

Discussion Guide Chapter 6 – Who Can You Trust?

What makes us trust another person? How can we as leaders make good decisions about whom to trust, to what degree, and with what tasks? This guide will help you facilitate a discussion with a group of leaders to help them explore these questions.

Suggested audience: This module works well with small groups of 6-12 leaders who are peers or at similar levels to one another. It is also possible to use this guide with a larger group, as long as you can accommodate breakout discussions. Discussions can be held virtually as well.

The guide is suitable for leaders at all levels, from new supervisors to senior leaders. As you know your people better than we could possibly know them, you are encouraged to modify the questions, structure, and pace of the material below to suit the audience level and situation. The material below should give you a good starting point.

Note: This module does involve a level of self-disclosure that some people may find difficult. Because of this, it can be a great way for a group of leaders to build trust with one another.

Estimated time: 60-90 minutes, depending on breakout structure and the level and characteristics of the group

Outcomes:

- Understand the personal factors that affect your own ability to trust and commit to actions that will make you a more effective leader in this area
- Understand the degree to which you may be influenced by “oxytocin trust” and commit to actions that will help you overcome any issues you may have
- Commit to actions that will help:
 - your people to be more trustworthy,
 - you to be more trustworthy as a leader, and
 - your organizational culture to encourage trust

Pre-work: Participants should read chapter 6 of The Brain Advantage before the session if possible. You may also want to share some of the discussion questions below and ask participants to jot down some ideas to discuss during the session. This will enable the discussion to more easily fit into a 60 minute time slot.

Instructions for the facilitator:

- Opening: (5 minutes)
 - Have people introduce themselves (as needed)
 - Because there is a level of self-disclosure involved in these discussion questions, the group must agree to keep the discussion confidential. They should also avoid discussing specific individuals by name.
 - Review the outcomes and agenda for the session
- Guide the group through the discussion questions in each section. Depending on the size and existing relationships of your audience, you can either: 1) break the group into sub-groups of three, then have brief report backs after each section, or 2) discuss the questions as a single group (not recommended for groups larger than 6 or 7).

Exploring the ideas, problems, and potential impact:

- Acknowledging the personal factors that affect your ability to trust (20+ minutes)
 - Think about the following:
 - To what degree do you tend to be comfortable with risk in general?
 - Trust is situational. For example, you may trust someone in one situation, but may not feel comfortable trusting the same person in another situation. How do you personally think about whom to trust in a given situation?
 - In general, do you tend to have an easy or a hard time trusting others?
 - Share the personal factors above that affect your ability to trust
 - What single action with regards to trusting others would make you a more effective leader?
- Monitoring your own levels of “oxytocin trust” and how it influences your behavior (15+ minutes)
 - Sometimes we may trust people because we feel a sense of connection with them. Some researchers believe that these feelings are associated with the part of the brain that produces oxytocin—a hormone that fosters bonding.
 - Make a private list of your “go to” people—those that you most often trust with challenging situations or high profile assignments. Now make a second list of the people that you are least likely to trust in these situations.
 - Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Do I tend to trust the people on the first list because they are similar to me, because I like them, or because I somehow feel a connection with them?
 - How much real evidence do I have that a person on the second list is likely to let me down? Is that evidence recent? Relevant to the situation?
 - Share the degree to which “oxytocin trust” may be influencing your behavior. What actions will you commit to in order to overcome any issues you may have in this area?

Exploring solutions and taking action: (20+ minutes)

- For trust to develop between leaders and their people, both parties need to demonstrate trustworthiness.
 - If there are people in your organization today that are not trustworthy, what are the three most important things they can do to become more trustworthy? How can you help them as a leader?
 - What are the three most important things we can do to become trustworthy as leaders ourselves?
- How does our organizational culture encourage or discourage trust? What actions (if any) do we need to take in regards to this?
- What will we do to commit to these actions?