

## Have you broken trust with your people? A 5-step process for getting back on track

David Witt / June 20, 2011



As leaders, sometimes we blow it. Sometimes we break trust by exhibiting poor judgment or poor behavior. Randy Conley, Trust Practice Leader at The Ken Blanchard Companies calls those occurrences “trustbusters.”

**Minding your A,B,C, and D’s—Ability, Believability, Connectedness, and Dependability**

Trustbusters are behaviors that erode trust among direct reports and colleagues. Some common examples are when we don’t demonstrate expertise in our jobs, and don’t achieve results which causes people to lose faith in our **Ability**.

We also “bust trust” when we break confidences, tell lies of convenience, or gossip about others. This impacts our **Believability**.

Another trustbuster is when we don’t listen. It’s hard sometimes to pay attention when we’re in conversation with people. Your mind starts to wander, or you find yourself thinking about the next meeting. When we don’t listen, or show interest in others, or recognize others, that erodes trust by eroding our **Connection** with people.

Finally, as leaders we sometimes bust trust when we don’t follow through on commitments by being disorganized or unreliable which undermines people’s perception of our **Dependability**.

### How can you go about rebuilding broken trust?

There are five key things that we can do to rebuild trust, says Conley. Conley calls them the 5 “A’s.”

1. “The first thing is that we need to **Acknowledge** that there’s been a breach of trust,” says Conley. “It’s like they say in a twelve-step program, the first thing you have to do is acknowledge that you have a problem. You’ve got to acknowledge the situation exists.”
2. “Second you have to **Admit** your part in the breach of trust. You have to own up to whatever you did that caused that loss of trust with that individual.”
3. “Third you have to **Apologize** for it—and if I were to add another key, I would say that you also have to make amends, so apologize and make amends for whatever you did to break the trust.”

4. "Fourth you have to **Assess**. And that means using the ABCD model to assess what you did and what were the core elements of trust that you broke and what can you do centered around those behaviors to help rebuild trust?"
5. "And then finally, you have to **Agree** on an action plan with the person that you broke trust with. You have to agree on what you're going to do differently moving forward to help rebuild trust."

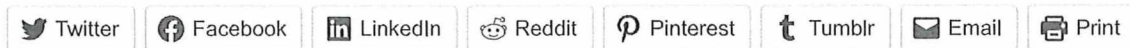
Trust is a very delicate thing that takes a significant amount of time to build and can be broken in just an instant. But it is possible to repair and rebuild trust. But you have to address it immediately. Don't let a mistake in judgment turn into an indictment of character.

Conley likes to quote a Chinese proverb to help leaders understand trust and timing. The proverb says that, "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is today." Don't let trust issues fester in your organization or in your relationships. Address them today.

To learn more about Conley's thoughts on improving trust—including the one behavior that all leaders can address immediately—read [The Leader's Role in Building Trust](#).

Or listen to a recording of a free webinar that Conley conducted on June 15, [Four Leadership Behaviors that Build or Destroy Trust](#). (Over 800 people attended this free webinar courtesy of The Ken Blanchard Companies and Cisco WebEx.)

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