

Building Trust that Builds Profit with Minda Harts (S6: Ep.1) Transcript

PODCAST

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CC: Thanks for joining us today on Work Better, Minda.

Minda Harts: Happy to be here, Chris. Thanks for having me.

CC: I really appreciate you coming, because there's so many conversations going on about trust right now.

Maybe more about lack of trust these days, and I just got the 2025 Edelman trust barometer report. And it's talking about things like how there's major institutional failures that have caused a lack of trust in not only institutions, but employers, government leaders, media, etc. And so you've written a book about trust, you teach a course about trust, and I gotta ask like, what in the heck is going on with trust?

MH: Chris, it's hanging in the balance, right? I think that all of us are experiencing in some way, shape or form, lack of trust or anxiousness, anxiety. Maybe some of our companies said one thing last year, and now it's a little bit different today in our day-to-day reality. And I think that you know the thing to keep in mind is that I don't think that anyone shows up to work and says, "Hey, how can I erode trust with Chris today," right? But it happens unintentionally and intentionally, but I think part of how we restore trust and create it, is we have to talk about it, and trust is a global language. If you're in Tokyo, you want it. If you're in Grand Rapids, Michigan, you want it, too, right? And so I think that that's going to be the the language that we need to start speaking in the workplace, because trust is profitable, as the trust barometer told us, right?

CC: Yeah, yeah, let's talk more about that in a minute. I want to just ask about the idea that you're teaching a class on trust. So to me, maybe I oversimplified it, but I always thought trust was pretty basic like you tell the truth, and you know, if you, if you commit to something, you do it, or you know you tell people why you can't do it, those kinds of things. So have I oversimplified it? Am I missing something about trust that we need classes to teach us about it?

MH: You know, unfortunately, I think we do, because I think trust is one of those things that we think of as a “nice to have”, a fluffy thing right? In our romantic relationships, in our platonic relationships, trust is a non-negotiable, but somewhere along the lines in the workplace we don’t keep it as the main character, right? You know, our manager might tell us something we have trust at 9 Am. and then by 11:15 ,it’s not there. Intentional or unintentional. Right layoffs happen. Reorgs take place, and I think we don’t think about trust as a catalyst in the workplace. And so when people talk to me, and I show up at companies, and I do a talk. They’ll tell me, “Oh, I don’t trust my manager,” and I kept hearing this from men and women, and you know, interns. And I started to think, “wait a second, what they’re saying is trust might be a little bit shaky, but what they need is the language to be able to ask for what they want,” right? I can’t come to you and say, “Chris, I don’t trust you,” because I’m not going to get the response from you that I want. But is it feedback that I need to build a trusting relationship? Is it, you know, demonstration? So for me, it’s really getting to the root of what would provide trust. And I think that’s what we’ve been missing in our trust equation in the workplace.

CC: Yeah. So let’s talk about that, and maybe start with something that, again should seem pretty basic, but how would you define trust? And you know, if we’re thinking about it more within work and the workplace.

MH: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think the baseline is we all know when it’s present, and we all know when we’ve lost it, right? That’s a universal feeling, and I think that the Webster’s Dictionary defines it really well, and that’s the strength of someone or something, right? The reliability and the truth in something, and I think that oftentimes in the workplace that for example, if a layoff takes place, we can’t sometimes evade layoffs or reorgs from taking place. But do we have a manager? Do we have a leader that’s transparent and humanizes the experience of everyone who might have survivors guilt, right? I was consulting for a company, and they had a mass layoff and then they had an all staff meeting and didn’t mention a thing right. That’s not going to help build trust with the remaining people on your team.

CC: By not acknowledging that.

MH: By not acknowledging and so there’s little things we can do. We may not be able to tell everyone A to Z what just took place, but let’s remind each other that we’re human 1st and employees second, that trust is the catalyst that’s going to help with productivity. It’s going to help with no more burnout. Those are the things that we need, so that people can do their best work, and I think sometimes that gets lost in the shuffle. Trust, that is.

CC: Yeah, you’re making some really important connections that I want to get into and come back to what you mentioned about profit like, there’s there’s profit and trust.

Before we go there, I just want to connect with some other words that I’ve heard you use where you’ve talked about things that I’d say are related to well-being, anxiety. We are reading a lot about people feeling depression or a lack of engagement. There’s so much going on that’s really impacting employees’ well-being as you’re kind of alluding to here and so, let’s talk about trust.

Tell me a little bit more about how trust is connected to those kinds of things.

MH: Yeah. Well, the barometer, the Edelman's trust barometer that you mentioned, they said that when trust is present, employees are 21% more profitable. There's 40% less burnout and 50% more retention right, amongst their employees. And so all of those things are tied to the bottom line and so I think it's imperative for people to not look at trust again as this nice thing to have, but it's part of the business case. It's a business imperative, for your employees will do their best work when they trust who they're working for.

There's another statistic that says that 70% of people feel like their managers are not invested in their success. That's a trust issue, right? So how can we remove barriers for people instead of create more? And I think that takes a little self-awareness and emotional intelligence to say, "Okay, am I contributing to this high trust or low trust environment? And what could I be doing better right to speak someone's trust language". And I think that that's what's going to be required, because to your point, some people are working remote. Some people are working hybrid. Some are being asked to come back to the office. There's probably some trust issues in that.

So, what would it look like to be transparent so that people can trust again in the workplace? I just don't want us all side-eyeing each other in the office when we get back, right? So, let's address some of the elephants in the room.

CC: You use the phrase language of trust. So you have a new book out. It's called, *Talk to me nice. The 7 Trust languages for a better workplace.*

Now again, I know, I thought about my love language. I've never really thought about my trust language.

So can you talk about like a couple of those at least, and kind of help us understand what you mean by love language, or excuse me, by trust, language?

MH: Yes. Well, see, you know I love Chris, that you talked about the the love languages because those are part of our cultural zeitgeist. Right, you know, in our relationships you might be acts of service, you know. I'm words of affirmation, and I thought, what if we had trust languages in the workplace? Because trust is a little shaky these days across the board. What do people really need? What is the root of this lack of trust? And so I started to think about all the conversations I've had, you know, speaking at various companies, people who write me and have, you know, asked for business advice, and I narrowed it down to 7 things that people actually were wanting that was prohibiting them from getting the trust that they deserved or desired.

And so a couple of those was transparency. It wasn't that you don't trust your company or your manager, you just need a little bit more transparency, and if your manager knew that, then they could help enhance trust instead of erode trust, right?

Another trust language is acknowledgement. Maybe I'm working, we're working on a team project, Chris, and you're the only one that gets acknowledged in this way, and now I don't trust you know my call. I don't trust you. I don't trust my manager, and it's not that I necessarily don't trust you, I actually just need to articulate that acknowledgement is what I really need to rebuild trust. And so I created these languages that we already use and say, "Okay, if we had a language to ask for what we want, or if I'm a manager and I want to get the best out of someone, What do they need me to speak to them? What do they need me to demonstrate to them so that they get to do their best work?" And in turn, that's good for business, right?

CC: So for those of us and those who are listening who are leaders in an organization, can you give us a little free coaching like, how do we understand? First of all, like, I hope I have trust among my team, but, like you know, I think all of us are maybe not always as self-aware as we wish we were.

Can you give us coaching as leaders and say like, how do you know if you've got trust on your team? And then how do you deal with like, maybe there's trust at different, at different levels, like teammates trusting each other, but maybe not trusting their leader or trusting their leader, but maybe not trusting the overall organization? Can you break that down for us a little bit?

MH: we all know that trust is also subjective, right? Because me and you might work on a team together and I'm your go to person, and we trust each other 10 toes down right. But then there's a couple of other people who might be introverted, so they don't show up in the same way. So maybe that's prohibiting trust for being present, whatever the case may be. But I created these 7 languages because I felt like sometimes we don't have the language to ask for what we need in the workplace, and what would it look like as a manager to say, "Okay, I know that Minda needs something from me", and I can't just say, "Hey, do you trust me or not?" That would be a little awkward.

CC: I just feel awkward.

MH: It'll be awkward. But what would it look like to start by saying, "what do you need from me to do your best work while you're here?" Right? Those simple questions, just to say, you know, I've even suggesting reading the the 7 trust languages as a group right to say, "Okay. out of these 7 languages, transparency, follow through, feedback, security, acknowledgement, demonstration, sensitivity, what is it that you need from me?"

If I were able to speak one or 2 of these trust languages for you, what would that look like, right, bringing it to the forefront? Or, if you need to manage up, what would it look like to have a conversation with your manager to say, "You know we're in a polarizing time in the country right now, and I know trust is a little shaky on the team. We were remote, now we're back in the workplace, I really don't know how to feel," you know. What would it look like to be a little more sensitive to some of these topics when we're talking about them in a group, right? Instead of saying, "Hey, I don't trust you." So I'm giving people the language to really self advocate for themselves, and then assess what your team might need from you. And so the 7 trust languages, just helps with credibility, It helps with reliabilit, and self-awareness, so that we could say, "Where has trust been broken?"

And lastly, I'll say, Chris, is that trust might be there at 9 in the morning, might be gone by lunchtime, but we have to keep it as a lifestyle, you know. It's not a one time event, relationship building will always be required of each of us if we want to make the workplace better than we found it.

CC: Yeah, I mean, I think that's such a good point that just even reminding us, there's so many things, you know, so many pressures on leaders and organizations to accomplish that sometimes trust might be something that again, you kind of take it for granted in some ways, and I think just even having the reminder to have those conversations that's really important guidance.

Another connection I want to make is and I want to hear your point of view on is between like trust and respect. I was listening to a conversation and it happened to be about emails. And do you respond to emails, which is something that I have to work on keeping up with everything. But the person who was talking was saying, you know that responding to an email is a form of trust or a form of respect, because it's acknowledging like you asked me something, and I'm acknowledging that back. What do you think the connections are between trust and respect?

MH: I'm so glad that you brought this up, Chris, because essentially what we're talking about is respect, like, I respect our working relationship, that I'm going to do or take the necessary steps to make sure that we keep a trusting, healthy work culture, because if you and I have a good relationship, then that's good for everybody else as well, working with us.

And I think again, many of us are running 90 miles per hour in the workplace, and we're not thinking about, "Oh, I just shot that email off, and I CC'd somebody, or I could have picked up the phone" right? Or "we have a hiring situation, and I'm just going to go to my go-to person and promote them, but I didn't think about what it was like for somebody who could have also been in the hiring pool." And I think we're making these decisions that have impacts on people that either enhance or erode. And so for me, I would ask people just to take a beat and say, "if I make this decision, what is the impact? Is that going to enhance trust? Is it going to erode trust? And will this person, on the receiving end of it, or the community, will they feel respected?"

And it's funny that you bring up emails because I used to be one of those people, "well, I don't have an answer right now, so I'm not going to answer it," right? Or "I'm too busy." But it doesn't mean I don't respect them. But now I actually have created a new way of responding to my emails and saying "confirming receipt. Just wanted you to acknowledge that I received it, and I'll try to follow back up in the next 3 to 5 days, or 24 hours." Because I would want someone to take that time to respect my time as well. And again, I think if we humanize each other's experience in the workplace and remind each other, you know, there's a human on the other end of this, right? I think we just have to slow down and think about the humanity part of the workplace.

CC: Yeah, I think that's such an important point, because we're all flying so fast. It's so easy to have a little unintended oversight, you know. Maybe I sent an email without really reading it through or thinking it through. Or, you know, I forwarded something that maybe I shouldn't have all of those kinds of things, you know, they just happen. And so that among other things, can get us to a place where you know trust does get broken. You know again to your point, nobody really shows up at work going, "Hey, I'm going to cause distrust to happen." But stuff happens. So when it does happen, do you have some advice for us about again, how do we go about rebuilding, acknowledging that trust was broken, and starting to rebuild it? That can feel really uncomfortable, I think, for a lot of people.

MH: I agree. Nobody wants to, I mean, few and far between, people want to acknowledge when they've made a misstep, right? And I think that because we haven't prioritized trust and respect in the workplace out loud, I think it's one of those things that we just think is automatic, and we know that that's not true. Just because you're the manager, that doesn't mean you automatically have trust with someone, just because you have tenure, it doesn't create trust right away. And I think we just have to remember that we have to build trust, just like we build the business case for anything else within the company. And so part of building trust, even if you make 10 mistakes in one day, is acknowledging when the mishap has taken place. For example, I had a manager who would always get my name wrong, and so at one point in time they just stopped saying my name right and so, or when they'd see me, they'd kind of try to duck in the hallway.

Like Hey, you? And I'm just like, and so in my mind, I'm like, "why is he doing that?" I would prefer him to attempt to try to say my name or say, "Minda, I apologize. I keep getting it wrong, say it for me one more time." Acknowledging that I'm going to keep trying. And I think people just want to know that you're giving an effort that you're "Hey? I made a decision for the team last month because of XY, and Z. Now, after thinking about it, that was probably not the right decision, and I wanted to let you all know about it. If you want to talk about it further, my door is open." That's going to feel a lot better than somebody pretending "Oh, there's nothing to see here," until there is something to see again.

CC: Yeah.

MH: Part of it is just people just want you to acknowledge when you've made a mistake. So that that's part of trust, because even if you make a mistake 5 times, I hope that's not the same mistake, but I would rather you come and self-correct instead of me questioning again, can trust ever be there? And I think it's these small modifications, Chris, that we can make that make our working relationships and our communication better. So we're going to have conflict all the time if we don't have trust.

CC: Yeah, it takes some humility and a little vulnerability as a leader to admit that you made a mistake. And that's hard to do. I just want to say that, like I don't know if there's a way that, a best practice, or a coaching or something, you know, because a lot of times as leaders, you know, you kind of learn that, well, you know, in order to have trust, you need to be consistent and confident, and you know people don't want to perceive you as somebody who's maybe weak. They want to perceive your strength, so I don't know any advice on how to make ourselves vulnerable, or just, or just do it?

MH: Well, I wish that I had like some pill that I could sell everybody right now, and that they all take, and it just makes it easier, right? But I think the point of it is, we know what it looks like as leaders and colleagues when we don't do it this way when we try to cover up, when we try to avoid, that just creates more room for distrust, right? And so let's try it. Let's try being a little more vulnerable. Let's be transparent. And Statistics show that vulnerability is a strength,, right? Acknowledging as a leader, saying," Hey, okay, a couple of years ago we thought that remote work was going to be best for us, but now we see that it's better if we come into the office, you know, 3 days." I understand that's a little bit hard for some people. But let's have a conversation so we can ease into this transition. Not just "Get back to work on Monday." That's not going to help. There's a way in which we can communicate better with each other and that's what this book really is about. This is what our conversation, "how do we communicate with each other with respect, trust, and dignity, at the forefront of every conversation."

CC: Hey, Minda, I want to just go back and ask about you. I like, there might be some listeners sitting here listening and just really finding what you're having to say very helpful and thinking, "how does somebody get into the trust business?" You know, like, what is it along your, your path that kind of led you into this direction of really making trust a big focus of your work?

MH: Yeah, you know I won't. I won't get into this conversation about my high school boyfriend, you know, cheating on me, Chris, so I won't.

CC: I think we've all had that kind of erosion of trust.

MH: But what I realized was these little ways that trust is eroded in the workplace. And when I think about I spent 15 years in corporate America, and I was realizing that trust was not the bar. It was on the floor in many cases in the workplace, but I never knew how to articulate getting more trust. And so it made me start to think about, "oh, we need languages, we need scripts." Just like we have the 5 love languages, what are the languages for the workplace, so that we get the best, because all of us want to go to work and do our best work of our lives, and if we can remove barriers for people instead of create more. And through my previous work, I wrote a lot about women and women of color in the workplace. And even in those conversations I realized that the root of what they were saying to me wasn't necessarily race, gender and identity, it was about trust. And then I'd go to places like Eli Lilly and have a conversation, and there'd be, you know, 50-year-old men telling me," Well, how do I ask for something like that?" And we just assumed that even they might know or not think about it. And I thought, "you know what, everybody's experiencing trust issues in some way," and it made me dig my feet into saying what we're missing is trust.

You know, all of these other programs and our initiatives that we have in the workplace that are coming and going. You know, some people might feel a certain way about that. But if we keep trust at the forefront of hiring, of promotions, of conversations, then that is what we needed in the beginning, right? We can't even get to some of that stuff if we don't have a foundation, and that is why what keeps me up at night. How can I help create more trust on every team, because we really get the best out of the future of work really can't sustain without it.

CC: Yeah, yeah, I can't agree more that trust is just so foundational to how we go forward, whether it is in business or in other areas of our work and lives, in our work, we're always thinking about the physical work environment, and are there things that we can do to help, or things that we can do to kind of nudge people. And one of the things that we've been studying a lot is about how the workplace can help people build a sense of community that it can really help people to make connections with their colleagues and also their organizations.

And then it occurred to me, as I was reading your work, that to build a strong community, any strong community, it's like trust seems to be at its very foundation. And I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts about like, how we might think about that when we show up in our physical workplace? Are there things that you think we might be able to do that would help build that sense of community and the trust that we need to thrive?

MH: Yeah, I think that that's such a great question. Thank you for asking. I really think when we show up in this space to be present. Let us be a trust catalyst, you know. I often think of myself, Chris, as the chief trust officer in every space I go into, and I hope that when we physically enter a space that we can role model that behavior to everyone else so that they want to be a chief trust officer, too. Because when trust is present, then we all get to do our best work, and so don't we all want to work in a space that has respect, dignity, and humanity? And we get to do that by making sure that we're respecting of each other with every decision and when we make a misstep that we respect each other enough in the space to acknowledge that we can do better.

CC: Yeah, no, I think that's so right. And you know, we look at things that might not seem obvious to everybody when they walk in a door, you know. Like, is there an appropriate level of transparency? And what I mean by that is like everything can't be completely transparent, because then it doesn't respect people's need for confidentiality or privacy. But, you know, can employees come in and really see the inner workings of the organization? See how decisions get made, or, you know, see how some of the leaders are thinking? It really feels like it's important for us to make sure that we're thinking about those things very intentionally as we're designing our workplace.

So before I let you go, any last thoughts that you want to share with us any last words of wisdom, Minda?

MH: You know 2 things, Chris, is our success is not a solo sport. We need each other to create the spaces that we want to work and do our best work in. And then the other part is to your point about transparency, there's some things as leaders and individuals that we're not going to be able to say everything about, but that's also part of trust. Acknowledging that, "Hey, I know this information is important to you, and I need you to trust me that when something does arise, I'll make sure that you have the information that you need," right? And we still can humanize the experience of that in the workplace by not by still acknowledging that "I'm going to be transparent and tell you that I don't have the information available for you right now." That even feels better than just pretending. So, there's little things that we can do that make such an impact each and every day.

CC: Well, Minda, thank you so much for joining us today on Work Better. This has really been a great conversation, and I know that our listeners are going to get a lot of value out of it. Again, the title of your new book. *Talk to me nice. The 7 Trust Languages for a better workplace.* So thank you.

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Thank you, Chris.

CC: That's all for today. Thanks for listening. Next week we're talking to author and sociologist Corey Keyes. Corey describes his work as studying what makes life worth living. He's most known for the terms "Languishing" and "Flourishing" which he uses to describe a person's level of mental health. He explains the continuum of mental health and the significant role that work plays in helping us lead full, satisfying lives. You're not gonna want to miss this one.

If you enjoyed today's conversation, would you share the episode with a friend or colleague? Like us and visit us as steelcase.com/research to sign up for weekly updates on workplace research, insights and design ideas delivered right to your inbox.

Thanks again for being here and we hope your day at work tomorrow is just a little bit better.