



Time to trust

An expert in organisational storytelling, **Gabrielle Dolan** says trust is of paramount importance to the success of leaders.

Trust is more important than ever in the current economic environment. Leaders and managers should be striving to gain a high level of trust from their people and maintaining it.

But while we know that trust must be built up over time – and tested most in times of crisis or adversity – do we really understand how important it is?

While leaders are faced with daily situations where they need people to trust in them, they don't always have the time to build it up. That's a dilemma when you are constantly faced with a workforce or a customer base that is looking for reassurance.

The value of trust. Research shows that people need to trust you before they trust your message. Swinburne University conducts annual research into the Australian public's acceptance of emerging technology. Consistently, the research has found that most people take a shortcut and form an opinion, not based on the information or data itself, but rather on

the information source. The research suggests that if people trust the source of the information, they are more likely to trust the actual information.

Storytelling. How can you fast-track the trust process? Organisational storytelling, particularly a trust story, is one way leaders can achieve this.

Trust stories are accounts of personal experiences. Trust stories should contain emotional language appropriate for a business environment, and must be authentic and true. The ultimate aim of a trust story is to demonstrate who you are and the values you hold.

The timing of trust. As a leader there are many situations where a trust story is appropriate: when you are new to a team; when meeting new peers or clients; during interviews; or during performance and coaching conversations.

Trust stories are also critical in times of change and uncertainty. The current economic climate is a perfect situation when leaders and organisations can use trust stories to alleviate the concerns of employees or customers (see boxout).

A leader's trust. Your people want to trust you, often desperately. And even if you enjoy a high level of trust from your staff, in times of flux they crave a reassurance of that trust.

Maintaining high levels of trust is like maintaining a high level of fitness; you don't get fit and then think 'that's it'. Fitness requires constant work; the same applies to gaining, building and retaining trust.

A word of caution. Simply telling trust stories, without congruent actions, will not achieve anything, and can make things worse. Trust stories should never be used to manipulate or deceive. As a leader your actions always speak louder than words. [MT](#)

Gabrielle Dolan is co-director of One Thousand & One, a company that specialises in organisational storytelling.

>> A case study in trust

Insurance company AMP recently sent out life policy updates to policyholders; a four page document full of facts and figures.

The update included an additional handwritten note to the policyholder from their own money. 'Their money' wrote: "I just wanted to get in touch and let you know I'm fine. Actually, I am better than fine. Truth be told, there's quite a bit more of me than there used to be! You can read the accompanying brochure to find out more, but the main thing is, I'm happy, I'm making the most of myself, and I've got great plans for the future."

In the current financial environment, AMP correctly identified what their customers really needed and wanted to hear. At this time more than anything, they craved reassurance, and the letter gave it to them.