



# The Value of Rock-Solid Relationships in Turbulent Times

Here's how to connect with your employees to create an indestructible team.

By Ed Rigsbee

Relationships always matter—but they matter most of all in troubled times. The best antidote for the motion sickness that accompanies high-speed ups and downs is rock-solid relationships. Here are suggestions for creating such relationships with your employees:

**Tell them what you want.** If you feel your employees are letting you down, ask yourself if you've been open with them about exactly what

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you need. A lack of clarity here is where organizational communication most often breaks down.

**Ask them what they need.** Urge employees to tell you their dreams, expectations, and limits. Then listen to their answers as if your life depended on it, and follow up on what they tell you.

**Be willing to give up some control.** Relationships work only if there is give and take on both sides.

**Build trust** by being candid about what you're doing at all times, setting clear expectations, and staying true to your commitments. Other

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ways to keep trust strong:

- Find ways to affirm people's uniqueness and worth.
- Tell them whenever they do something right. Affirm and celebrate their successes.
- Give prompt feedback.
- Share your plans before taking action.
- Get everyone's side of the story before forming conclusions.
- Take time to see things from other people's perspectives.
- Train staff to make their own decisions, and then support and reward the decisions they make.

**Be a coach and a mentor.** Both ways of relating to employees focus on helping them grow while furthering the organization's values. For more on coaching, take a look at "Coaching Your Way to Effectiveness" on page 26. To learn how to mentor, see "Seven Keys to Successful Mentoring," at right.

**Encourage risk.** Turn every error into a learning experience. Make sure people know they won't be punished for trying something new.

**Move away from your desk,** and spend time walking around, observing, chatting, and getting to know people.



## Move away from your desk.

**Walk your walk.** Is there anything you preach without practicing it yourself? Do you tell people they should have a life away from the job, for example, and then work all weekend yourself? If so, you'll destroy trust and integrity, which are the essence of relationships.

**Try the three on three method.** Ask people to share three things they like about your relationship with them. Then ask for three things they *don't* like. Simply say "Thank you" without defending your position. When you're alone, think about what they had to say. Later, let them know that you appreciated their comments and that you're making efforts to change, based on their input.

**Resolve conflict** immediately. Don't let disagreements fester. Face problems with honesty and forthrightness.

**Never underestimate the power of food.** Breaking bread with people has a special ability to dissolve barriers. Seize every opportunity to eat with employees.

**Monitor** how things are going. Check if everyone's making progress toward agreed-upon goals, and make adjustments if circumstances have changed. ■

*Ed Rigsbee, CSP, is president of Rigsbee Research ([www.rigsbee.com](http://www.rigsbee.com), [ed@rigsbee.com](mailto:ed@rigsbee.com), 800-839-1520) and the author of PartnerShift: How to Profit from the Partnering Trend, Developing Strategic Alliances, and The Art of Partnering.*

## Seven Keys to Successful Mentoring

Mentoring is a close cousin to coaching. The difference? Mentors walk through the door ahead of the mentee, while coaches walk side by side with the person they're coaching. While coaching focuses on enhancing current job performance, mentoring tends to focus on people's career paths. Mentors typically use coaching skills to guide people, but they also use their position to help mentees further their careers. To be a successful mentor, follow these essentials:

**Gain a full picture** of your mentee, using personality tests, interviews with coworkers, observation, and in-depth talks. Reveal who you are, sharing your dreams, experiences, successes, and failures. Define expectations and set goals together. Decide how often to meet and how much can be done through phone calls and e-mail.

Mentors walk ahead, while coaches walk side by side.

**Keep a watchful eye on the environment**, looking for threats (such as rumors or distorted accounts of your mentee's behavior) and opportunities (such as seminars that fit your mentee's needs). Help your mentee address the threats and take advantage of the opportunities.

**Advocate** on behalf of mentees, and sponsor them for opportunities such as participating on committees, leading projects, and becoming members of professional organizations. Introduce them to key people in their fields of interest.

**Counsel** your mentees on how to handle problems. For example, you can help them become more skilled at resolving conflicts and dealing with the "politics" of organizational life.

**Teach** mentees by sharing experiences from your life, offering information, giving them access to resources, and providing feedback.

**Be a role model**, showing how to cope with challenges and live the organization's values.

**Motivate and inspire.** Awaken your mentees' creativity and help them reach their greatest potential.

—adapted from *Seven Keys to Successful Mentoring* (Center for Creative Leadership, [www.ccl.org](http://www.ccl.org))

## Compassion Starts at Home

These *Nonprofit World* articles (available at [www.snpo.org/members](http://www.snpo.org/members)) will give you some fresh ideas on partnering with your employees to create depth and loyalty within your organization:

- **Build a Powerful Staff Team** (Vol. 18, No. 4)
- **Can We Call a Truce? Ten Tips for Negotiating Workplace Conflicts** (Vol. 27, No. 6)
- **Leading from Feeling: Coaching Tools for Interpersonal & Organizational Excellence** (Vol. 27, No. 1)
- **Regular People, Spectacular Results** (Vol. 23, No. 4)
- **What's Your Personality Type?** (Vol. 14, No. 5)