

# GETTING BACK TO WORK.

**BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION  
OF TRUST & EMPOWERMENT**

# MBA

**GET A BETTER GIG.**



**TEXAS A&M**  
UNIVERSITY

**We recognize that we can create every practice and protocol necessary and still people may not feel safe. This is where psychological safety comes into focus. And, while it was the most important issue prior to COVID-19, it has only elevated its stature and cemented its role as one of the most defining issues in the workplace.**

Psychological safety is the intentional balance of fear (healthy and unhealthy) with trust, employee voice, and empowerment. Organizational research has identified psychological safety as an important factor in understanding how people collaborate to achieve a shared outcome. As employees who will already be filled with anxiety and fear head back to the office, field, retail stores, etc., leaders and managers will need to have an understanding of how to create a psychologically safe environment that promotes a clear sense of trust, the ability to feel safe speaking up (voicing their opinion and concerns), as well as allowing employees to feel empowered to make decisions and get their work done.

The employee must feel safe to speak up to management, to his/her supervisor and to his/her peers. There is a delicate balance that empowers leaders while at the same time creating the environment inside the company for the employee to feel empowered and safe.

## **HERE ARE 31 TIPS TO CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.**

- 10 tips to build trust with leaders
- 10 tips to build trust with managers
- 11 tips to build trust with your company

# TRUST LEADERS TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS

**1. Accept the fundamentals.** It's not what you think they think, it's what they think that counts. Listening is one of the most important leadership attributes. Listening with your ears, eyes and bodies. Trust your leadership sixth sense – you will feel when people are feeling safe and when they are fearful. Listen and act. As a society, we have devalued listening and elevated the art of reacting. Work on flipping this – limit your need to react

and elevate your need to listen and hear.

## action:

Do a permission to change exercise. Identify 5 things you would change about your company in a perfect world. Then, identify the reasons you will or will not change them. Act!

## 2. Communicate. Rinse. Repeat.

The process of communication is fundamental to your success connecting with others. And those connections with leaders and your people will last and help you overcome challenge and the next crisis ahead. Tell the story. Tell it again with a slightly different twist. Be real with your words and your emotion. Don't be scripted – they will know it is contrived and will not respond. And, when you have told them enough, tell their family and significant other. The binds that tie us together start with our stories and showing that we want them to know. Actively work to connect.

## ACTION:

CREATE A WEEKLY ENGAGEMENT PLAN. THINK ABOUT YOUR THEME FOR THE WEEK AND HOW MANY DIFFERENT WAYS YOU CAN INFLUENCE UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION AROUND IT. IS PART OF YOUR PLAN EMAILS, PHONE CALLS, VIDEOS, OR ARE THERE OTHER TOOLS TO CONSIDER?

**3. Talk to your friend.** Yes, you are the leader. But, you don't have to talk in corporate speak or talk down to people. Imagine you are talking to a friend with every communication. What words would you use? What is the tone? How would you reciprocate in challenging discussion? Would you trust your friend with the information? You don't have to say everything, but you must say enough that people understand what is real and truthful.

**ACTION:**

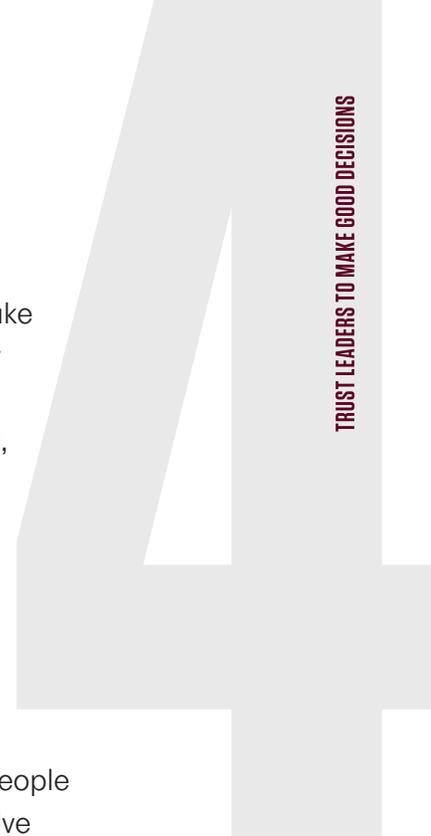
WRITE A COMMUNICATION WITH THE SALUTATION "DEAR MOM" AND THEN AFTER FINALIZING THE COMMUNICATION, CHANGE MOM TO "DEAR EMPLOYEES" – SEE IF THE TONE IS DIFFERENT AND IF YOUR WORDS ARE WARMER. IF THEY ARE NOT, THEN FIND WAYS TO HUMANIZE YOUR MESSAGE EVEN MORE.



**4. Sound the alarm.** Tell the organization that you will sound the alarm before you need to make any difficult decisions. Trust your organization and people, who overwhelmingly want to do good, with the respect for their lives and work by not hiding difficult information. Go out of your way to ensure business as normal by not giving false signals, but when there is a signal you need to give, be clear and timely. Setting the stage and allowing people to know they are safe until you give them advance notice otherwise creates a healthier and safer culture.

**action:**

Identify a potentially difficult situation and think about how you would normally communicate difficult news. Now, create a mini timeline with high level messages to sound the alarm earlier and in stages. What is different for you and for your workforce?



## 5. Culture matters more today.

Companies will do more with less – less resources, less certainty, and possibly less people. But, more will be expected. Culture gets defined in times of challenge and cemented for good or bad. This is the time to rethink values and to define them with clarity. Support the culture by adding behavioral competencies to guide behavior, hiring, performance and promotion. Be purposeful and reorient your leadership and employees around your purpose and recommit to the fact that culture has a direct and inextricable link to performance. It is not soft – it is defining.

### action:

Review your values and their definitions. Do they still apply to where the company is going in the near and longer-term future? If not, it is time to rethink them, redefine them and humanize them so that they have meaning and stick. If they are right, go out of your way to live them, communicate them and promote good work around them.

5

6. **Eliminate Policies.** Make the workplace easy to understand. Make it less about not doing things that are wrong and reinforce work that is right. Take time to eliminate policies that are punitive, that are redundant or that can be framed positively. Organizations must do what is right for the people and not hide behind the “policy.”

**ACTION:**  
IDENTIFY AT LEAST ONE POLICY THAT YOU ARE WILLING TO REMOVE. CAN YOU FIND MORE? WHEN YOU DO, LET YOUR WORKFORCE KNOW THAT YOU ARE REMOVING THEM AND TELL THEM WHY – MOST TIMES IT IS BECAUSE YOU HAVE SET THE EXPECTATION AND THEY ARE ALREADY LIVING UP TO IT.

6

**7. Double up leadership training.** This is the time to invest in people, especially those who you expect to do more for you. This is an “HR benefit” for them and a performance benefit for you. They will likely lose some measure of security, we all have with the pandemic, give them a gift that will last through this job and trust that it will pay off – with work dividends and with a more trusting employee who recognizes that you believe in him/her.

**action:**

Identify 3 people in your organization that you want to recognize. Talk to them about wanting to help them with training. Create a plan together. That training can start with a few books or articles and discussions or it can become a formal training plan with outside coaches and learning tools. It benefits you both.

**8. Health assessments aren't just for people.** Your company needs a health checkup. Understanding not just what you think, but what the whole of the organization thinks as they reenter the workforce is fundamental for alignment at every level of the company. More important, it gives you the opening to effect change – change they identify as necessary and change that you know is required. Do not think of this as an employee survey – think of this as a real check up on the direction, operations, people and engagement of the organization. Take time to again listen – your people are talking to you and the diagnosis is real. Follow that check up with 1 question pulse surveys more frequently to get an immediate and cumulative understanding of the health in the moment – which for them as individuals, may be changing by the moment.

**ACTION:**

COMMIT TO AN ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT IMMEDIATELY BEFORE OR AS YOUR EMPLOYEES BEGIN TO ENTER BACK INTO THE WORKPLACE. UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY THINK AND FEEL AND THEN LET THEM KNOW YOU HAVE HEARD BY SHARING THE INFORMATION AND GIVING THEM A HIGH-LEVEL PLAN OF ACTION YOU ARE TAKING FROM THE ASSESSMENT. TRY A COMPLIMENTARY ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT ([WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES](http://WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES)), THE CLARITY PERFORMANCE INDEX™ OR OTHER ASSESSMENTS.

**9. Tether to the future.** We are disconnected to so many aspects of life and humanity. Working remotely has disconnected our normal flow and relationships at work. As people return, it is vital to tether them to your belief in what is possible in the future. Give them a vision to hold on to – it is not corporate mumbo jumbo, it is hope. Research shows that vision, leadership and team orientation are 3 of the most critical factors that increase engagement and keep the workforce committed to the future.

**action:**

Review your company vision. Is it still right for the environment today? If so, reiterate that this is our shared view of the future. If it needs definition and meaning, provide it. If it is out of date, it is imperative to create the statement of where the organization is headed. Your leaders need it and so do your employees.

**10. Positivity is the glue that binds.** Chaos. Transition. Challenge. These are the realities of our times. But, not necessarily the reality of our outcomes. Positivity becomes the central force in connecting you to other people and to your desired future state. It is easy to “go negative” but that will not yield the results that your work requires. Positivity is a science that includes inspiration, mindfulness, gratitude, happiness and optimism. One or more can be off in a given moment – but you can still be positive.

**ACTION:**

LEAD POSITIVE WITH “HAPPY YOU YEAR” EXERCISE (COMPLIMENTARY DOWNLOAD AT [WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES](http://WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES)) BY SETTING YOUR DAILY TRAJECTORY, MEDITATING FOR 8 MINUTES, PICKING ONE DAILY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY, IDENTIFYING ONE GRATITUDE FOR YOU, AND MEASURING YOUR PERSONAL POSITIVITY QUOTIENT. IT TAKES LESS THAN 13 MINUTES TO SET THE COURSE FOR YOUR DAY AND LEADERSHIP.

# TRUST YOUR DIRECT MANAGERS

- 1. Be you.** It doesn't matter if you have the skills to lead. Simply be human, be you. This is not a time to be a friend, but be a leader who is open and honest. Go out of your way to be clear with what you say and what you mean. And, practice kindness – everyone around feels it, even when it is not directed to them.

## action:

Follow “Ms. Lorraine’s Rule” by going out of your way and saying something nice to at least one person each day. You can never go wrong by being kind.

- 2. Daily ‘Office Visits’.** Conduct a daily wellness check with each employee. Simply make the effort to physically (within safe social distancing guidelines) reach out and check in on your colleagues. Ask how their day is going? Ask how their family is? Ask how their transition back to work is going? The art is not in the question, it is in the act. Genuinely try to understand where they are in the moment knowing that each day may bring something new.

## ACTION:

DRAFT A PLAN TO MAKE OFFICE VISITS IN PERSON OR ON THE PHONE. CREATE YOUR SCRIPT AND MAKE THE TIME TO VISIT.

### 3. Recognition not reward.

Organizations may not be able to be as generous with material bonuses and reward programs. But, that should not stop recognition programs, which are critical components of safe and high culture work environments. Employees of all generations are gravitating toward the recognition systems that call them out on a local and broader basis for their work or adherence to the culture, values or behavioral competencies.

**ACTION:**  
CONSIDER YOUR RECOGNITION APPROACH AND DEVELOP EVEN A TEMPORARY PLAN TO BEGIN TO APPROPRIATELY (NOT OVERLY) RECOGNIZE PEOPLE FOR STRONG, PURPOSEFUL ACTS THAT ALIGN WITH YOUR STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE OR CULTURE SYSTEMS.

### 4. Release the pressure valves.

The pressure is real for you and them. What can you do to release the pressure? Consider where the pressure points are and ways to gradually release it. Does the pressure come from not enough people, unrealistic timelines, fear of illness in the workplace, anxiety of a new routine? There are many points in the day that increase pressure. Actively identify what those places may be (they could be different for different people) and what mechanisms (existing or new) you can implement to begin that slow release. Some can be serious, structured or simply fun.

**action:**  
Try a Standing 8 meeting or a walking meeting to get people out of their normal routine and incorporate thought into the process (8 minutes to complete a full meeting or walking and talking).



## 5. Commit to “Wonder Wander” Sessions.

The world of essential workers is now shifting to all workers being essential. Give people an opportunity to dream and imagine through wonder wander sessions. These sessions are part wonder (simply asking questions) and part wander (freestyle mental exploration – similar to brainstorming and taking concepts farther). This allows the brain space and gives the person freedom from their normal task.

### action:

Conduct a session where your team gets to create 15 wonder cards. They can write down any questions of things they wonder. Then the group will sort the cards and pick one to explore and begin the conversational wander. Pick as many cards or choose the questions that most pertain to where you want to go!

## 6. Never Why?

Building trust starts with genuine connection. One of the ways to connect is to approach people with a question. Ask genuine questions that don't allow a one-word answer (i.e. Fine. Okay. Good.) Practice leading with a question in all your encounters with others. But, never start the question with “Why?...” it creates barriers. You can get more information and create more connection by simply asking: “Tell me about...” or “Can you explain?” It eliminates the barriers and feeling of being put on the spot.

### ACTION:

CREATE A LIST OF 10 GO TO QUESTIONS THAT ARE NATURAL TO YOU, AND THAT WILL ENGAGE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH AND EVOKE GENUINE THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION.

**7. Color. Color. Color.** Color is critical in chaos. When things around us are in constant motion and swirling, color allows us an opportunity to ground and reorient. Try to color code your meetings – eliminate the ambiguity around what kind of meeting it is by assigning a color. Huemanize MindMaps™ is one color system that provides definition and clarity around how to mentally get into that specific color state. Try color coding conversations with co-workers and your staff – it eliminates unnecessary time for everyone to get into the “same place” for the conversation.

**action:**

Visit [WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES](http://WWW.BRADDEUTSER.COM/RESOURCES) and try a color coded meeting

**8. Expectation over environment.** We have debunked the concept that we are products of our environment – as many people have been productive while working remotely. What we know from research is setting clear expectations is fundamental to driving performance and results. Don't make this an annual or bi-annual exercise. Think about this as a weekly or monthly exercise as people transition into the office. It sets expectations, reduces anxiety of the unknown, and gives a leader an additional natural check-in point.

**ACTION:**

**SIT DOWN WITH A CO-WORKER AND ACTUALLY CLEARLY ARTICULATE REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS THAT YOU BOTH AGREE ON. ALSO, CREATE A PLAN FOR PERIODIC CHECK INS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY. SOMETIMES GETTING BACK TO BASICS HELPS BOTH THE LEADER AND THE EMPLOYEE CONNECT AND FIND POINTS OF AGREEMENT.**

**9. Positivity is the glue that binds.** Chaos. Transition. Challenge. These are the realities of our times. But, not necessarily the reality of our outcomes. Positivity becomes the central force in connecting you to other people and to your desired future state. It is easy to “go negative” but that will not yield the results that your work requires. Positivity is a science that includes inspiration, mindfulness, gratitude, happiness and optimism. One or more can be off in a given moment – but you can still be positive.

**action:**

Focus on being grateful. Specifically, each week write 10 things you are grateful for in your life. Then, each day write 1 thing that you are grateful for about you. Do not repeat the 1 thing for 30 days – find a new thing each day you are grateful for about you!

**10. Different Strokes.** Empathize. Understand. Connect. Recognize that each person you work with and each person you interact with requires something unique. What works for one person, does not necessarily work for someone else. Go out of your way to vary your connection points and approaches with each of your colleagues and direct reports.

**ACTION:**

MAP OUT YOUR ACTION PLAN FOR ENGAGING EACH EMPLOYEE DIFFERENTLY. WHO NEEDS A GENTLE PUSH AND WHO NEEDS A SOFTER APPROACH? HOLD EVERYONE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE SAME GOAL, BUT CREATE DIFFERENT, INTENTIONAL ROADMAPS.

# TRUST AND ENGAGE WITH YOUR COMPANY

- 1. Give grace.** This is the time to give grace for all that you have, even with all that you have lost. But, it is also the time to demonstrate grace for the opportunity you have to be part of a company or organization. Be understanding that your boss doesn't have the answers or the clear roadmap nor does the workforce have the answers. Mistakes will be made, be forgiving and be flexible as you are asked to undertake new roles and responsibilities. This is the time to eliminate the rigid view of role and embrace what it means to be part of a high performing team, even if your team isn't high performing (yet).

## **ACTION:**

**SIX GRACES – THIS IS ABOUT IDENTIFYING THINGS THAT AFFECT YOU AND INTENTIONALLY LETTING THEM GO. YOU MAY COME UP WITH A DIFFERENT SOLUTION FOR THEM, OR SIMPLY LET THEM GO (EVEN FOR THE MOMENT). IDENTIFY 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT YOUR COMPANY, 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT YOUR SUPERVISOR, 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT YOUR CO-WORKERS, 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT YOUR POSITION, 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT THE FUTURE, 1 THING TO GIVE GRACE FOR ABOUT YOU.**

- 2. Give them vision.** The company vision is critical. Most times, it is used for strategy reasons and put on posters or on the website. During times of dislocation, vision becomes one of the key tether points for leadership and most importantly, for the workforce. There is a saying from Alice in Wonderland, "If you don't know where you're going, any old map will do." The map is important. It gives people hope, something to aspire to and to rally around.

## **action:**

**Bring your vision to life with definition, with words, and with images. Get the workforce aligned on what the vision requires of all areas of the company. Make it real.**

**3. The shoe fits.** Set expectations and be part of the culture and the movement that is required to move it forward. The shoe fits is how we view culture – we all wear it everywhere and every place we go. Wear it with pride. Culture is non-negotiable. Live up to the standards – and give in to what the company expects, even if it is “different than how we used to do it.” The company must set goals around culture and performance and evaluate. Be honest and don’t shortcut yourself or your teammates.

**ACTION:**

**ASSESS PERFORMANCE AROUND THE CULTURAL NORMS OF THE ORGANIZATION. FOCUS ON STRENGTHS, NOT THE WEAK CULTURAL LINKS DURING TIMES OF TRANSITION.**



**4. Orientation for all.** Welcome them back, everyone! Reorient the organization around the company vision and direction. Most important, it is your chance to reset behavioral and cultural expectations. Let everyone see the bigger construct of your company and where they contribute and fit. Give them the honor of a first day all over again. Treat everyone like it is that magical (with a few butterflies) first day. Create a day 1 welcome, and 30, 60 and 90 day plans to ensure a smooth and intentional reentry.

**action:**

**Develop an Orientation and Onboarding program for every employee. Treat each person like it is their first day – start with the pre-first day communication, the day 1 welcome and the plan for their next 90 days. Recreate the honeymoon period with everyone.**



**5. Reward creativity.** Innovation doesn't belong to a leadership group or select few. Reward creative thinking and actions. Encourage people to do what they are expected to and encourage them to find new ways to complete work, to collaborate, to design solutions. It is natural to hold on tighter and do only what you are asked – get people comfortable with breaking out and being different. Find ways to coax creativity, to encourage big dreams and to think in color.

**action:**

Think about 5 tasks that you/your team execute daily. Reimagine ways to complete them adding creativity, fun, or interest. The goal is simply to add creativity and reorient your team's thinking around basic tasks – even if you go back to the way you always do it.

**6. Practice strategic patience.** This is an art. This is not patience for patience's sake. Companies must set the expectation and help employees remain on the pathway to achieve those expectations, even with the detours that will inevitably happen. Leaders cannot allow frustration of the new work environment (yes, it is new for everyone) to seep into their leadership. In times of dislocation, those that understand and can remain focused on the long game will yield the best and most strategic outcomes.

**ACTION:**

IDENTIFY 10 ACTIONS THAT TRIGGER AN EMOTION OR REACTION. THEN, CREATE DIFFERENT RESPONSES AND WAYS YOU CAN EXERCISE STRATEGIC PATIENCE BY EITHER NOT REACTING OR REACTING TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.

**7. Healthy Space.** Be intentional with your spaces. If you have offices, think about each person's responsibility to keep them sanitary. If you have an open office format, think about staggering the work schedule, alternating stations and having a 1 in and 1 out format to ensure a responsible number of employees entering and leaving each rotation. Also, create branded or themed communications, face coverings and other protective equipment. Make it real and not corporate.

**action:**

Create a task force with no managers to identify areas of potential concern and creative solutions to keep space and safe. Have them design fun, engaging and different communications to engage their peers.

**8. Remote Control.** Leaders have learned to trust their employees and employees have learned to trust their leaders while working remotely. No, it is not perfect working remotely, but it has been and will be necessary. The reality is that working in the office isn't perfect either. Leaders have learned to establish protocols to help with this "remote control" and at the same time, providing the space so that the employee becomes empowered and feels trusted.

**ACTION:**

INNOVATE A NEW REMOTE CONTROL. THINK ABOUT IT NOT FOR ELECTRONICS, BUT FOR PEOPLE. PART OF THE REMOTE CONTROL WILL INCLUDE TACTICS AND BUTTONS TO PUSH WHILE EMPLOYEES WORK REMOTELY AND OTHERS WILL BE FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING IN THE OFFICE. HAVE FUN AND THINK ABOUT BUTTONS YOU CAN PUSH THAT WILL SPUR POSITIVE REACTION.

**9. PIC One.** Put yourself back in grade school. Everyone had basic responsibilities. Organizations must again assign and hold accountable people for these daily tasks – even if they are mundane. Assign a Person In Charge of different areas in the office that focus on safety and health – this is not just an HR or leadership responsibility, although they may have ultimate accountability. Individuals and teams are responsible for key areas – doors, door handles, supplies, office sweeps, kitchen, supply rooms, and any area that encourages public gathering. The basic message is that today everyone is essential and has a role to ensure the health of the office.

**action:**

Create a 30-day accountability chart assigning roles for the office. At the end of each week, the “PIC” will convene and discuss observations and create improvements for the following week.

**10. Immunity.** Unfortunately, no one is immune from anxiety that has permeated our society. We are all susceptible to periodic lapses. It is vital for our health and mental wellbeing to identify release valves to let go of the stress, real and manufactured, so that we can more effectively navigate the chaos and barrage of information and misinformation. We are all human – leaders and followers, employees across the company and up and down the front lines. We are all going to face challenging days and challenging thoughts. Search for ways you can protect yourself and right your mind when it begins the natural wander.

**ACTION:**

READ ABOUT MINDFULNESS AND COMMIT TO ONE WEEK OF MEDITATION. IF YOU CAN DO 8 MINUTES A DAY, GREAT (THAT IS ENOUGH TO CHANGE YOUR BRAIN). BUT, IF YOU ARE NEW TO MEDITATION, TRY IT FOR 5 MINUTES. GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE TO BREATHE AND SIMPLY BE IN THE MOMENT.

**11. Positivity is the glue that binds.** Positivity is everyone's responsibility in the company. This is something everyone can focus on and improve. Recognize that positivity is not simply being happy. Positivity is a science that includes inspiration, mindfulness, gratitude, happiness and optimism. One or more can be off in a given moment – but you can still be positive. Positivity becomes the most powerful connector to other people and to your desired future state.



**ACTION:**  
CREATE A DAILY POSITIVITY JOURNAL. BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT IDENTIFYING ONE POSITIVE TAKE-AWAY FROM EVERY DAY. AT THE END OF THE WEEK, READ THROUGH THE WEEK'S STATEMENTS OF POSITIVITY. MAKE THIS A HABIT AND SEE HOW IT REORIENTS YOUR PERSPECTIVE AND THAT OF YOUR TEAM. ENCOURAGE TEAM CONVERSATIONS AROUND TAKE-AWAYS EACH WEEK TO FURTHER INGRAIN THE POSITIVITY.

Through the Deutser Clarity Institute, Deutser provides leaders and organizations with immersive and thought-provoking workshops, products and publications for times of transition and growth.