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## MANAGEMENT

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### LEADERS & SUCCESS

# Earn Trust To Fuel Liftoff

By Steve Watkins

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Trust plays a huge role in creating successful teams.

Here are ways to win with it:

- **Grasp the costs.** It might seem like a small thing to show up late for a meeting.

But the money wasted in lack of productivity adds up.

Once people realize this, they'll keep their commitment to be on time, says Charlie Pellerin, author of "How NASA Builds Teams."

"If you can't keep small agreements, how can you keep large ones?" he said.

- **Boost efficiency.** John Whitney, head of the Deming Center for Quality Management, told Pellerin that up to half of all business activity is wasted because of a lack of trust.

If you trust someone to do what you say, you don't have to spend time making sure it gets done.

"That's an enormous amount of energy you can devote to something else," Pellerin told IBD.

- **Redo the deal.** If you've made an agreement you can't keep, make a new one before you fail to live up to the old one, says Pellerin, former director of astrophysics at NASA and current president of Boulder, Colo.-based consultant 4-D Systems.

Reset a project due date before you miss the deadline.

- **Focus on your reputation.** You build a persona with each action. Do what you said you'll do, and people will buy into your point.

"It destroys your personal brand when you say you'll do something and don't follow through," said Jim Welch, founder of Kansas City, Mo.-based marketing and leadership consulting firm Growth Leader Inc. "Trust is the underlying foundation for success."

- **Be blunt.** Don't spin it for different audiences. If you tell sales one thing and give another version to the finance team, that can hurt trust.

"You have to be willing to tell it like it is," said Welch, a former Hallmark marketing executive.

- **Admit your mistakes.** Pellerin points out that he was part of a huge NASA mistake: the Hubble Space Telescope's flawed mirror.

Despite that, he later earned the Outstanding Leadership Medal, which NASA has bestowed on just 50 people.

Being upfront about problems causes others to put trust in you.

"It's a nice thing when you can get an honor for fixing something after breaking it," Pellerin said.

- **Pay attention.** Focus on agreements and you'll keep them, Pellerin says.

He shows clients a video of kids playing basketball. When viewers have to count the number of times the ball is passed, most never notice a guy in a gorilla suit who walks briefly into the scene.

"You have to shift your attention to the importance of keeping agreements," Pellerin said.

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- **Query people.** Ask customers and employees how you can provide support.

And ask what you can be doing better.


"Great leaders ask great open-ended questions," Welch said. "When you ask questions, it exposes your own vulnerabilities and makes people trust you."

- **Communicate clearly.** Employees will assume the worst if left to fill in the blanks.

Tell them exactly what's going on and why.

"The more they see ambiguity, the more distrustful they become," Welch said.

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