



U.S. ARMY

Trust at the Core: Essential for Leadership and Mission Success



DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTION,
RESILIENCE AND READINESS

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Trust is the foundation of any successful organization. In the Army, it is essential for mission success, [unit cohesion](#) and effective leadership. A strong culture of trust ensures that Soldiers operate with integrity, communicate openly and hold one another accountable to high standards. When properly cultivated, it leads to increased morale, operational efficiency and unit effectiveness.

Aspects of a culture of trust

1. Honesty

Honesty in the Army is about truthfulness in both words and actions. [Leaders](#) and Soldiers must be transparent about their capabilities, mistakes and expectations. For example, a platoon leader who openly acknowledges a tactical error promotes trust in their unit. Soldiers will respect a leader who admits to mistakes and takes corrective action, rather than one who hides errors out of fear of reprisal. This honesty builds credibility, ensuring that Soldiers can rely on one another in high-stakes situations.

2. Having challenging conversations

Trust is reinforced when leaders and subordinates can engage in [difficult discussions](#) without fear of retaliation or judgment. These conversations may involve addressing poor performance, discussing ethical concerns or providing guidance on improvement. For instance, if a squad leader notices that a Soldier is consistently failing to meet physical training standards, a direct but constructive conversation is necessary. Instead of avoiding the issue, the leader should explain the impact of subpar fitness on mission readiness and offer a plan for improvement. This approach fosters respect and accountability.

3. Holding people accountable

Accountability is a cornerstone of military discipline and operational effectiveness. Soldiers and leaders must hold themselves and others to the Army's core values and standards. A culture where accountability is expected—not feared—ensures that mistakes become learning opportunities, rather than sources of blame. For example, if a Soldier repeatedly arrives late to formation, their squad leader should address the issue promptly, reinforce expectations and implement corrective actions, such as additional duties or mentoring. Consistently holding Soldiers accountable reinforces discipline while maintaining trust.

Establishing a culture of trust

Building and maintaining a culture of trust requires intentional efforts through setting norms and expectations, active listening and providing performance-based feedback.

1. Setting norms and expectations

Leaders play a critical role in defining the [standards and behaviors](#) expected within a unit. This starts with clearly articulating unit values, protocols and the importance of trust. For example, a



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company commander can begin each deployment by outlining expectations for communication, respect and teamwork, ensuring that all Soldiers understand the unit's guiding principles. Additionally, leaders must model these behaviors themselves—if they expect honesty and accountability, they must demonstrate those values consistently.

2. Active listening

Trust is strengthened when [leaders actively listen](#) to their Soldiers. This involves not only hearing concerns but also addressing them thoughtfully. For example, if a junior enlisted Soldier expresses frustration about a training schedule, a leader practicing active listening will seek to understand the issue, rather than dismiss it outright. By asking follow-up questions and acknowledging the Soldier's perspective, the leader builds an environment in which Soldiers feel valued and understood, which will encourage them to speak openly.

3. Giving feedback focused on performance, not the person

[Feedback](#) should always be constructive, with the goal of improving performance, not criticizing the individual. This approach helps maintain trust while driving development. So if a Soldier struggles with marksmanship, instead of saying, "You're a terrible shot," a leader could say, "Your accuracy needs improvement, but I've noticed your stance is inconsistent. Let's work on adjusting it to enhance your aim." This kind of feedback helps the Soldier improve without feeling personally attacked, thus reinforcing a supportive and growth-oriented environment.

By fostering honesty, engaging in challenging conversations and holding people accountable through clear norms, active listening and constructive feedback, Army leaders can create a culture in which trust is not just a principle but a practiced value.

References and resources

Team Cohesion: Build a Culture of Trust

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/r2/Build-Culture-Trust.html>

3 Tips for Handling Difficult Conversations

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Difficult-Conversations.html>

Three C's of Communication to Navigate Tough Conversations

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Navigating-Tough-Conversations.html>

Creating a Climate of Motivation

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Climate-Motivation.html>

Building a Positive, Healthy Command Climate and Culture

https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/SAAPM-2024/pages/images/pdf/factsheet/SAAPM2024_Factsheet_1_1-25-24_FINAL.pdf

Be Aware of Nonverbals: How Unspoken Messages Make or Break Communication Within Teams

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Be-Aware-of-Nonverbals.html>





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RESILIENCE AND READINESS

Four Strategies to Foster Respect and Strengthen Your Organization

<https://www.armyresilience.army.mil/ard/R2/Foster-Respect.html>

Purpose, Direction, and Motivation: A Guide for Army Leaders

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2024/September/Purpose-Direction-Motivation>

A Culture of Trust

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/May/A-Culture-of-Trust>

Toxic Culture: Enabling Incivility in the U.S. Military and What to Do About It

<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1325971/toxic-culture-enabling-incivility-in-the-us-military-and-what-to-do-about-it>

Feedback is Essential, but Difficult to Master

<https://www.ansa.org/articles/feedback-essential-difficult-master>

Resilience Through Counseling: Empowering Soldiers for Lifelong Success

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2024/February/Resilience-Through-Counseling>

