

Trust: Essential for Managing People and Promoting Better Performance

Alan A. Ayers, MBA, MAcc

Content Advisor, Urgent Care Association of America

Vice President of Strategy & Execution, Concentra Urgent Care, Dallas, Texas

Urgent care operators frequently approach UCAOA for suggestions on how to more effectively manage their front-line staff. Urgent care is a business, but unlike corporate environments, there is typically little hierarchy or bureaucracy in an urgent care center. Rather, all team members have a direct working relationship with the doctor—who in many cases has significantly greater education, social standing, and may make up to ten times the salary of staff members. In order for staff to remain focused on delivering quality patient care, a pleasant patient experience, and positive financial returns, there must be an environment of trust between the center's leadership and front-line staff.

Trust in any relationship is based on the balance between what one puts into a relationship and what one gets out of it. If employees feel they're "giving" more in the workplace than they're "receiving," they are likely to distrust management. Rarely do front line employees—who struggle with paying bills, raising children, building marriages, and other realities of "everyday" life—embrace the urgent care owner's passion of building a thriving business. Instead, they evaluate work by the quality of interpersonal interactions, opportunities to learn and develop, and their ability to engage in activities that are meaningful to them.

To cultivate trust, managers should tap in to these factors that intrinsically motivate staff. That means demonstrating confidence in people's ability to perform, creating a culture that requires honesty and integrity, and creating opportunities for team members to take initiative and ownership of their roles. Any behavior that is contrary to these can cause staff to disengage—with the result being "zombie" employees who go through the motions doing only what is expected of them, but taking little initiative in pleasing patients.

Specifically, employees lose trust when managers:

- Demonstrate manipulative, unethical or dishonest behaviors—there is no quicker way to undermine staff confidence than to show them you're willing to lie, cheat, or steal. If a manager shows its "okay" to act in these ways, don't be surprised if staff starts to do likewise.
- Say they'll empower employees, but find excuses not to—failing to deliver or making empty promises communicates to staff that you're "all talk and no action." Do this enough, and they won't rely on anything you say.
- Insult, put-down, degrade, or instill fear and anxiety in employees—no matter how frustrated a manager may become with staff behavior, staff should always be dealt with in a professional manner. As a manager this means thinking about all potential outcomes before talking or acting. Never shoot from the hip. The workplace should likewise have a zero tolerance policy towards sexual innuendo and bullying behavior.
- Fail to communicate directly with employees, communicating impersonally through email or posted memos, or informing outsiders about something before filling in staff—if you want employees to feel "a part" of the center, they need to be "in the loop."
- Fail to provide employees the tools, resources or training necessary to do their jobs—this includes delegating responsibility without giving the authority to get things done. Inability to perform to their full potential results in frustration and disengagement of the staff.
- Give rewards that mean little or nothing to employees or administer rewards unfairly. Is the basis for promotion and other recognition complaining frequently enough? Or is it demonstrating consistent hard work? Rewards should be tied directly to outcomes and never dispensed arbitrarily.
- Are inaccessible and always behind closed doors—if you want staff to communicate with you, you need to be available to them. Never say you have an "open door" policy if you don't—and if staff does come to you, treat their initiative with the utmost respect and confidence.