Chapter V

Establishing Trust

Many of the myths and challenges described previously stem from the fact that there is not a strong established trust relationship within a team. If managers feel that their employees can work independently and deliver on their commitments without constant supervision and micromanagement, then people might feel less need to meet face-to-face.

If employees feel that their work is visible, that their peers understand and value their contributions, and that their managers provide support and encouragement during all phases of their projects, then the employees might not feel that they have to be sitting next to their bosses in order to climb the corporate ladder and to be successful. One manager, Joe Gerardi, explained the importance of building a trust relationship.

Nobody cares what you think until they know you care about them. Teamwork is more than a series of transactions. Teamwork is a series of engagements. It really depends on the depth of the relationship you have with the person. I wouldn’t want to fire someone remotely, but if I had to, I could fire Person A over the phone because we have built a strong relationship.

Consider the following: Even if we have very poor communication and no tools to support a team, if we have a strong trust relationship, there might still be a
chance for success. However, just having great communication and the best tools, with no strong trust relationship, doesn’t guarantee anything.

Trust is the single most important driver for the success of virtual teams.

If you are able to establish trust as a team member, leader, or manager, you will be able to gain consensus, agreement, and the ability to influence.

**Consensus and Agreement**

In some groups and organizations, the simple fact that a person is in a leadership position gives that person full power to make decisions, set direction, and tell people what they should do. Although team members may follow orders, they potentially may not be in total agreement with the decision, especially if the direction seems risky or ambiguous, or in some way makes them feel uncomfortable. In the short term, this might result in resentment and later disengagement or non-performance. In the long term, team members might become less independent and look to the leader to make every minute decision, or they may just leave. The most effective group is not the one in which the members are hesitantly participating, but rather the one that is fully engaged and contributing at their highest performance.

Let’s consider the following situation: You are leading a team of people who want to go river rafting. Rivers are rated from Class 1 to Class 6, based upon the difficulty of passage. A Class 1 river is basically flat water, appropriate for travel by children. A Class 6 river is so difficult that safe passage is doubtful, and chances for serious injury and death are almost certain. If you are trying to decide what class of river to take, then trust, agreement, and consensus are critical in order to make sure you have a fun but safe trip. Gaining agreement and consensus in this situation ensures that everyone has an understanding of the following:

- What is the overall goal of the activity? (To have fun? To be challenged?)
- How much risk is the team willing to take?
- Which skills are necessary to take on this activity, and, more importantly, which skills are missing from the team?