Build Trust, It's Rare

Idea In Short

Audit your relationships through five trust properties: trust is fast, trust creates focus, trust requires norms, trust requires consistency and trust requires grace. Competencies and processes matter, and interactions still boil down to trust. Build it deliberately, because it is increasingly rare.

The People Business

Teaching, training, writing, coaching, listening and persuading are all the same business underneath: the people business. Look back over six months of emails and text messages with the hundred-plus people in a working life and a pattern emerges, because the experiences, both good and bad, essentially come down to trust. That is surprising against the usual vocabulary of competencies, talent, processes, roles and responsibilities, technology, decision rights and best practices. All of that management machinery matters, and still the outcomes boil down to trust, which functions as the glue: without it, you have a collection of people and processes that simply do not connect.1

Trust Is Fast

The first property may be obvious and remains underpriced: trust creates flow, cutting transaction costs, delays and wasted time. It removes negotiations, contracts, double-checking, redundant meetings, over-explaining and general bureaucracy, the same logic that drives companies to vertically integrate for control and smoothness. Stephen Covey built an entire book on the observation, aptly titled The Speed of Trust.2 A concrete example makes it vivid: across fifteen years of rental property investing and a hundred-plus contractors hired, only three or four earned complete trust, and those few never quote prices. They are simply asked to go fix the problem and send the invoice. Is that fast? Absolutely. Did the trust develop overnight? Absolutely not.

Trust Creates Focus

When a team trusts each other, the right things get done without prioritization theater. No matrix is required for every decision, and no responsibility grid must be drawn before anyone lifts a finger. Picture three friends opening a tapas restaurant: nobody bickers over whose job a task is, because whatever needs doing gets done, and process serves the purpose rather than replacing it. A client example shows the professional version. Mid-engagement, part of the statement of work turned out less relevant than expected. The client could have forced completion of the tasks exactly as contracted, and it would have wasted everyone's time; instead, mutual trust redirected the hours to something genuinely useful. Contracts define the floor of a relationship. Trust operates above it.

Trust Requires Norms

Trust does not float free of structure, and the third property supplies it: every community needs common understanding, expectations and guardrails. Without a benchmark for behavior, there is no way to know whether words and actions are acceptable or threatening, and two people can each hold perfect integrity to their own standards while still disappointing each other, simply because one expected X and the other intended Y. Communication closes the gap, since unarticulated expectations produce no trust at all. Social proof plays its shortcut role here too: shared churches, hometowns, honors degrees and professional credentials all make someone a safer bet, and they remain exactly that, shortcuts to trust rather than the thing itself.

The Builder's Weekly Practice

The five properties translate into habits any professional can run. Make one deposit weekly with someone who matters: work delivered early, a promise kept precisely or help offered before it was requested, because consistency is built one repetition at a time. State expectations aloud at the start of anything shared, converting the norms property from luck into design. Extend one measured advance of trust each month, a task delegated without checking or a draft shared before polish, since trust grows only when someone risks first. When a mistake arrives, yours or theirs, name it plainly and forgive it fast, banking the grace that future speed will draw on. And audit quarterly: which relationships run on flow and which on contracts, and what deposit would move one from the second column toward the first?

Trust Requires Consistency and Grace

The fourth property is time. Trust builds through repetition, continually doing great work, respecting people's time and helping them succeed, and a stranger by definition lacks the mutual history that makes any of it possible. Public work accelerates the accumulation: one recent client had read this material for four or five years before any engagement began, and six hundred published pieces created a shared history that a first meeting never could, which is a standing argument for sharing your work, portfolio and thinking in public.3

The fifth property keeps the whole system running. Moving fast with intense focus guarantees imperfection, moments when things are said wrong or the proper process gets stepped over, because trust is not a six-sigma discipline and human relationships are not precision milling. Grace absorbs the defects. The old maxim applies: do not attribute to malice what can be attributed to ignorance, or in common speak, trust each other and forgive the silly mistakes. A recent exchange proved the point, when a teammate's request met polite pushback because the work was unneeded and the relationship could carry the candor: no hurt feelings, full transparency, zero drama. That is what the glue looks like when it holds, and in a world where it is increasingly rare, the people who can manufacture it are the most valuable in any room.

- 1Trust (Social Science)
- 2Stephen Covey
- 3Personal Branding

Summary

Six months of interactions reduce to one variable: trust. It speeds work by removing friction, focuses teams without prioritization theater, rests on shared norms, compounds through consistency and survives on grace for honest mistakes. The glue is scarce, which makes builders valuable.