

Trust, Time, & Influence

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June 17, 2025



CASE STUDY

Acknowledge mistakes

Pepsi, through a compelling ad campaign, claimed it held a taste advantage. However, the trust behind the Coca-Cola brand enabled it to maintain a global market share approximately 20 points above that of Pepsi. Coca-Cola eventually decided to change the formula but faced an immediate emotional backlash from its consumers. Revenues dropped dramatically while it received as many as 20,000 complaint letters per day. Coca-Cola decided to reverse course very publicly on CBS News and acknowledge that it underestimated the emotional connection consumers had to the original formula. After reversing the formula change, it quickly regained its customer base.

The role of the senior leader is to create clarity around strategy and build organizational and external energy to execute against it. This requires building an environment of trust in which you can influence constituents to align with strategic goals, while also managing yourself to have enough time to focus on critical priorities and external constituencies.

“As you think about creating clarity through strategy, ask yourself: What do you want your organization to look like through the eyes of your key constituencies?”

- Jack Stahl

01 TRUST

“Senior leaders should view their role as the Chief Trust Officer.”

- Jack Stahl

Tie the strategy to the employee value proposition

As a foundation for building organizational energy, connect your strategy to what it means to your employees' growth, career aspirations, and goals. Co-create strategy with employees to ensure alignment.

What you think is strategic, the audience hears as tactical and personal. While you might communicate the strategic path for the company, their first thought will be, “What does it mean for me?” How does the strategy connect to the personal wins of employees?

PERSONAL EXERCISE

100 Conversations

To get the most out of your hallway conversations, consider leading with three questions:

1. What is your name, and what do you do?
2. What are you currently focused on?
3. What is your biggest challenge in your work?

“When you don't make the connection between strategy and the ways employees win, you lose something when you try to execute. You haven't built trust. At Coke, we talked about how the strategy would drive mobility and growth for employees' career opportunities.”

- Jack Stahl

Define controllable objectives

People are willing to trust if they are working towards objectives that are achievable and within their control. Stretch your teams, but be explicit about the degree of confidence you and others have about achieving the strategic goals. Is it reasonably high?

Stay humble

Be transparent about your mistakes. Your constituents understand that trial and error is part of the process.

Drive relentless engagement and communication

Spend two to three times as much energy than you expect on two-way communication. Intense, repetitive engagement helps senior leaders to drive understanding, while learning about challenges in the company and resolving issues.

Adopt a mental model of having 100 one-on-one conversations per week. These may be as short as 90-second hallway interactions. Ask questions. Every problem is linked to a person, somewhere. Understand what they are focused on, the challenges they face, and how you can help them. Share context about the strategy to help build a connection between them and the company's future direction.

CASE STUDY

A compelling, familiar, and realistic destination

Early in Jack's tenure at The Coca-Cola Company, the company had lost some ground. The rope was frayed.

Communication played a key role in their turnaround

They created a compelling picture of a 360-degree Coca-Cola landscape that told the story of how associates were contributing positively to their communities, with opportunities to advance their careers or build a legacy, while simultaneously achieving business objectives.

Coca-Cola's strategy was distilled into only three words that associates could easily relate to: availability, affordability, and acceptability. It was easy to understand, it connected to personal goals and was easy to repeat to others.

Coca-Cola's overall market share was quite high. Drinks per person per year were close to 400 and ranged from as high as 800 in some markets to as low as 100 in others. It was clear that growing the low-performing and average markets was achievable, and therefore, building overall market share was very possible.

Be situational as a leader

Oscillate between clarity and empathy. Reading the situation to know when to exercise each, and to what degree, is important to building trust with your constituencies.

02 INFLUENCE

Drive change

If you are struggling to build ownership for your strategy, imagine that you and the person you need to influence are hanging from a frayed trapeze rope. Follow these steps to move to another rope before the one you're on snaps:

1. Make the destination compelling

Tell a compelling story of what change is needed, where, when, by whom, and what the company will look like once the change is made. Create a vivid image of what the destination will look like.

2. Make the destination familiar

Make the destination familiar by relating it to something in their own experience. It may be shared company values, a common purpose, or your own experiences and stories that they can relate to.

3. Keep the destination close enough to be credible

Set realistic goals. People need to believe that the goal is achievable. They won't jump to a new rope that they feel they can't reach.

4. Make the need to move clear

It is not enough that you understand the need for change. People must feel that the situation they're in is in decline and that they need to move. Be very clear about what it may mean for the organization and them if they do not move.

CASE STUDY

The power of asking questions about key challenges

The CEO of Coca-Cola asked a Piggly Wiggly store manager, “What is your biggest challenge?”

“Rusting produce cabinets,” he replied, much to the surprise of Coke’s CEO.

The CEO quickly solved the problem with a 99-cent water filter plugged onto the water hose.

The store manager was a vocal broadcast tower in the Southeast, and six months later, with produce cabinets that had not yet rusted, he offered to give Coca-Cola six feet of extra shelf space and exceptional reviews at the grocer’s convention.

Manage constituencies

Consider the constituencies that are most important to your business and list them in order of priority. Understand their strategies, objectives, and very importantly, their challenges by asking questions. Recognize that they are talking to each other. Deepen your relationships with them in a way that creates opportunity and reduces risk.

Once you've decided who the priority constituencies are, identify the broadcast towers. Are there key employees or external constituencies who have disproportionate influence over others? Spend time with both the positive broadcasters as well as the skeptics. Including the skeptics can help shift thinking in important ways.

Value individuals

Human beings want to be relevant. Create spaces for them to share the stories of their journeys and how those experiences shape their view of personal and business successes.

Then, understand their challenges and what is keeping them from achieving their objectives. When you help someone solve a key challenge, relationships and the ability to influence can be built.

“Putting your energy into recognizing that people want to be valued and relevant and helping to solve their challenges is a game changer.”

- Jack Stahl

Diffuse dissent

At times, you may face opposition that cannot be overcome through support alone. Misalignment often arises from a situation where people throw conclusions at one another, each believing that they are right.

To understand someone's opposing perspective and diffuse conflict, ask questions to explore the data and experiences that shape their viewpoint. Be generous in explaining what underpins your perspective. Suspend disbelief while you listen to find common ground.

If you can reach a mutual understanding of why you come to the conclusions that you do, it becomes easier to gain support, even if full agreement on the decision is not possible.

“If you can come away thinking differently about what drives a person and their thinking, and they can come away thinking differently about what drives you, you can get to a better place.”

- Jack Stahl

For relationships that are already damaged and defensive, start by acknowledging the conflict. Lay out what you agree on and what company or personal objectives you share. Revisit an issue that caused a disagreement and practice the exercise of exploring what drove your perspective.

03 TIME

Building trust and influence takes three to five times as much time and energy as you think it will. To do it successfully, you must be highly conscious and disciplined with how you spend your time.

Focus on the goal

Understand the key priorities that drive the value in your function. Spend 80% of your time on the four to five things that create 80% of the value. If a task does not support a key value driver, delegate it.

Build talent to save time

Understand the difference between how A and B talent affect the demands on your time. If leaders ranked their talent on a scale from 1 to 10, any leader whose direct reports average less than eight is stretched for time. They're not fully serving their organization, and they're not being selfish enough about their professional responsibilities, and perhaps even personal goals.

Identify the B- talent and either coach them up or move them out quickly to protect your time and your obligations to the organization.

Lead at scale

Rather than lead through one-on-one meetings, create predictable meeting routines that allow you to lead at scale. Establish operating rhythms around the key initiatives where you can be in front of eight to ten people or more at once.

Use every meeting as an opportunity to share broader context, strategy, teach what you know, help properly frame problems, and assess and develop talent.

Be in enough routines with enough frequency to know that the process is working. Identify executional gaps and whether people have the capability to solve them. If a given initiative is being managed correctly, turn your attention elsewhere. Go where the opportunity is greatest, or where the risk of a lack of leadership is highest. Free up time so that one-on-one meetings can be used only for crises or opportunities.

Track constituencies

Spend 15 minutes once a week to review a list of your 15 to 20 most important constituencies.

Which are most important to the strategy at that point in time?

Is there any action required in the following week? Where are you spending too little time?

Is there something less critical that you are prioritizing instead?

Be proactive about your relationships, as missing a key constituency can be very damaging.

“You can't be everywhere at once. And just realize, you get to choose who you're going to disappoint and get comfortable with that because these jobs are sometimes impossibly hard.”

- Jack Stahl

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