

Just Trust Me!



I'm not sure I've ever stopped to think about *trust*. I'm a fairly open person and have always felt that most people will do the right thing. As a matter of fact, when I first saw a course offering on business ethics, I couldn't understand the need for the class.

I used to think that most people and most businesses just lived by the golden rule. For the most part, things usually seemed to work out.

Silly me!

The headline USA Today read "Trust: Americans have great faith in each other, but their trust in CEOs, Big Business, priests and HMOs is slipping away".



According to the newspaper's poll, nearly 70% of Americans say they distrust CEOs of large companies and eight in 10 say that those same top executives will take "improper action" for their personal benefit. 38% of those polled said that they felt big business was an actual threat to the future of the country.

The distrust of the business community has become more frightening to Americans than their fear of another terrorist attack.

At the same time, more Americans than ever are relying on friends and family members. The poll showed that 68% of us were relying less on the advice of professionals and more on their own judgment.

What does this information mean to retailers?

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Although it presents a tremendous opportunity to set us apart, it comes with a heightened responsibility to our customers, our employees and our communities.

The retail community has traditionally been shrouded in distrust. We lock up our merchandise to keep the most valuable items out of reach to both consumers and employees. Even our best customers are subjected to policies that suggest we think they might write us a bad check or give us fraudulent credit information.

In fairness, many of our fears come from our experiences.

But now may be the time to at least emotionally unlock our showcases and put more trust in those around us.

Get out into the community. Our biggest competitors have grown because of their ability to create store traffic, but for the most part, they are bigger businesses. To my knowledge, large retailers aren't guilty of cooking their books or defrauding their investors but they are still, big business headquartered somewhere else.

Become visible again. Participate in the Chamber and get your employees involved in coaching little league, bowling with your company's team and in volunteering for local charities.

- **Develop testimonials from customers who have put their faith in you.**
- **Follow through on your promised and exceed expectations.**
- **Brand yourself as trusting and trustworthy.**

I know it's difficult to cultivate a positive work environment when you do drug testing and honesty testing with your employees or when you install security cameras in our warehouses, but it can be done if you communicate openly with your team.

Staff members need to know that your rules are in place to protect them from the few bad apples out there. You don't want their safety or financial future jeopardized by those who may drive under the influence or who may steal from the company.

Entrust an employee oversight committee to review company policies and offer ways to improve or change them.

Plan more company events, contests and parties to help make your team feel more like part of a big family. Recognize small wins and offer encouragement to those who may not yet be your best performers.

Give your team more information. Trust them *not* to tell their friends, your suppliers or your competitors that your business is less profitable than last year, 20% ahead of budget or planning a future expansion.

I can't remember a time of greater opportunity for closely held locally owned businesses.



Don't be alarmed if employees and customers are suspicious of your new open policies. Recent events have taught them to be wary.

But if you're real, genuine, and sincerely trust others, I think those around you will follow suit in short order.

I trust you more already.

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