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Growing Trust

From Scratch

BY:

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GROWING TRUST FROM SCRATCH

Nothing demonstrates the need for trust in an organization more than having to start over with a new team. Several years ago, a former business partner and I parted ways, and some of our team members joined him in his practice. As if that wasn't enough of a disruption, we had recently taken on a large new book of business. It was a tough time for everyone as we worked to handle the additional load with fewer resources. Often, we felt like we were changing tires while driving 100 miles an hour. Over time, we were able to hire more good people for our organization, but we didn't automatically gel as a team. I struggled personally too, since overnight, my inner circle of business leaders had changed.

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These were major challenges to overcome, but I intended to do much more than survive a difficult transition. As an owner, I had my sights set on achieving transformational growth for our new businesses and positioning us for a successful generational transition down the road. I knew that the only way to get there was to radically transform the way we did business. My natural inclination was to go full steam ahead. But to get everyone on board, they needed to trust that I wasn't completely insane. To earn their trust, I had to show people that I genuinely cared about them. I needed to put my

team members' needs ahead of my own. I had faith that if I put my team's needs first, they would ultimately put our mission first. **How could I best demonstrate that I valued my team's needs above my own?**

On reflection, I realized that they needed their leaders to listen to them, to make time to develop relationships with them, and to collaborate with them rather than dictate solutions to them. Take my relationship with my new business partner, for instance. I was confident that my proposal for transforming our business would differentiate us in our market and be critical for our growth. But my partner was apprehensive. She thought my proposal was premature, a strategy she believed would be unrealistic to launch for another two to three years. We were already juggling a lot of change, she pointed out, and the major transformation I envisioned would be extremely costly. Now, I am the majority owner of the firm, so I could have overruled her objections. The old me probably would have done that. But the new me realized I absolutely needed her trust, and the only way to do that was to create an environment in which she and I collaborated on solutions.

She and I developed a simple process for managing our differences about how to transform our business: We had coffee every week. We spent that time "interrogating reality" together. We listened to each other's views about problems and issues. We made a pact to welcome conflict and disagreement, because we knew that if we couldn't be open about



our differences, we couldn't trust each other. We debriefed mistakes and thought through what we were learning along the way.

We challenged each other with questions to help create solutions. For example,

What are the things in our business processes we can eliminate without negatively impacting client experience?

What are things I or others can take off your plate, so you have bandwidth to transition into this new way of working?

Because of the trust and conflict mastery that developed from these regular conversations, my partner and I were able to streamline many elements of our work and eliminate quite a few others.

We also agreed to slow down implementation of changes I had advocated. Despite that agreement, within 18 months, **we were able to transition 85% of our business to a new platform.**

We saw significantly better outcomes than we had with our standard platform, and our client experience measures steadily improved.

The collaborative process my partner and I used to chart the future of the organization is one that we continue to this day. And it's now used by other leadership teams who head up key change initiatives.



Contact Saša Mirkovic at Inspire Network to learn more about strategies for creating transformational growth or positioning your business for a successful generational transition.

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THAT'S THE KIND OF CULTURE THAT PROMOTES TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH. AND THAT'S THE KIND OF CULTURE THAT WILL ENSURE A VIBRANT MULTIGENERATIONAL BUSINESS TODAY AND IN THE YEARS AHEAD.

At the beginning of our business transformation, I could have decided to trust myself above anyone else. Initially, I had been completely convinced of the wisdom of my proposed strategy. Had I pushed ahead on my own, without my partner's buy in, I might have accelerated some important changes in technical infrastructure, but I doubt we'd reap the rewards of the cultural infrastructure our business enjoys today—an environment of trust, collaboration, and unity of purpose.

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