

“Without trust, employees have little interest in being creative, taking risks and collaborating. That *generative power* begins to wane and performance is diminished. However, trust can be rebuilt after it’s been broken. Indeed, both facets – building and breaking – are necessary and natural in all relationships.”

Building Sustainable Trust

By Dennis S. Reina and
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Introduction

Parallel to the emerging field of Positive Organizational Psychology, which focuses on optimal individual psychological states, is the field of Positive Organizational Practice which centers on optimal leadership and management practices that create the best of human conditions in working environments. Positive organizational practitioners recognize that business is conducted through relationships. And trust is the foundation of those relationships.

Trust is the critical ingredient and trustworthiness is the descriptive word that helps to define authentic leadership. Trust is the basis for effective leadership and for relationships in the workplace, and it is those relationships that produce extraordinary organizational regeneration and renewal.

Yet in today’s business world there is a wide variety of dynamics constantly at play that challenge trust at several levels. Mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, change initiatives ad infinitum, high speed-to-market demands, outpacing workforce education, tight controls on information sharing - these workplace dynamics call trust into question. When trust erodes, relationships are compromised and people shut down, pull back, and hesitate to engage. Without trust, employees have little interest in being creative, taking risks and collaborating. That *generative power* begins to wane and performance is diminished. However, trust can be rebuilt after it’s been broken. Indeed, both facets

– building and breaking – are necessary and natural in all relationships. Trust, betrayal and rebuilding trust go hand-in-hand for developing *sustainable* trust.

A Trust Rebuilding Example

Sandra, a customer service manager of a telecommunications firm, thought she was operating with the best interests of the company in mind. Yet at a meeting of her management team Sandra’s boss did not support her. In fact, he belittled her with his unfounded remarks. Sandra was upset, but said nothing to her boss in her defense. After the meeting, she quickly left the room feeling quite defeated.

The next day Sandra took a risk. She knew she could be fired for speaking up. Yet she also knew she had to do something and do it soon! After a sleepless night worrying, Sandra walked into her boss’s office and asked if they could talk. She told her boss her side of the story: that she felt misunderstood and betrayed by her boss’s comments and actions the day before and that her boss’s comments were not justified. The two of them talked the situation through. The boss admitted the mistake he made, and Sandra took responsibility for her part. Both talked about what they would do to prevent misunderstanding in the future. Sandra and her boss were able to restore trust and confidence in each other, and in their relationship.

In working through the issues and restoring trust in her relationship with her boss, Sandra was able to refocus on accomplishing the tasks of her job, instead

of worrying about whether she had one. Taking the time to build and maintain trust in the workplace allows employees to focus their energies on what they are there to do and want to do.

We have developed a Trust & Betrayal Model (Reina, D.S. & Reina, M.R., 2006) that provides a roadmap for building sustainable trust. It is sustainable trust that cultivates an environment where the possibilities for positive organizational practice can be realized. The model offers a lens with which to focus directly on supporting "... the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them (Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. 2000,5).

What Builds Trust

At the core of trust building is raising people's consciousness of what trust means and the behaviors that build it. Providing a common language of trust puts workers on the same page and cultivates shared understanding that supports constructive discussion and action planning. A behavioral construct of trust is essential to its sustainability.

We call trust Transactional Trust because it is an exchange and it provides a foundation for effective relationships and work results (see *Figure 1*).

Contractual Trust

Contractual trust implies mutual understanding between people; each will do what they say they will do. Managing expectations, encouraging mutually-serving intentions and keeping agreements are examples of behaviors that build contractual trust. When practiced, employees understand what is expected of them, roles and responsibilities are clear, promises are kept or renegotiated; individuals collaborate freely, depend on each other, and perform consistently.

When staff members focus on themselves and lose sight of others, agreements may not be kept. Failure to keep agreements breaks down collaboration and affects others' ability to deliver. One of our clients, a global IT leadership team, repeatedly failed to deliver

as promised and ultimately it cost the company its speed-to-market advantage and its competitive position.

Communication Trust

Trust influences communication and communication influences trust. Sharing information, telling the truth, and speaking with good purpose are examples of behaviors that create Communication Trust. When

present, workers feel safe to ask questions, honestly speak their minds, challenge assumptions, raise issues, give and receive feedback, or acknowledge that they don't understand and seek help.

Our research in over one hundred organizations, using trust measuring surveys, has found that gossip is the number one killer of Communication Trust. Nine out of ten people in the workplace experience this particular breach of trust that creates damaged relationships and an unhealthy culture.

Competence Trust

Those responsible for implementing change need to be involved in designing the change. Minimally, their input needs to be sought. When a leader seeks an employee's input the leader demonstrates trust in that individual and the employee's confidence in his or her own competence is nurtured. Trust in the leader is extended in return.

Competence Trust is compromised through micromanagement and the failure to delegate. Both are oppressive and cause people to question their sense of belonging. As a result, workers don't feel free to use their knowledge and they feel discounted and robbed of opportunities to grow and develop.

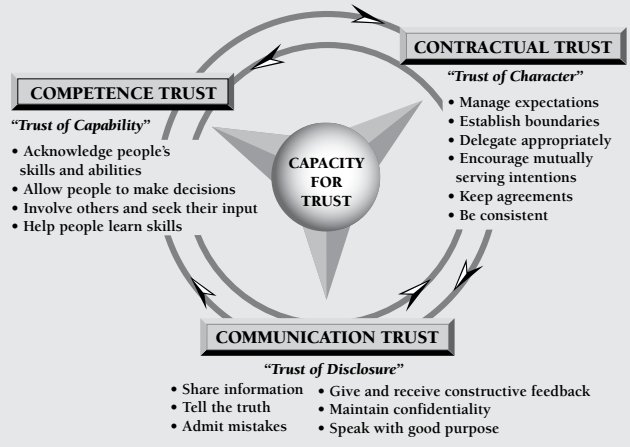
FIGURE 1: The Reina Trust & Betrayal Model®

Transactional Trust

Transactional Trust is:

- Reciprocal ("Got to give it to get it")
- Created incrementally (step by step)

Three Types of Transactional Trust:



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In summary, *Contractual Trust* sets the tone for engagement and direction and shapes roles and responsibilities. *Communication Trust* establishes information flow and how people talk with one another. *Competence Trust* allows individuals to leverage and further develop skills, abilities, and knowledge. Everyone in an organization is responsible for building trust.

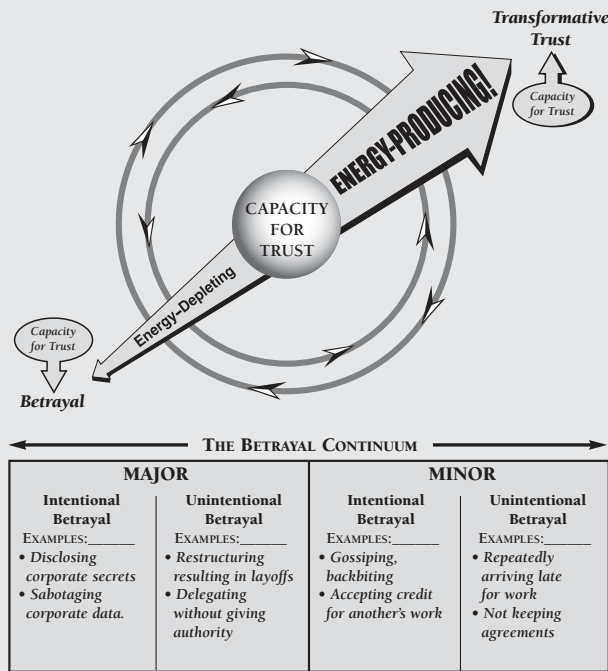
When Trust is Broken

We all experience the building and breaking of trust in personal and work relationships. Trust may break in an instant or gradually erode. We define betrayal as the breach of trust or the perception of a breach occurring along a continuum from major to minor; intentional or unintentional (see *Figure 2*). Major betrayals often occur suddenly and have significant effects. In the work setting, major unintentional betrayal, in particular, is often a by-product of change such as mergers, acquisitions and restructuring, resulting in the loss of "life" in the organization as people once knew it. In these instances, employees often feel betrayed because of how the change was managed, rather than because the change occurred.

FIGURE 2: The Reina Trust & Betrayal Model®

Betrayal

- A breach of trust or the perception of a breach
 - From major to minor
 - Intentionally or unintentionally



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Many assume that major betrayals contribute most to eroding trust. We have found quite the opposite. Trust is broken in subtle ways every day. When people fail to deliver as promised, take credit for another's work, look out only for themselves, neglect to collaborate in decisions and spin the truth, trust is broken. When these breaches get overlooked, go unaddressed or are justified away, they accumulate, having the same effects as major betrayal – disappointment, let down, frustration, doubt, confusion and pain.

When feeling betrayed people lose focus, question their place in the organization, doubt their competence and their own trustworthiness and withdraw their efforts. Passion is lost. Workers feel hopeless, helpless and out of control. While they often do not have control over the changes and decisions that create distrust, they certainly have control over how they respond. Some choose to remain bitter, resentful, angry and even vengeful – you

guide people through the pain of betrayal to rebuild trust and renew the spirit of relationship (see Figure 3).

1. Observe and acknowledge what has happened.

Start with Awareness. Assess the Health of Your Organization. Notice what leaders and employees are experiencing and acknowledge it. Pay attention to the subtle and not so subtle behaviors that are building and breaking trust. Healing begins when we acknowledge what has occurred, the affect on people,

hurt me, I will hurt you. Others seek ways to heal from their pain and be motivated by the desire to learn, grow and gain from the losses.

Rebuilding Trust

Critical to sustaining trust is the ability to rebuild it. This requires healing. A mistake leaders make during change is to assume that once broken, trust may be re-established on its own, over time. This view is unrealistic, irresponsible and compromises the leader's trustworthiness. The Seven Steps for Healing helps

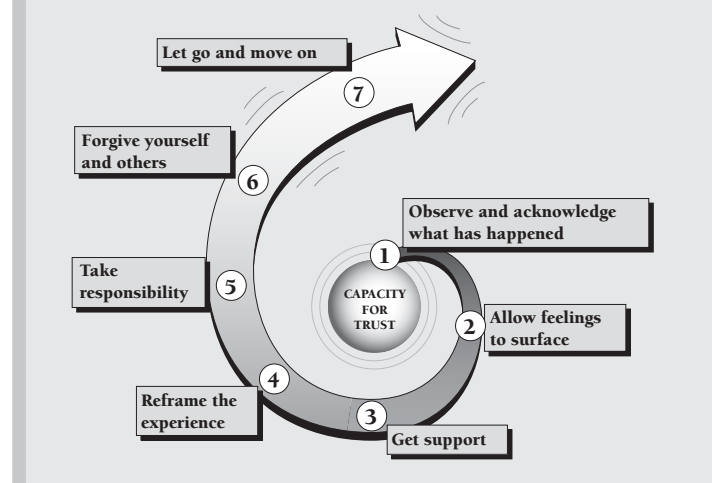
the system and the resulting losses. The failure of management to acknowledge the loss of relationship and connection during change is a painful betrayal that workers experience. When they observe perceived betrayal and give voice to the experienced loss, and associated feelings of vulnerability, doubt and confusion, they send the message that staff do count, and that they are being heard and are receiving attention.

It is common for leaders to slip into justification, rationalization and explanation of the business needs when responding to the loss of trust. This view is irresponsible. People experience this tendency as failing to hear their views and as insensitive. As a result, they feel discounted, diminished, and invisible.

2. Allow feelings to surface.

Give People Permission to Express Their Concerns, Issues, and Feelings in a Constructive Manner. During change, employees often feel anxious and vulnerable. They wonder if they have what it takes to be successful in the new environment, questioning their own trustworthiness. Create safe forums such as open dialogue, focus groups that allow workers to express their fear, anger,

FIGURE 3: The Reina Trust & Betrayal Model®
Seven Steps for Healing



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frustration and doubts. Doing so helps them begin to let go of the negativity they are holding, freeing up that energy for rebuilding relationships and returning their focus to performance.

Help People Verbalize Their Pain.

Sometimes employees have pain they are afraid of or feel unable to share. When we give our attention to supporting them, we let them know that we respect their pain. In healing, the leader's role is to listen, observe, and acknowledge. This is difficult work, but necessary for rebuilding relationships. When the expression of feelings is not supported, feelings go underground and give birth to lingering resentment and a climate of entitlement. This creates an internal paralysis and blocks shared responsibility and accountability. When in pain, workers do not care about the business needs until it is clear that the business cares about them, their needs and their well-being.

3. Get support.

Recognize People's Needs. Employees have needs that must be met before rebuilding can occur. During transition, people have informational needs regarding the organization's direction and strategy, and relationship needs associated with belonging to the organization, and their role in it. They need to know the playing field, what they can and cannot expect.

Give Support! Another common mistake leaders make is failing to seek support for themselves and for their employees during challenging times. They get caught up with the assumption that "we can manage on our own." Rebuilding trust is hard work. Leaders and their employees can not do it alone. They need support to fully understand what occurred, its effects, and actions that are necessary to move through the healing process. It is through support that betrayal may be used as a stepping stone for growth, innovation, shared responsibility and accountability for the very outcomes change was intended to deliver.

Something quite powerful occurs when the breach of trust is truthfully acknowledged. Not twisted, justified or defended, but acknowledged. There is

TRUST TIPS

We Are Inclined to Trust People...

- » Who are self-aware
- » Who take responsibility for their role in the relationship
- » Who demonstrate that they consider the best interests of others rather than just themselves
- » Who do what they say they will do
- » Who practice the values they tell us are important to them
- » Who are willing to recognize and consider both sides of the story
- » Who listen and respond to our needs and interests
- » Who are willing to think about what they have to give as well as what they hope to receive

We Are Not Inclined to Trust People...

- » Whom we experience as selfish and self-absorbed
- » Who do not demonstrate an interest in the needs of others
- » Who are not willing to accept responsibility for their actions
- » Who gossip/talk about others behind their backs
- » Who blame others without looking at their role in the experience
- » Who make snap judgments and draw conclusions before hearing all the information
- » Who are not open and receptive to the ideas and views of others; people who consistently feel that they know all the answers and their way is the only way and the right way
- » Who change the rules all the time
- » Who are inconsistent in their behavior so we don't know what to expect from one interaction to the next
- » Who distort the truth by omitting information for their own purpose

a releasing quality when people shift from finger pointing to seeking to understand; from judgment and criticism to considering extenuating circumstances; from abdication of responsibility to problem solving and taking responsibility; from loss to possibilities.

4. Reframe the experience.

Put the Experience into a Larger Context. Reframing is an important part of the healing process because people can use their hurt and pain as stepping stones for growth, development and life enrichment. Workers are supported to reframe their experience by engaging in the bigger picture, reflecting on extenuating circumstances, noticing the business reasons for change, and exploring opportunities that the changes present.

Engage in Inquiry. Healing is a process of inquiry and occurs when people are provided with an opportunity to have their questions answered. Responding to questions honestly gives employees

an awareness and understanding of the bigger picture leading to renewed hope for trusting relationships and their place in the organization. When in pain it is easy to criticize and judge another for what one perceives they have done wrong. Through inquiry workers become more aware of how they are responding to betrayal. With heightened awareness and consciousness of their own behavior, staff members have the opportunity to behave differently and move more deeply through the healing process.

Help People Realize There Are Choices. When feeling vulnerable due to change, employees may believe they are at the mercy of the forces of change. When reframing the experience, consider that while workers do not have control over what has occurred, they do have control over how they choose to respond.

5. Take responsibility.

Take Responsibility for One's Role. It is not helpful to spin the truth or to cover up mistakes contributing to perceived

The Organizational Trust Quiz™

How well do the people in your organization practice behaviors that build *Trust*?
Take a few moments to evaluate.

THE REINA ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST QUIZ™

	1	2	3	4	5
	AN	O	ST	F	AA
1. Do people in this organization keep agreements or renegotiate if they cannot?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Do people in this organization have clear and explicit expectations regarding measurable results and objectives?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Do people in this organization act with mutually serving intentions without hidden agendas?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Do people in this organization share job related information that is pertinent to getting the job done?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Do people in this organization speak their minds and tell the truth, even when others disagree?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Do people in this organization openly admit and take responsibility for the mistakes they have made?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Do people in this organization gossip or participate in unfair criticism about other people?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Do people in this organization have confidence in their ability to keep up with the changing demands of their jobs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Do people in this organization acknowledge the skills and abilities of others?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Do people in this organization help each other learn new skills?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reina, D.S. & Reina, M.L. (1995, 2003). *The Reina Organizational Trust Scale*®. Stowe, VT: The Reina Trust Building Institute.

Add up all your scores for the above questions to come up with your score of the organization _____

SCORING

The highest possible score is fifty, and the lowest would be zero. The higher the score, the greater you perceive your organization practices trust building behaviors, and the likelihood the organization has effective working relationships.

Your organization practices trust-building behaviors...

- 0 to 10 Almost never. There is serious room for improvement!
- 11 to 19 Occasionally, which damages trust within the organization.
- 20 to 29 Some of the time, which does not build sustainable trust.
- 30 to 39 Frequently, and are most likely have effective working relationships.
- 40 to 50 Almost always, and are probably viewed as a highly effective organization. Keep up the good work!

betrayal. People see right through it and trust is further diminished. People take responsibility when they acknowledge their mistakes or oversights. Telling the truth, without justification and rationalization, demonstrates a leader's trustworthiness and exposes vulnerability. Doing so makes it safe for others to expose their vulnerability, seek support and take responsibility for their behavior. Sometimes three simple words, "I am sorry," reflect taking responsibility and go a long way to rebuilding trust.

Help Others Take Responsibility for Their Role. Trust begets trust and betrayal begets betrayal. The more aware people are that they choose their actions, the more able they are to take responsibility for their behavior and the results it generates. It is necessary to question assumptions, examine behaviors and to reflect on how one is building or breaking trust. Employees in pain tend to blame their leaders, as well as to behave in ways that further contribute to betrayal. They need help to see their role. While people may not have control over what happened, they do have control over how they respond. Even though they have been betrayed, it does not justify betraying in return.

Make Amends and Return with Dividends. In the workplace, it is the leader's role to break the chain of betrayal and reverse the accumulative pattern of distrust. Because actions speak louder than words, the leaders need to take the first step in mending fences with their employees. Rebuilding trust does not simply mean giving back what was taken away. It means returning something in better shape than it was originally and it means strengthening relationships and enhancing the culture. In making amends truth-telling is essential. People need to honestly know the realities of the situation and what their leaders can and cannot take responsibility for and therefore, what they can expect.

Manage Expectations. Future betrayals associated with change are managed by continually clarifying expectations. Workers want to know what is expected of them and what they can expect in return. Sustaining trust requires negotiating when

expectations and agreements cannot be fulfilled as well as leaders being receptive to entering into such negotiations. Doing so does not mean that people will always get their way. However, clarity of expectations will result, agreements will be kept, truths will be told and trust will be built.

Keep Promises. Sustaining trust requires that people know that promises made will be kept. Leaders and their employees need to be mindful of what they promise. Sustaining trust requires that leaders do not make promises they know they can't keep in the spirit of winning approval or looking good. Doing so sets oneself up for failure and the breach of trust. When one realizes promises cannot be kept, admitting the oversight and renegotiating an agreement is essential.

6. Forgive yourself and others.

Recognize That Forgiveness Is Freedom. Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. Anger, bitterness, and resentment deplete people's energy and interfere with relationships and performance. When organizations help individuals forgive, they help them free themselves. With forgiveness, they heal their future by changing their attitude about the past. Forgiveness helps people see new possibilities.

For most people, forgiveness takes time, and happens gradually. Over time employees may be willing to forgive, but they can not expect to forget. Leaders can help their staff members heal from the pain they felt, but they cannot erase the events of the past. Employees may occasionally feel a twinge of pain after they have forgiven. It is natural for there to be lingering pain for perceived wrong doings. However, through forgiveness, the lingering pain will likely not have such a charge that it evokes negative behavior.

Shift from Blaming to Focusing on Needs. It is important to address persistent resentment and finger pointing, as they are toxic to individuals and the entire system. They undermine morale, productivity, innovation, engagement and erode trust. Forgiveness is a personal matter. As such, it is difficult for people to forgive a system. However, leaders can help cultivate a

healing, trustworthy environment where forgiveness takes place. They may do this by helping people shift from blaming the organization to focusing on addressing individual needs as they pertain to their roles and the needs of the business. To do so, leaders must consider what employees need to resolve issues, concerns, fears and pain. They must pay attention to conversations that need to occur and listen for what needs to be said. Leaders may be guided by insight into what can make a difference right now.

7. Let go and move on.

Accept What is So. Acceptance is not condoning what was done but experiencing the reality of what happened without denying, disowning, or resenting it – facing the truth without blame. People accept what is so when they separate themselves from their preoccupation from the past and invest their emotional energies in creating a different future. One that is trustworthy.

Take the Time and Make the Commitment. When trust is lost, it is regained only by a sincere dedication to the key behaviors and practices that earned it in the first place. The journey back to trusting is not an easy one. However, by listening, telling the truth, giving the benefit of the doubt, seeking to understand and practicing Transactional Trust behaviors people will find their way. Individuals may be guided by their good-faith effort and by keeping their intentions honorable. People will not always agree or be aligned, but they may do so with honesty and integrity.

While not easy, rebuilding trust is essential. The cost of not doing so is too high to be ignored. By being self aware and choosing to practice trust building behaviors, leaders can play an instrumental role in supporting employees to heal from betrayal, to rebuild and sustain trust and renew relationships.

Summary

Trust influences the positive psychology of an organization's culture, and supports the organization in dealing with change. It also affects the behaviors that drive

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Dennis S. Reina, PhD, co-founded
The Reina Trust Building Institute,
an outgrowth of 15 years of
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trust-building behaviors into
strategic organization initiatives
to achieve sustainable trust.
Michelle and Dennis co-authored,
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business results. Building sustainable trust requires two leadership qualities: Intention to integrate into one's business practices certain trust-building strategies and commitment to utilizing these strategies even after trust has been broken. Trust is sustained when the organization and its employees are committed to practicing Transactional Trust. Relationships are honored and the behaviors of each type of transactional trust are consciously and consistently practiced. Leaders and employees strive to minimize betrayals. When people make a conscious choice to work through betrayals, treating them as opportunities to strengthen interpersonal relationships and organizational effectiveness and efficiency, sustainable trust is created.

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