

How to foster trust in the workplace

Trust is one of the most important aspects of a happy and productive workplace. Without it, communication and collaboration can deteriorate, efficiency can decrease, and staff satisfaction can take a nosedive. The truth is trust is not universal at work, with only 17% of Kiwis stating that they trust all of their colleagues. An additional 49% state that they trust 'most of their colleagues' – leaving 1 in 3 people trusting only some of their colleagues or less.

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The current state of workplace trust in New Zealand

SEEK research shows that 1 in 2 people have had their trust broken by a colleague. Those who have had their trust broken are, not surprisingly, significantly less likely to trust their colleagues in the future.

The top three reasons for a lack of trust in the workplace in New Zealand are:

- Hearing colleagues say negative things about others
- The political nature of their work environment/culture, based on secrecy, favouritism and strategic 'game playing'
- Not being able to relate to their colleagues

There is a strong correlation with trust and the size of the company (based on the number of people working there), with trust being higher the smaller the company is.

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- **Consider company culture.** Grant Burley, Director Absolute IT, advises job seekers to research the company's staff retention rates and make sure that they feel comfortable with the company's culture before accepting a new position.

"A high staff retention rate is indicative of a high trust factor between employer and employees. If employees feel valued, respected and engaged in their workplace the staff turnover is usually low and productivity is high.

“Company culture is another strong indicator of the type of work environment you can expect. A good sign would be a company that has a culture of equality, transparency and open communication. ”

- **Ask in your interview.** If you’re called for an interview, use the portion where you’re given the opportunity to ask questions to enquire about trust. Asking “how does your company foster/ support trust in the workplace” will not only indicate that you value trust, but can reveal a lot about your potential employer. Look for comments about communication and transparency as a sign that you’re onto a good thing.
- **Work with your employer after you’re hired.** Andrew Morris, Director at Robert Half, offers advice for employers and staff looking to work together to foster trust within the workplace.

“It’s vital that companies truly understand how to support each of their employees by creating trust early on, because it may come down to the difference on whether you attract and retain the best and the brightest in your team.

“Employers realise that a degree of flexibility is important for staff trying to manage their work life balance. Allowing employees to run the occasional personal errand, or to take a personal day to refresh and reboot can make all the difference to them. It will also help keeping employee motivation levels up. Low staff turnover is a good indicator that staff feel supported.

“To feel supported, employees should not work in isolation, but seek out advice from colleagues, or look for a senior director or leader within their workplace who they can trust to become a mentor.”