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Changing corporate culture: Building trust with employees

By Stephen Young

Stephen Young (stephen.young@risknavigationgroup.com) is Managing Director at Risk Navigation Group, Inc. in Wheaton, IL.

- [linkedin.com/in/stephenyoung1](https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephenyoung1)

Can corporate culture ever truly change for the better if the employee base does not trust the leadership? It is doubtful. By trust, let's be clear on what we mean—the employee base does not trust that the leadership will listen to their day-to-day concerns, take reasonable actions to promote the open and honest dialogs so often emphasized, and treat everyone fairly and justly.

Many organizations have such a gap in trust that the employee base no longer takes it upon themselves to call out inefficiencies or improper behavior. If they do, they often feel that they will be retaliated against or be viewed as a troublemaker. It simply isn't worth it to take the chance of being open and honest in their communications with leadership.

So how does an organization begin to bridge this trust gap with the workforce? Perhaps a good place to start is by regular meetings with groups of employees and listening to the issues they are facing. The critical elements are to:

- **Actively listen to what is being said.** Don't criticize, challenge, or correct the employees. Let them speak their minds. Set the stage for these meetings to be constructive, but hear what they have to say.
- **Take some meaningful action on the issues that were shared.** Demonstrate to employees that you have listened to their issues and have taken an active role in investigating and fixing the problem, based on their recommendations. Now the employees will know that you are serious.
- **Follow up on delayed actions.** For items that cannot be corrected immediately, let the employees know at future meetings that these issues are still being addressed. They have not been forgotten.
- **Be honest with the employees.** For items that cannot/will not be changed, tell them that the company cannot fix the issue and the reason why. Maybe they can assist in finding an alternate solution.

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