen again."

Keep talking

Hoping to win the trust of colleagues as well as customers?

Then don't hide out in your office and avoid the hard conversations, executive coach Virginia Mansell says.

If you're not in frequent communication with your workers about everything that's going on, they'll second guess your actions and make up their own stories and interpretations of events.

An atmosphere of mistrust and plummeting productivity are the "rewards" of those who fail to keep the conversation alive, Mansell warns: "The consequences of not communicating and keeping people informed can be catastrophic for a workplace."