

ACTIVITY

8 HABITS OF A TRUSTED SCHOOL LEADER

Building Authentic Leadership in Schools

A guide to eight essential habits that foster trust, connection, and confidence in school leadership.

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LEAD WITH TRUST

When staff **trust their leader**, they feel safer, more supported, and more motivated to do their best work. Authentic leadership creates a culture where people **know their voices matter** and their efforts are valued—leading to stronger teams and thriving students. Trust doesn't come from a title—it's built through daily actions that show honesty, care, and consistency. **Use these habits to guide your leadership, strengthen relationships, and create the kind of school culture where both staff and students can thrive.**

How to Use This Resource

- **Personal Reflection:** Circle 2–3 traits you feel strong in and 1 you want to grow.
- **Leadership Team Meeting:** Discuss which traits define your school's leadership and which need more focus.
- **Staff Development:** Share the list with your team and invite them to add examples of how they see these traits in action around the school.

8 Habits of Trusted School Leaders

These simple but powerful habits show up in the daily actions of leaders who build authentic trust—helping staff feel valued, supported, and inspired to do their best work.

Honest: They tell the truth, even when it's hard.

Reflective: They pause to learn from feedback and experiences.

Real: No masks, no act—what you see is what you get.

Reliable: Their actions match their words, and they follow through.

Purposeful: They remind others of the "why" behind the work.

Compassionate: They listen with care and show empathy in action.

Humble: They share credit, admit mistakes, and stay approachable.

Ethical: They model fairness and lead with integrity.




1 HONEST

Trusted leaders tell the truth, even when it's hard. Trust grows when leaders communicate openly instead of sugarcoating or hiding information.

- **Example:** A principal explains a tough budget cut clearly, along with what it means for the school, instead of avoiding the topic.
- **Reflection:** How can I share important information more openly with my staff?

2 REFLECTIVE

Trusted leaders pause to learn from feedback and experiences. Authentic leaders admit they don't have all the answers—and they grow by listening.

- **Example:** After a new schedule rollout, a leader asks teachers what's working and what's not, then adjusts.
 - **Reflection:** Do I make space to reflect on feedback, even when it's uncomfortable?
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3 REAL

What you see is what you get. Trusted leaders bring their whole selves to the role instead of pretending to be perfect.

- **Example:** A principal shares a story about a time they struggled as a new teacher, helping staff feel less alone.
- **Reflection:** Where can I let my guard down and be more real with my team?

4 RELIABLE

Trusted leaders match their words with actions and follow through. Consistency builds confidence.

- **Example:** If a leader says they'll cover a class so a teacher can observe a colleague, they actually show up on time.
 - **Reflection:** Do I follow through on what I promise, even in small things?
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5 PURPOSEFUL

Trusted leaders remind others of the “why” behind the work. Their vision inspires people to keep going when things get tough.

- **Example:** During a challenging testing season, a leader shares how their students’ growth is bigger than just a score.
- **Reflection:** How often do I connect our daily work back to a larger purpose?

6 COMPASSIONATE

Trusted leaders listen with care and show empathy in action. Staff know their well-being matters.

- **Example:** When a teacher is dealing with a family crisis, the principal adjusts duties to give them breathing room.
 - **Reflection:** Do I show compassion not just in words, but also in concrete actions?
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7 HUMBLE

Trusted leaders share credit, admit mistakes, and stay approachable. Confidence without arrogance makes staff feel safe.

- **Example:** A leader admits to staff that a new initiative rollout wasn't as smooth as planned and asks for input to improve it.
- **Reflection:** When was the last time I openly admitted a mistake to my team?

8 ETHICAL

Trusted leaders model fairness and lead with integrity, even when no one is watching.

- **Example:** A leader applies policies consistently, whether it's for a veteran teacher or a first-year staff member.
 - **Reflection:** Am I leading in a way that would make my team proud if every decision were public?
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Bonus: Staff Trust-Building Commitment

Try this one-page worksheet where staff reflect on the 8 Habits of Trusted School Leaders — and then choose one to commit to practicing in their own role.



How to Use It:

- Share the worksheet after introducing the "8 Habits of Trusted School Leaders."
- Ask each staff member to pick the habit that resonates most with them right now.
- Have them write a short sentence about what that habit looks like in their own work.
- Optionally, invite staff to share their commitments with a partner or post them on a team "Commitment Wall."



Examples for Staff:

- **Honest:** "I'll communicate clearly with families about student progress."
- **Reflective:** "I'll ask my students for feedback on our classroom routines."
- **Real:** "I'll share my own learning process so students see mistakes as growth."
- **Reliable:** "I'll follow through on classroom routines so students know what to expect."
- **Purposeful:** "I'll connect lessons back to real-world applications."
- **Compassionate:** "I'll check in with a colleague who seems stressed."
- **Humble:** "I'll admit when I don't know the answer and learn alongside my students."
- **Ethical:** "I'll treat every student fairly, regardless of their background."

Printables



8 HABITS OF TRUSTED SCHOOL LEADERS



Directions: Read through each habit and highlight the one you feel strongest in today, plus one you'd like to grow. Use this as a reflection tool or a team discussion starter.

Trusted leaders are Honest: They tell the truth, even when it's hard. Openness builds credibility.

Trusted leaders are Reflective: They pause to learn from experiences and feedback instead of rushing ahead.

Trusted leaders are Real: No masks, no act—what you see is what you get. Authenticity fosters connection.

Trusted leaders are Reliable: They match their words with actions and follow through. Consistency builds confidence.

Trusted leaders are Purposeful: They remind others of the "why" behind the work, keeping hope and vision alive.

Trusted leaders are Compassionate: They listen with care and show empathy through action, not just words.

Trusted leaders are Humble: They share credit, admit mistakes, and stay approachable, creating psychological safety.

Trusted leaders are Ethical: They model fairness and integrity, making values visible in everyday decisions.

8 HABITS OF TRUSTED SCHOOL LEADERS

Choose one or two habits you want to focus on this month. Use the questions below to reflect on your leadership and set small, practical goals.

Honest: How do I share difficult information while keeping trust strong?

Reflective: When was the last time I asked for feedback and acted on it?

Real: Where can I show more of my authentic self with staff?

Reliable: Do my daily actions match the commitments I've made to my team?

8 HABITS OF TRUSTED SCHOOL LEADERS

Choose one or two habits you want to focus on this month. Use the questions below to reflect on your leadership and set small, practical goals.

Purposeful: How am I keeping our vision and "why" front and center this week?

Compassionate: In what ways am I showing empathy through actions, not just words?

Humble: When was the last time I admitted a mistake or gave away credit?

Ethical: How do I ensure fairness and integrity guide my decisions?

Staff

Printables



MY TRUST-BUILDING COMMITMENT



Review the eight habits and choose one that you want to model in your role. Write how you will show that habit through your daily actions.

8 Habits of Trusted School Leaders

- **Honest:** Speak the truth with clarity and respect.
- **Reflective:** Learn from feedback and experiences.
- **Real:** Be yourself—authentic and approachable.
- **Reliable:** Follow through on your promises.
- **Purposeful:** Keep the "why" behind your work front and center.
- **Compassionate:** Listen with care and support others.
- **Humble:** Share credit, admit mistakes, and stay open.
- **Ethical:** Lead with fairness and integrity.

My Commitment Statement:

How will practicing this habit help build trust in our school community?

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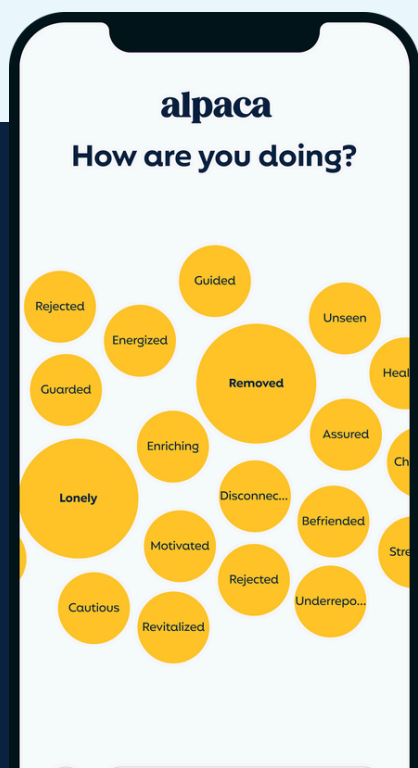
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