



TRUST AND COMMUNICATION:

Bridging the Gap Between the Board and C-Suite

Hard times come in many shapes and shades. For one CEO it happened when his Board appointed a President to manage the day-to-day, internal operations, so the CEO could focus externally. It seemed like a fair and helpful plan, EXCEPT no one on the executive leadership team was supportive of the candidate the Board put forward, and the Board ignored their input, eroding trust and disrupting the very operations they were hoping to improve.

This raises the question of leadership collaboration and how decisions can be executed most effectively to get the best performance from both the c-suite and the board. Trust and communication between a company's executives and its board need to provide a pathway for dialogue to enable impactful, long-term success. This pathway should be lined not with force and coercion but rather trust and two-way exchange of information.



Prioritizing the soft skills enables success during the hard times.

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THE ROLE OF TRUST

Collaboration is trust-essential work. Leadership needs to feel fairly treated, safe, and autonomous yet supported, cared for, heard, and empowered to speak (and act) in accordance with what matters to them as individuals and as a collective. And trust is a two-way street — both the c-suite and the board need to engender it.

TRUST



FAIR



SAFE



AUTONOMY



SUPPORTED



CARED FOR



HEARD



EMPOWERED

How to Create Trust in Communication:

- ▶ Lead with inquiry: Ask about their viewpoint before you indicate your own
- ▶ Adopt a stance of humility, assuming there are things you don't know/aren't aware of; it is the most credible place you can come from
- ▶ Clearly define roles and responsibilities through frequent communication and clarification

HOW TO SUSTAIN TRUST IN COMMUNICATION	C-SUITE	BOARD
Raise issues/concerns directly as a joint problem to solve without blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Engage the board early and often on tough topics ▶ Reach out ASAP with concerns or questions outside of scheduled meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Treat the c-suite as trusted partners with whom you dialogue and debate, not employees you direct and manage
Disagree without being disagreeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share your perspective AND be open to theirs ▶ Focus on facts and data, not who is right or wrong ▶ Ask questions to understand why someone sees it differently from you 	
Check in on the relationship as often as you check in on the business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Schedule informal discussions outside of formal meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask for feedback on how the board is impacting the c-suite
Ask for what you want, and say what you expect from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Be as clear and descriptive as possible ▶ Transparency is key: share why something is needed and if there might be alternatives to explore further 	
Request feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Both formal and informal – written and verbal – in the moment and in retrospect 	
Display a mutual respect among team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Leverage the board as an asset for the good of the business ▶ Inquire and use their expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ If you have performance concerns, respect the chain of command and raise with the CEO first
Be self-aware and hold yourself accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Do what you say you are going to do when you say you will 	

If we think back to the CEO who had a President thrust upon him that no one on his team signed off on or supported, we see the rupture a lack of trust in communication creates between a board and the c-suite. The team is now taken off course, distracted from the important work of the business, and the long-term impact has yet to play out. What we do know is that the damage could have been avoided if there had been a two-way dialogue and an open, trusting debate initially. This may not be easy to do, but it is essential for healthy, strategic alignment between boards and their c-suites.

Don't let misalignment hold you back, reach out to BDO's [People Strategy & Solutions](#) team to discover how we can help transform your leadership dynamics and build a foundation of trust and communication. We are committed to supporting you in navigating the complexities of leadership collaboration, aiming to help your organization thrive on the people side of business through integrated culture, leadership, talent, and communications solutions.

The [BDO Center for Corporate Governance](#) endeavors to support directors in engaging in effective governance by providing insights, learning, and networking opportunities in collaboration with BDO subject matter specialists and advisors designed specifically for boards of directors.

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