It’s easier to have a positive impact if trust exists in the relationship. Yet building trust is a mystery to many people, and it certainly does not have to be. What does someone need to do to earn your trust?

Depending on your style, you may have given several responses. You may expect people to be dependable and trustworthy—“I do what I say I will.” You may expect them to be honest and candid—“I say what I mean.” You may want people to be accessible and open—“I’ll tell you anything about me.” Or you may expect them to be approving and accepting—“I will listen to you without judgment.”

There are four basic ways that people build trust. And while you may think of other words, they generally fall under the four categories in the figure. Each of us has a preference for what we think is necessary to build trust, and we typically attempt to build trust with others the same way. It is what comes natural to us. Realize that what seems natural for you may not be what someone else prefers. Have you ever heard of the platinum rule? While the golden rule says do unto others as you would have them do unto you, the platinum rule says do unto others as they want.

There are four general ways to build and strengthen trust. Number the behaviors from 1 to 4 in order of what you believe is easiest for you, with 1 as the easiest and 4 the most difficult.

1. Direct and candid: “I say what I mean.” “You will always know where I stand.”
2. Accessible and open: “I’ll tell you all about me.” “Let’s keep our agenda open and have fun.”
3. Approving and accepting: “I value people and diverse perspectives.” “You can count on being heard without judgment or criticism.”
4. Dependable and trustworthy: “I do what I say I will do.” “I keep my promises.” “You can count on me.”

What you perceive as easiest are the strengths that are natural to you. They are the natural ways you go about building trust with others. Those that are more difficult are important to others who do not have the same characteristics as you and who value different ways to build trust. These are the ones you need to improve. Who is good at these skills? Observe them and how they build trust. Identify specific things that they do, then decide what you could do to strengthen trust in this way.

Trust goes both ways. How do you show that you trust your employees?