

Module 3: Communicating to Build Trust

Leadership, Trust, and Communication in the Field: A Conversation with my Father

Communication as a Technical Leader

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Partner Reflections on Agreement/Disagreement

For this reflection, I spoke with my dad about a recent situation where I was the lead on a professional organizing job involving a severe hoarding case. I led a cleanup crew that included a veteran organizer who was used to leading projects herself. She pushed back on my directions, which created some tension. My father, having served as a leader in both the Army and law enforcement, offered insights into trust, leadership, and communication from his extensive experience.

First, he agreed that trust in leadership is built by being consistent and calm under pressure. He emphasized that people will follow you when they believe you're steady and not reactive, especially when tensions are high. This aligned with what the course taught me about emotional intelligence and non-verbal communication.

Second, my dad partially disagreed with how I handled the organizer who resisted my plan. He said that while I kept things professional, I missed an opportunity to pull her aside early and affirm her expertise privately while still reinforcing my leadership role. He stressed that trust isn't just built by being right, but by making others feel trusted and seen.

Third, he agreed with the module's point that leaders don't just give directions; they also explain the "why" behind their plan. He told me that in both the military and civilian sectors, a team that understands the mission is more likely to buy into the process and adapt when things change.

Two New Ideas that Emerged

One new idea that came out of this conversation was the concept of "shared command" in temporary teams. My dad explained that sometimes, when people are used to leading, the fastest way to build trust is to acknowledge their experience openly and ask for their input during planning, even if you're the final decision maker. That way, they feel respected and are more likely to follow your lead.

Another idea was about the power of deliberate tone-setting at the beginning of the project. He suggested that before starting a high-pressure job, a good leader should take five minutes to establish not just the logistics but the mood and expectations for the day. That includes reaffirming roles, encouraging collaboration, and clarifying goals, something I could have done better that morning.

My Feeling about my Dad's Reactions

I felt seen and validated when he acknowledged how I stayed composed under pressure. I also appreciated that he didn't just praise me, he constructively challenged how I handled the interpersonal aspect with the other organizer. It made me realize that earning

trust isn't just about controlling the chaos or having the right plan, it's about humility and connection.

His thoughts on tone setting especially stuck with me. I didn't realize how much of an impact those first five minutes could have. It made me reflect on other times when the energy of a job was off from the start, and now I recognize that as leadership moment I missed.

Trust and Engineering Communication

From an engineering and communication perspective, this discussion deepened my understanding that trust isn't just about relaying information clearly. It's also about emotional awareness, presence, and adapting your delivery to different personalities. In technical fields, we often think that precision and planning are enough, but trust is the emotional foundation that makes those plans executable.

This conversation reinforced the importance of taking responsibility for both message clarity and relational dynamics. Whether in engineering, organizing, or any team setting, clear expectations, active listening, and tone-setting are leadership tools, not just communication strategies. I'll carry this awareness forward into every team I lead or contribute to in the future.