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## Rebuilding trust at work

**From snippiness to lying, office betrayals can break professional relationships. Here are some tips on how to make up and move on.**

Jen Weigel

Lessons for life

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In a perfect world, we'd all like to think we can trust our co-workers. But what if that trust is broken? Whether it's not sharing critical information, or snapping at your cubicle neighbor, betrayals on the job can wreak havoc at the office.

"You can fix [broken trust], but it doesn't happen quickly," says Dennis Reina, a corporate consultant who, along with his wife, Michelle Reina, wrote the book "Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace: Seven Steps to Renew Confidence, Commitment, and Energy" (Berrett-Koehler). "Healing is not a linear function. It happens in stages. And 90 to 95 percent of the betrayals that cause problems at work are just the little ways we let people down."

Those "little ways" can be anything from not following through with a task to lying. And experts say even the smallest breach can have a large impact if not addressed.

"A breakdown in trust or communication doesn't mean we are weak leaders or dysfunctional employees," says Michelle Reina, who is also a corporate consultant. "It just means we are human beings. We have a choice with how we respond, and many times I'll see a leader who hears there was a trust issue, and they will just want to move past it and forget about it. ... But if you don't take a look at it, this will cause bigger problems in the future."

Here are the Reinas' seven steps to rebuilding trust at work:

**Observe and acknowledge what happened.** "When someone experiences a betrayal, it's a loss and we need to talk about it," says Dennis Reina. "Little things add up, and they can become big if time goes by without clearing the air."

**Allow feelings to surface.** "If co-workers don't get a safe place to vent, they'll talk about it anyway," says Dennis Reina. "This will feed the grapevine gossip and cause a toxic environment. If you are a team leader, encourage a dialogue."

**Get and give support.** "So often leaders think they need to keep a stiff upper lip, but it takes a centered and focused leader to say, 'I feel vulnerable and I don't know what the outcome will be, but if we put our heads together we can work through it,' " says Dennis Reina.

**Reframe the experience.** "This is the point where we shift from being a victim to finding solutions," says Dennis Reina. "A strong leader will see that there is a bigger picture at stake."

**Take responsibility.** "You're not responsible for others' behaviors, but you are responsible for your response," Dennis Reina says. "Own yours, and you set an example to your whole team."

**Forgive yourself and others.** "Forgiving doesn't mean excusing," says Michelle Reina. "It means you are honoring how broken trust has affected you and then releasing yourself from the blame you put on yourself and on others."

"If you can't forgive, consider if this is a pattern in your life or your professional career. Maybe it's worth investigating," adds Dennis Reina.

**Let go and move on.** "There is a difference between remembering and dwelling," says Dennis Reina. "It's about helping people shift from dwelling on the past to focusing on the present and what can we do now for a productive future."

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