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KEEP IT REAL CHECKLIST: 12 THINGS MODERN MANAGERS DO TO BUILD TRUST

While the whole world seems to have caught the bug for being a generative leader and driving employee engagement, secretly, most of us tend to assume others are the problem rather than ourselves. But the truth is, leading well means being overtly human within an environment that proportionately and subjectively discourages it, which is why it remains a continued practice for the majority of us. As marvelous as you are, be careful not to assume you're automatically doing it. Chances are your adapted protections and interpersonal walls are in play more than you imagine. To get on the other side of habit, give these 12 simple yet powerful people skills a try in generating the impact you seek.

1. **Show 'em when you sweat.**
   While it's easy to fall in love with whatever aspect of vulnerability Brene Brown is bringing to life at the moment, living it is something we can all do better at. Our humanity, our fears, the very things that challenge us – that's when the people we lead come to fully understand our own grit and fight. Far from the perfection of our resume or LinkedIn profile, this is the reveal that teaches them that as much as you are tasked with helping them grow, that work never stops – and is on all of us. The next moment of uncertainty is your opportunity to show your humanity. Courage only exists when fear is present.

2. **Be present with people.**
   Nothing conveys to people that they don't matter quite as much as not being fully present with them. This undermines their ability to feel valid and heard, and mitigates your ability to actually absorb and respond to whatever it is that is under consideration. Put your phone away. Make eye contact. Make sure not to spend the entire time they are talking formulating what you are going to say. Come to meetings with them as present and prepared as they do for you.

3. **Acknowledge you have a life.**
   Many leaders make the mistake of trying to hide when they have a personal commitment, or when they need to use discretionary decision making to honor their non-work commitments. Don't waste the energy. By doing that, you not only convey to the folks who work with you that they cannot trust you, you tell them that they should be lying to you as well. Go on vacation. Take a lunch break. And when life intervenes and you have to juggle to address something outside of work, do so with grace, dignity and transparency.

4. **Give specific credit.**
   You might think that thanking the entire team or crediting the team is enough for your people to feel recognized, but actually for them to feel seen and appreciated you need to consider carefully who did what and, wherever specific contributions can be identified, sing them from the mountaintop. Do so both in front of the team, and directly 1:1. As you start to model this, you may be surprised that they may also begin to do so with one another – and with YOU.

5. **Pick the right channel.**
Ever find yourself going down the rabbit-hole of endless email threads or having so much to include in a correspondence it reads more like a term paper? Or maybe an IM or Slack conversation is getting so meaty, with callbacks to previous messages and clarifications you'd have to print the whole thing out to follow both the details and take-aways. Asynchronous communication such as email should only be used when facts are being delivered or specific asks are made. When perspective or context is required for your people to understand the "why" of a choice, get off of pixels and move the interaction to face-to-face or at least voice-to-voice. The subtleties of tone and pacing, not to mention facial expression, go a long way towards helping them align with how you think and consider and, as their guide and teacher, building trust for the long term.

6. **Become fluent in "I don't know."**
So often leaders think they have to have all the answers, which in turn conveys to their teams that they better have all the answers. Meanwhile no one has all the answers, so we all end up making stuff up, faking it. And we can *all* tell when each other are making stuff up. Not only is that false certainty a trust killer, your lack of transparency prevents you from turning a moment of not knowing into a generative discussion, a brainstorm, or a project for someone on the team to take on for everyone's benefit. Plus, you're selling short more than your own discovery -- you're robbing someone else of their opportunity to learn and synthesize, too. Become an expert in not knowing.

7. **Let go.**
Delegation is less of an art or science than it is a birthing. When you ask others to do something, give them everything you can to facilitate their alignment with the ask. Every context, every concern, every hidden agenda you can think of. Then let them know that means that they are the one who will do the investigating and considering, that they are the one who will come back with the recommendation of best path, and that they are the one who will provide the fodder upon which the ultimate decision will be made. When the reports are made and the review happens, your modifications and response to their work should be offered with transparent reasoning. By doing that they have owned not only the project and process, but they have been given the opportunity to learn from the experience beyond just executing.

8. **Take a breath.**
By you running from one thing to another and never taking a breath between thoughts or a moment between commitments, you're showing employees that clarity and focus is not valued. We know our own processing is not optimal when overtasked, so imagine the damage a team of overtasked processers can do. Use pauses between meetings to actively clear your mind. Model taking an obvious breather to your team by asking for a moment when you need it. Use elevator rides and water breaks as built-in opportunities to feel your feet on the ground, slow your breath, and clear your mind. Whenever you can, build in moments of centering to create transitions from one interaction to the next.

9. **Respect time and energy.**
Watch your people as you would loved ones. Consider carefully what's on each of their plates, how hard they push themselves, and whether or not you're setting them up for a crash or chronic underperformance by taking advantage of their strong work ethic. If one is lagging or making mistakes, address it directly by asking about engagement, enjoyment, and workload. Ask them about how they feel about working late or early, weekends, etc., and then respect their wishes to

the extent that you possibly can. Model that it is safe to have boundaries and limits by expressing your own.

10. **Share your journey…the real one.**

    In a recent divisional offsite, the agenda included each person considering a break-through moment, a time in which they had been working towards something they weren't certain about and had to see through to the end. They shared their stories in small groups, and then bragged about who in the room had inspired them, which quickly (and by design) turned into an inspirational story slam, with colleagues wowing each other with their tales of triumph in the face of adversity. Do that. Do that first. Then get them to do the same.

11. **Know what they care about.**

    There used to be this myth that we all just went to work, did our jobs, and then went home. This myth held that we really didn't need to know anything about each other or bother with learning if we had anything in common. But while that is true of most machines, even machines have to speak similar languages or cooperative functions. And the human machine has the added complexity of being connection-driven, all because of these hearts and emotions that are both part of our hardware and wired into our systems. Forget about considering knowing about each other as being "soft skills." Think of it as integration maintenance.

12. **Specificity saves relationships.**

    Whether in project management, team interaction, simple asks or delegating something of great complexity, always, always, always be specific about the WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN and HOW. If you've ever heard "but you didn't say…" even when you did say, then you didn't do so with the directness needed. Give the asks, then ask them if they have any questions about the assignment and if they are committing to the ask. It may take an uncomfortable "Is that all clear? Anything you need to negotiate or clarify?", but you'll have course-corrected before it is too late, and everyone (yes, everyone!) will be much, much happier **in the end.**

Since 2002 Balance Integration has been working with leaders in some of the world's most respected organizations to create optimal work cultures. If your leadership could use some re-alignment, reach out to our CEO, Tevis Trower at tevis@balanceintegration.com to explore how.