

BUILDING AND PRACTICING TRUST

Social change takes both a vision about the world that can be shared and the conviction that, together and over time, it is possible to reach that vision. The key to doing this is trust, defined as “the firm belief in the reliability, ability, or strength of someone.” It is one of the most underestimated building blocks in developing strong multi-generational and social justice leadership.

To develop trust, opportunities need to be created to share experiences, talk about individual histories and perspectives, and find ways to learn from one another. Since trust is built over time, it is natural for leaders to have faith in those with whom they have a long history. It takes conscious efforts to create trust across generations that might have fewer shared experiences. The process of relying on people to make good decisions leads to increased confidence throughout an organization as a whole.

Beyond shared experience, leaders at all levels need to be given challenges and allowed to take risks. Many of those working in nonprofits feel that while they are successful in their current roles, they are not growing or learning in their positions or encouraged to try out new ideas.¹ This can have a detrimental effect in the long run.

TRANSPARENCY

Building and practicing trust in the workplace requires a high level of transparency (often more than some leaders are currently comfortable with). Giving staff the freedom to make independent decisions is a vital component of encouraging them to do their best work and creating trusting relationships. Knowing how decisions are made, and the role that staff members play in making those decisions, is equally important.

It is important to create an environment for open

conversations. People need to be able to take risks without being met with defensiveness or anger. Organizations, from the board to the constituents, can retool to support open conversations about ideas on leadership and work-related issues.

One of the most difficult parts of intergenerational relationships is recognizing differences in power. Acknowledgment and transparency about power differentials based on age and position will help move groups out of a victim role and into one where power and influence can be shared. It is also important to address the role that race, gender, and class play in power dynamics as well.

LEADERSHIP TOOLS

The exercises in this section offer a series of reflective practices to help organizational leaders think about how to build trust with their staff and Board members. They can be done separately, but they are most useful together as one builds on the other.

In the next section, alternative organizational structures are examined that will build on the trust and transparency addressed in this section.

ONLINE TOOLS IN THIS SECTION

Exercise: Understanding Trust

Exercise: Building Trust in the Workplace

Exercise: Practicing Trust-Building Culture
in the Workplace

Exercise: Building Trust with the Board

Report: What Works

¹ See *What Works: Developing Successful Multigenerational Leadership* (Building Movement Project 2010)