



Resolving Issues with Your Boss (Part 2): *The Nature of Trust.*

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Summary of Part 1

Part 1 of this series introduces six common management styles and highlights the complexity of conflict resolution. It emphasizes that resolving conflicts requires strategic thinking, interpersonal tact, and time, focusing on navigating power dynamics and balancing risks.

The section also distinguishes between "realistic" and "unrealistic" conflicts, setting the stage for exploring tailored dispute-resolution strategies for subsequent parts.

The Loss of Trust

Anyone fired or released without warning can confirm the situation is relatively straightforward. The decision has been made: you are leaving, and there is no room for negotiation. At-will employment laws virtually guarantee that there will be no appeal—your time has run out.

If the organization values your contributions, you may receive some notice and a severance package to help you get back on your feet. However, if you are suddenly deemed unworthy—perhaps due to a grave mistake, a violation of workplace norms, or simply because you

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submitted your two-week notice and they resent paying you further—there are various ways they can demonstrate just how little they value you.

You may be seen as having no worth to them, as toxic, or as a potential threat, resulting in a swift termination. In such cases, you cannot return to your desk. Instead, you will be asked to list your personal belongings, and someone will be sent to collect them while you wait in a supervised area.

It is not an attractive scenario or a pleasant experience for anyone involved, whether you are the one being let go or the one delivering the news. Regardless of the justification, it is a difficult situation.

You have been cast out, forced to fend for yourself in whatever way you can. The trust you once enjoyed has been irrevocably damaged.

Why Trust is important

In Part 1, we briefly examined several potential workplace friction points where individual roles, responsibilities, circumstances, and egos can clash. Not all of these conflicts result in termination of employment, but they can still be significant.

All workplace conflict—whether from unrealistic or realistic competition—consumes time and resources, even when it ultimately leads to cooperative behavior and team building.

Trust is the "social glue" that facilitates human interaction and collaboration, forming the foundation for societal relationships. Without trust, interactions would be fragmented and characterized by suspicion. At its core, trust enables individuals to believe in each other's reliability and intentions, fostering a sense of security for cooperation. It allows for reciprocal relationships and predictable interactions. Trust develops through positive experiences and is reinforced by societal norms and legal frameworks.

Trust is crucial for the division of labor in complex societies, allowing individuals to rely on others' expertise. This cooperation is vital for large-scale societal efficiency. Trust also nurtures social capital, creating networks that provide resources, support, and prompt responses during crises. Beyond its practical benefits, trust shapes social identity and fosters a sense of belonging. When trust is present, individuals are more inclined to act in the collective good, reinforcing norms of cooperation and justice.

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Without trust, economic transactions and political stability would be jeopardized, immersing society and vulnerable groups in nothing short of chaos, with all that implies.

Some Trust Definitions

The journey from conditional to provisional trust, and eventually to implicit and unconditional trust, represents a significant evolution in human relationships. It signifies a shift from trust based on specific conditions and expectations to a deeper, more fundamental connection that transcends particular terms or outcomes. Each stage builds upon the previous one, and the transition from one form of trust to the next is often gradual, marked by shared experiences, challenges, and increasing intimacy. These stages are defined as follows:

- Conditional Trust is based on specific conditions or criteria being met. In this form of trust, an individual or group will trust another party only if certain preconditions are satisfied. If those conditions are violated, the trust may be withdrawn or reduced.
- Provisional Trust is temporary and can be adjusted based on future behavior. It is given with the understanding that it can be revoked or adjusted depending on the outcomes.
- Implicit Trust is a natural, unspoken expectation based on assumptions or experience. It does not require formal expression or agreement.
- Explicit Trust is clearly communicated, often through written or formal agreements. It involves direct promises or statements of trust.
- Unconditional Trust is given without reservations, often based on a deep confidence in the other party's integrity and character.

Three comments need to be kept in mind before going further:

First, we all tend to navigate trust relationships like fish navigate in the water; we are largely unaware of it until we lose it. That is because trust is often an implicit and gradual process earned over time, but it can be lost instantly due to a significant breach.

Second, we often focus on how much we trust others; we may not always consider how others perceive our trustworthiness.

Third, culture significantly influences how trust is built, maintained, and lost, shaping how individuals interpret relationships and assess the reliability of others.

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Caveats for Reestablishing Trust

Assuming you need or want a job, you need to decide whether you are willing to pay the price for attempting a resolution.

Statutes and laws define the rights and responsibilities of employment, though many aspects are subject to interpretation. Most states follow the "at-will" employment doctrine. Your situation may not be governed by "at-will" principles, and it is always advisable to consult a qualified attorney if in doubt.

Attorneys generally expect to be paid, though some may offer pro bono services in some instances. Your financial ability to seek legal advice is often critical, but legal aid or reduced-fee services may be available for those in need.

Lawyers and legal questions aside, navigating a dispute with your boss can take a significant psychological toll. It requires confronting issues and individuals that may feel uncomfortable or, in fact, risky.

Deciding whether to stay and resolve the conflict or leave the situation depends on several personal and professional factors. Staying and working things out has advantages, especially if you value the position or believe the relationship can be improved. On the other hand, leaving or negotiating a graceful exit might be the best option if the environment is too damaging or the prospects for resolution seem slim.

Choosing to stay and resolve the conflict can be a decisive move, personally and professionally. It shows resilience, problem-solving skills, and a willingness to address challenges constructively. For employees who value their role or see significant growth potential in their current position, staying may provide opportunities to learn valuable interpersonal skills and gain the respect of colleagues. Additionally, resolving the issue could improve the working relationship with your boss, leading to a more collaborative and supportive environment. However, staying also demands emotional labor, requiring you to manage your stress, communicate clearly, and possibly compromise on some expectations.

Conversely, deciding to leave or negotiate a win-win departure may be better if the psychological cost of staying becomes too high. A persistently toxic dynamic with a boss can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout, ultimately affecting both personal well-being and professional performance. In such cases, leaving allows you to prioritize mental health and seek opportunities in environments more aligned with your values and goals. Negotiating a departure that benefits both parties, such as agreeing on a reasonable notice period or a

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positive reference, can provide closure and protect your reputation while opening doors to new possibilities.

Ultimately, choosing between staying and leaving hinges on carefully assessing your priorities, values, and long-term goals. Are you willing to invest the emotional energy required to improve the situation, or would your efforts be better spent seeking opportunities elsewhere? Either decision requires courage and clarity, but prioritizing your well-being and professional development ensures you emerge stronger, regardless of the outcome. Whether you resolve the conflict or move on, the experience can become a stepping stone toward personal growth and greater resilience.

This admonition may seem like common sense. Until you consider that clear thinking often goes out the door when we are under pressure or upset. Resisting our ever-present fight-flight-freeze instincts calls for sufficient time to weigh your options. Despite your efforts to save the employment relationship, you must consider the likely risks and devise contingency plans in case—in the end—you are fired or let go.

Conclusion

Losing trust in the workplace can lead to significant and far-reaching consequences. Trust is essential for effective teamwork, communication, and collaboration. When trust is broken, it often results in decreased morale, disengagement, and reduced productivity. Employees who feel betrayed may become skeptical and hesitant to share ideas or collaborate, stifling innovation and creating a toxic work environment. Ultimately, a lack of trust can fracture relationships and undermine organizational cohesion.

Regaining lost trust is a complex and demanding process. It requires acknowledgment of the breach and consistent and transparent actions that demonstrate a genuine commitment to change. Rebuilding trust involves addressing the underlying causes of the breakdown, engaging in difficult conversations, and showing—through actions, not just words—that the relationship can be repaired. This process takes time and patience, as trust is rebuilt incrementally and often requires individuals to prove themselves repeatedly.

Rebuilding trust can be emotionally exhausting and demands both resilience and vulnerability. While the effort to restore trust is substantial, the reward is a more positive and collaborative work environment. In the end, although the cost of regaining trust is high, the effort to rebuild it can lead to more robust, more resilient relationships that benefit both individuals and the organization as a whole.

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* Note: A pdf copy of this article can be found at:

https://www.mcl-associates.com/downloads/resolving_issues_with_your_boss_part2.pdf

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