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Francis Frei

Scaling Culture, e-Summit

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Human Resources / Corporate Culture / Trust

Take-Aways

- Trust has three components: authenticity, logic and empathy.
- If you sense a lack of trust, identify the component you do not practice and make amends.
- Companies must promote trust on an ongoing basis by adjusting and reinforcing their values.
- As Uber became an established company, its values had to evolve.

Recommendation

In this episode of the Connolly Owens podcast *Scaling Culture*, Harvard Business School professor – and best-selling author of *Uncommon Service* and co-author of *Unleashed* – Frances Frei demystifies trust by breaking it into three component parts. Frei and host Ron Lovett discuss how leaders can hone trustworthiness and promote trust within rapidly growing companies. Leaders will benefit from Frei's best practice examples from her time as Uber's first senior vice president of leadership and strategy.

Summary

Trust has three components: authenticity, logic and empathy.

Trust is not monolithic. It consists of three behavioral components over which people have agency. The three elements of the “trust triangle” are authenticity, logic and empathy.

“The component parts are totally actionable.”

People will trust you only if you act authentically. They will notice right away if you say something you don't believe. For people to trust you, the things you say and do must derive from and display logic. You must demonstrate empathy to build trust.

If you sense a lack of trust, identify the component you do not practice and make amends.

If you feel a lack of trust between you and someone else, identify the component of trust you may lack. Among more than 100,000 people surveyed, Frei found that people can self-diagnose their trust deficits with 80% accuracy.

“The trick is to figure out which component part is getting in your way at any given time.”

If you are unsure which component you should address, discuss the issue with a loved one who can give you honest feedback. Each person usually has one weaker component and one stronger component. For Frei, for example, lack of empathy is usually the culprit when she senses that someone doesn't trust her; logic is her reliable strong point, or “anchor.” She likens situations in which she acts un-empathetically to hitting someone accidentally with her tail when turning around. After catching herself, she tries to make amends either in public or in private, depending on where the infraction occurred.

Companies must promote trust on an ongoing basis by adjusting and reinforcing their values.

A newly created company usually lives out the culture of its founders. Once a company grows, however, its founding values can become “weaponized.” Frei shares the example of a start-up that used to give people the benefit of the doubt as a matter of course. However, when the company grew bigger, this value turned into a taboo that prevented people from critically examining other people's actions.

“Values should not have liquid cement poured on them.”

Once organizations reach a certain size and their founding values no longer inspire trust, leaders should use a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to redefining their corporate values. Have people write out the companies' existing values and identify extreme cases in which the firm uses its values in a counter-productive way. Next, collect input from everyone on how to update those values.

Companies with several thousand employees can usually identify common themes for senior management to consider. Frei's research shows that companies generally maintain at least 50% of their founding values after re-evaluating them. International companies must make sure their values are sufficiently broad to allow for local cultural differences in interpretation.

As Uber became an established company, its values needed to evolve.

When Frei joined Uber, its corporate culture was a “hot mess.” As a start-up, Uber was a disrupter: It needed to challenge policies protecting the taxicab industry to deliver the customer service it intended. Once the broader legal framework enabled Uber to operate and thrive, however, its corporate culture of challenging established regulations needed to change to accommodate its new circumstances.

From fall 2018 onward, the company had to follow the letter of the law to stay successful. In addition, Uber had to address high demand for upskilling from its staff members, many of whom had gained early leadership positions quickly with scant preparation. Uber's employees proved to be exceptionally eager learners, and the company now trains up to 2,500 people at a time in virtual classroom settings.

About the Podcast

Ron Lovett is a leadership consultant and host of the Connolly Owens podcast, *Scaling Culture*. **Frances Frei** is a professor of technology and operations management at Harvard Business School. She is the co-author of *Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader's Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You* and the author of the bestseller *Uncommon Service*.



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