Four Essential Steps for Leaders to Rebuild TRUST After Making Mistakes

You cannot repair team trust unless you first share a sincere and effective "I'm Sorry."

Just like a vase that has been broken, when trust has been broken between teammates it does not get better unless there is <u>intentional action</u> taken to repair it.

As leaders, we all share one common trait: we're not immune to making mistakes.

That can fracture the trust that you have worked hard to establish.
As you have probably discovered, trust is earned in drops and lost in buckets –

In working with teams, I have often shared that TRUST is like a [three-legged stool](#)…

There are 3 things that determine how much your team trusts you:

- Competence in your role

- Concern you have for others
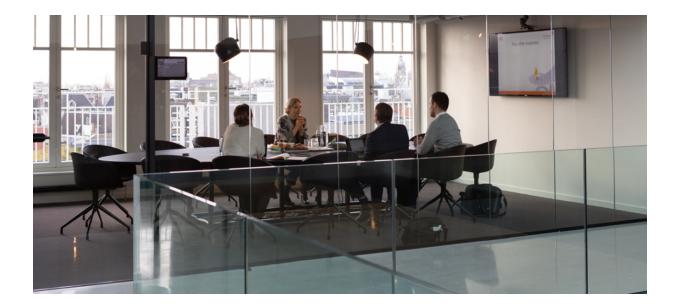
- Commitments you have kept

The absence or weakness of any of the legs on a stool would cause the stool to fall – or at the least provide a much less comfortable and solid foundation for the seat.

And whether you acknowledge it or not, most every interaction you have is impacting how much your clients or coworkers will trust YOU. So, when you find yourself needing to rebuild trust following a misstep, remember that time alone won't mend the bonds with your team.

If you or a teammate have neglected a responsibility or broken a promise of some kind, the first step to "fixing" the problem is to share a **sincere and specific** "sorry."

A heartfelt and effective apology involves more than the typical disinterested phrases like "My bad" or "Wow… sorry about that" we sometimes hear form the people around us…

Rather, it's your intention and actions that will pave the way for trust to be reestablished.

Let's delve into the four crucial steps to rebuild trust after making a mistake.

1. Acknowledge Your Mistake

The first step on the path to regaining trust is to own up to your mistake. Pretending it didn't happen or deflecting blame only widens the gap between you and your team. Transparency and vulnerability are key here. By admitting your error, you show your team that you're human and that you value honesty.
But don't stop at merely acknowledging the mistake—go a step further and communicate your understanding of its impact. This demonstrates that you're fully aware of the consequences and are committed to making things right.

2. Clearly State Your Intentions

Once you've acknowledged your mistake, take the time to express your intentions moving forward. Clearly articulate how you plan to rectify the situation and avoid repeating the error. Your team needs to see that you're not just apologizing for the sake of it, but that you're dedicated to positive change.
Share your vision for the future and how it aligns with the team's goals. This will reassure them that you're working towards a common purpose, rekindling their trust in your leadership.

3. Change Your Behavior

Actions speak louder than words, and the same goes for leadership. To rebuild trust, it's essential to transform your behavior. This step involves more than a one-time course correction; it's about adopting new habits that reflect your commitment to change. Your habits are a reflection of your inner values and decisions.
Small, consistent actions build credibility over time, demonstrating to your team that you're genuinely dedicated to your promises. These habits are the building blocks that will reconstruct the foundation of trust.

4. Prove Your Commitment Through Consistency

Consistency is the linchpin of trust. Effective Leaders understand that your reputation is built over time through consistent behavior.

Your team is watching to see if your new behaviors are lasting or merely temporary. As a leader, it's imperative to continue demonstrating your commitment through sustained efforts. Even though change may not happen overnight, the steady progress you make will bolster your credibility. Over time, your team will recognize your genuine transformation and perceive you as an improved leader.

Rebuilding trust after making a mistake requires deliberate and sincere effort. It involves acknowledging your misstep, clearly stating your intentions, changing your habits, and proving your commitment through consistent actions.

Remember, trust isn't rebuilt solely through the passage of time; it's rebuilt through intentional and consistent behaviors that demonstrate your dedication to positive change. When you claim responsibility for your mistakes, you can use them as opportunities to become more trusted in the future.

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As effective as a specific "I'm sorry" will feel to you, it STILL will be only your words – and these four steps are required to truly convince your team that your apology is sincere.

And changed behavior is the only evidence that you can provide to demonstrate that you are committed to being better in your role. Perhaps more importantly, you will also **gain a great deal of respect** for the way you handled yourself and claimed responsibility for the mistake.

Everyone makes mistakes and is imperfect.

The key is to deliver a sincere and powerful "I'm sorry" afterwards and work to make sure you continue to fortify the relationships that you depend on for your team to succeed.

SEAN'S SHORT BIO

Sean Glaze is a speaker and author who works with organizations to develop Effective Leaders and Winning Teammates.

His programs and books have helped clients like Cisco, John Deere, and Emory University to increase team collaboration, boost productivity, and build more positive and profitable workplace cultures.

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