NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

BUILDING TRUST: A LEADER'S ACTION PLAN

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Use simple verbal and non-verbal cues to build trust with your team.

NANO TOOL:

Trust is essential for a leader's success, but two misconceptions often stand in the way of leaders gaining the trust they need. First, they mistakenly believe that developing trust is a long, slow process that has to evolve over time; and second, they expect that as long as they are trustworthy, people will naturally trust them.

New research shows that building trust doesn't have to take years, and even the most trustworthy people don't automatically win trust — especially from people they work with — no matter how much time is involved.

The researchers found that there are specific actions you can take to build trust quickly — which is especially good to know when you are tasked with leading a new team or moving to a new organization.

Numerous studies show that people who inspire the most trust are those who exhibit two distinct traits: warmth and competence. We trust warm people, because we believe they care about us, and we trust competent people because they are credible, effective, and efficient. Most people inherently project one or the other. But to build strong, trusting relationships both in and out of the office, we need to project both.

Projecting warmth involves a mix of verbal and non-verbal cues. Asking about a colleague's loved ones or inquiring about someone's vacation plans (and listening to the responses), can show you care. Even more important than what you say, though, is what you do. Physical connection is one of the best ways to build trust, whether through handshakes, face-to-face meetings, or other efforts than show you care about the relationship.

On its surface, competence seems easier to convey. Credentials and titles are obvious signs that let others know we're credible. But even with competence, you can project more subtle — and more powerful — cues. "Talking the talk," or using the right jargon, is one way to do this. But you can overdo it, especially when you have already demonstrated high competence and don't score high with others on warmth. In those cases, conveying vulnerability can build trust even more effectively.

ACTION STEPS:

In an age where it's all too easy to get lured into a sense of false intimacy created through social media and email, real trust can be a rare commodity. By deliberately and consciously taking steps to improve in each of these four areas, you can quickly and effectively build trust with your team and other colleagues.

1. **Demonstrate concern for others:** Make it a habit to learn about others' personal lives, and show you care. That might mean remembering and celebrating birthdays, sending flowers and a handwritten note to a team member who has experienced a loss, or simply walking the halls and taking the time to connect personally with your employees. A word of warning, though: if your concern isn't authentic, or isn't perceived as authentic (for example, you don't listen to an answer), this can backfire. Choose ways to connect that feel comfortable to you.

2. **Use non-verbal cues:** Create opportunities for physical connections, which are one of the best ways to build trust. Hold face-to-face meetings, especially if you're charged with leading a new team, or your team is based in another region or country. Handshakes, eye contact, and even a pat on the back can send a powerful cooperative message. Being in the same place signals commitment to the relationship, heightens our focus, and allows for more complete communication — including the ability to project warmth.

3. **Talk the talk:** Conventional wisdom argues for minimizing the use of jargon. But in some industries, the correct use of specific terms and jargon helps signal your competence, showing that you "get" your product, strategy, or corporate culture. By using terms correctly, you demonstrate expertise and that in turn fosters confidence and trust.

4. **Beware of over-competence:** When your competence is already established, but you're having trouble conveying warmth, find an opportunity to be vulnerable. Especially when you are new to a team or organization, showing that you're "only human" can help bridge a trust gap. You might share a personal anecdote in which your human frailties shine through, or admit that you're still learning the ropes and don't have all the answers.

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

- When then-CEO Alan Mulally keynoted a Ford dealer's meeting in 2010, he greeted each dealer by name, asked about his or her business, and posed with him or her for a picture until the right pose was captured. In another show of warmth, Pepsi CEO Indra Nooyi wrote letters to the parents of 29 senior Pepsi executives, telling them what wonderful people their children were.

- Zappos CEO Tony Shieh communicates with his employees directly and in person at "All Hands" meetings and informal gatherings, and hosts events like an annual New Year's Eve party at his Las Vegas home.

- Current and former leaders with deep knowledge of the technology their businesses were built on include Instagram's Kevin Systrom, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Dropbox's Drew Houston, and Google's Larry Page. They gain the trust of their tech teams by speaking their language and understanding the challenges they face.

- Tadashi Yanai, CEO of Fast Retailing, owner of Uniqlo, often reminds others of the challenges he overcame, including being turned down for a bank loan, being overpowered by dominant wholesalers, and coming close to bankruptcy on numerous occasions. Yanai even flaunted his mistakes in his first book *One Win, Nine Losses.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Friend & Foe: When to Cooperate, When to Compete, and How to Succeed at Both*, Adam Galinsky and Maurice Schweitzer (Crown Business, 2015). Argues that finding the right balance between cooperation and competition yields better outcomes at work and in life.

- "Universal Dimensions of Social Cognition: Warmth and Competence," Susan T. Fiske, Amy J.C. Cuddy, Peter Glick, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, No. 2 (2007). Demonstrates that when people spontaneously interpret behavior or form impressions of others, warmth and competence account almost entirely for how they characterize and differentiate each other.

- "Promises and Lies: Restoring Violated Trust," Maurice Schweitzer et al., *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 101 (2006). Finds that trust harmed by untrustworthy behavior can be effectively restored when individuals observe a consistent series of trustworthy actions, but trust harmed by the same untrustworthy actions and deception never fully recovers.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMI) at Wharton's Mack Institute for Innovation Management.