

THE HUMAN MARGIN

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS OF TRUST

Katherine Meese, PhD

September 25th, 2025



**UNITY AMID
UNCERTAINTY**
2025 IHA LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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OH NO

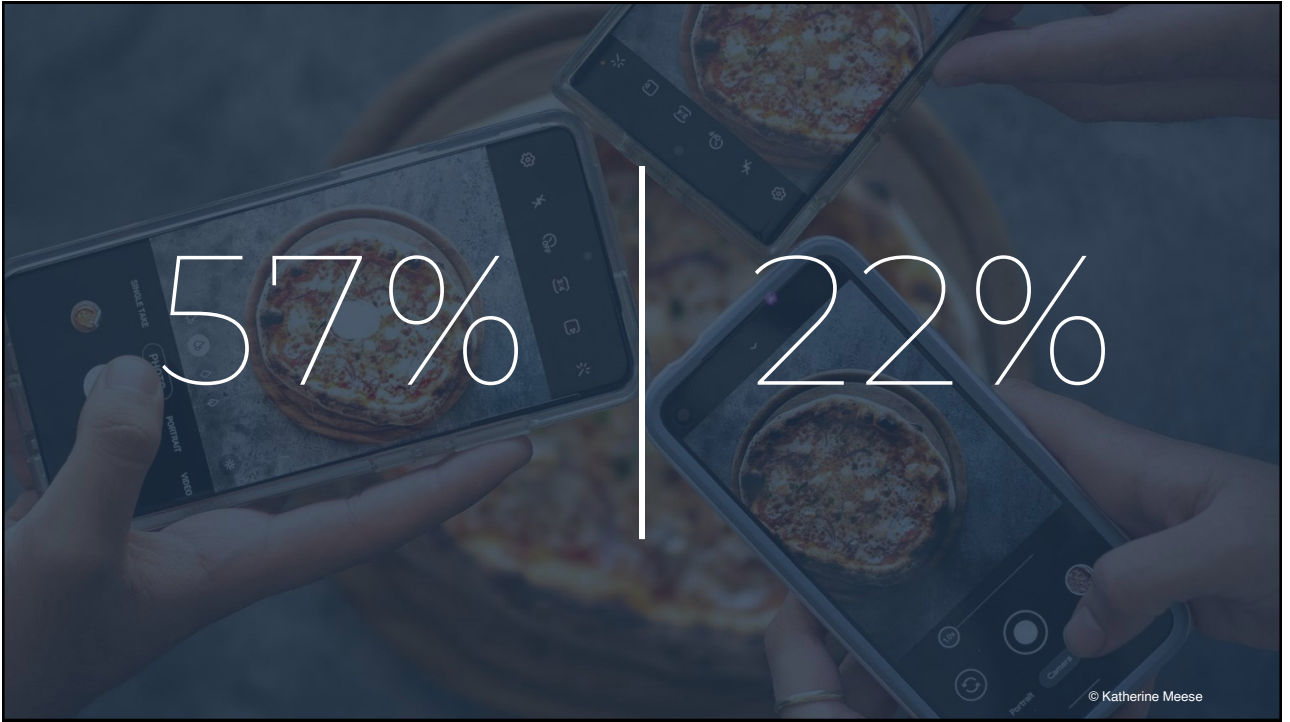
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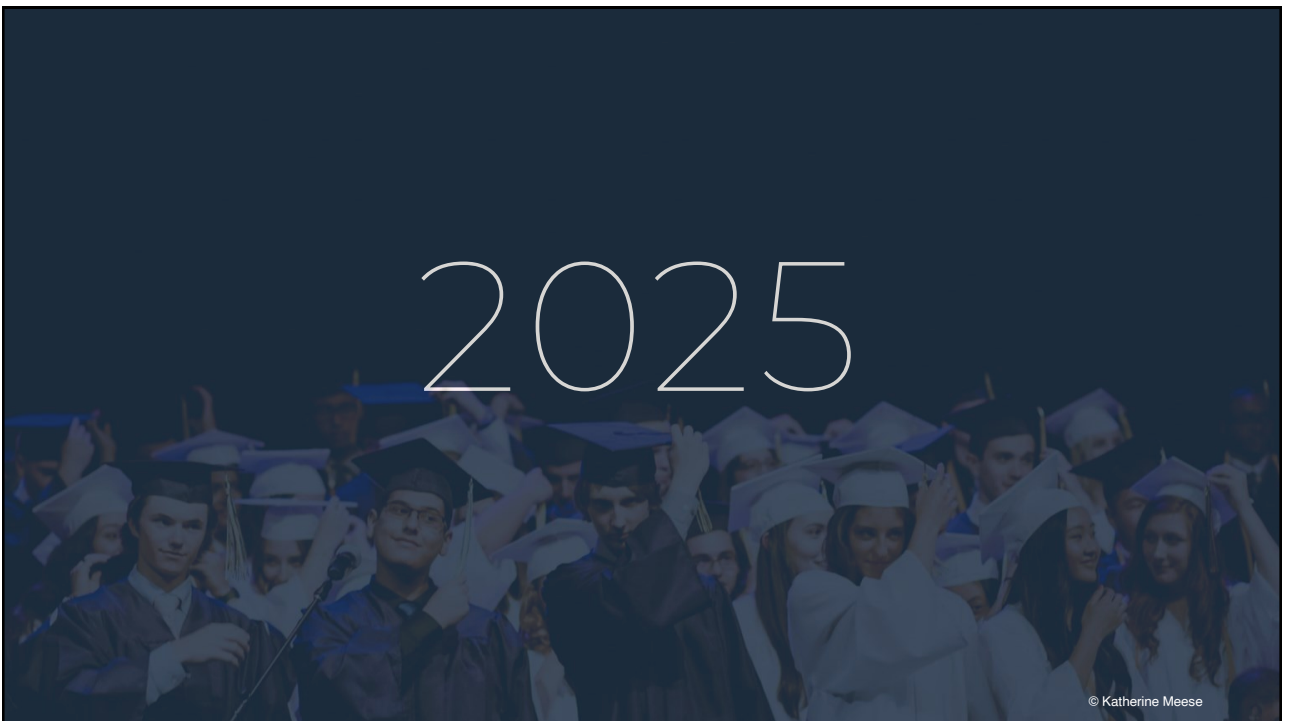
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DON'T GO



Meese, Boitet, et al. (2024). Don't Go: Examining the Relationships between Meaning, Work Environment and Turnover Intention across the Entire Healthcare Team. Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare

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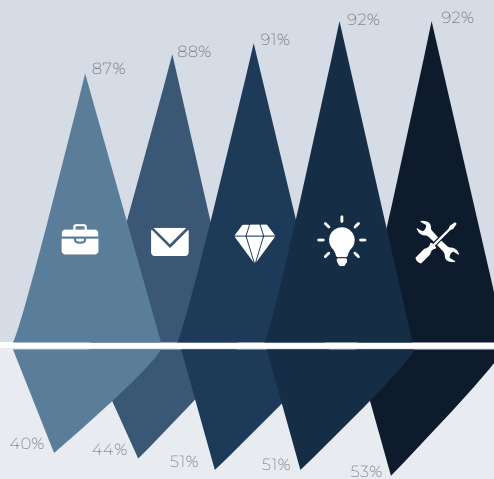
TRUST & ENGAGEMENT

Employee Engagement

Behaviors that shape VA Employee Engagement

Experiences of Highly engaged employees

Experiences of mixed or low engaged employees



- Decisional involvement
- Honest Sr. Leaders
- Talents Used
- Encourage Innovation
- Develop Skills

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CULTURE

Importance relative to compensation



Sull, Sull & Zweig, 2022

To be valued as **HUMAN** and not just an employee, keeping the abandonment rate down.

-Administration

Squeezing more juice out of an already macerated fruit.

-Physician

Realizing that this hospital only cares about making money and they see [us] as dollar signs instead of people.

-Nurse

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1. DO I TRUST YOU?
2. DO YOU CARE ABOUT ME?
3. IS THIS THE PLACE FOR ME?
4. DO I MATTER?
5. WILL IT GET BETTER?

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DO I TRUST YOU?

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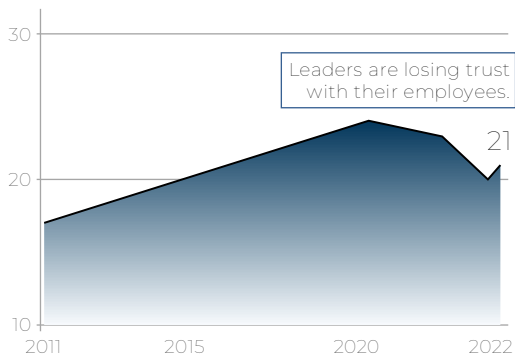
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TRUST

Employee Trust in Organizational Leadership

I trust the leadership of this organization

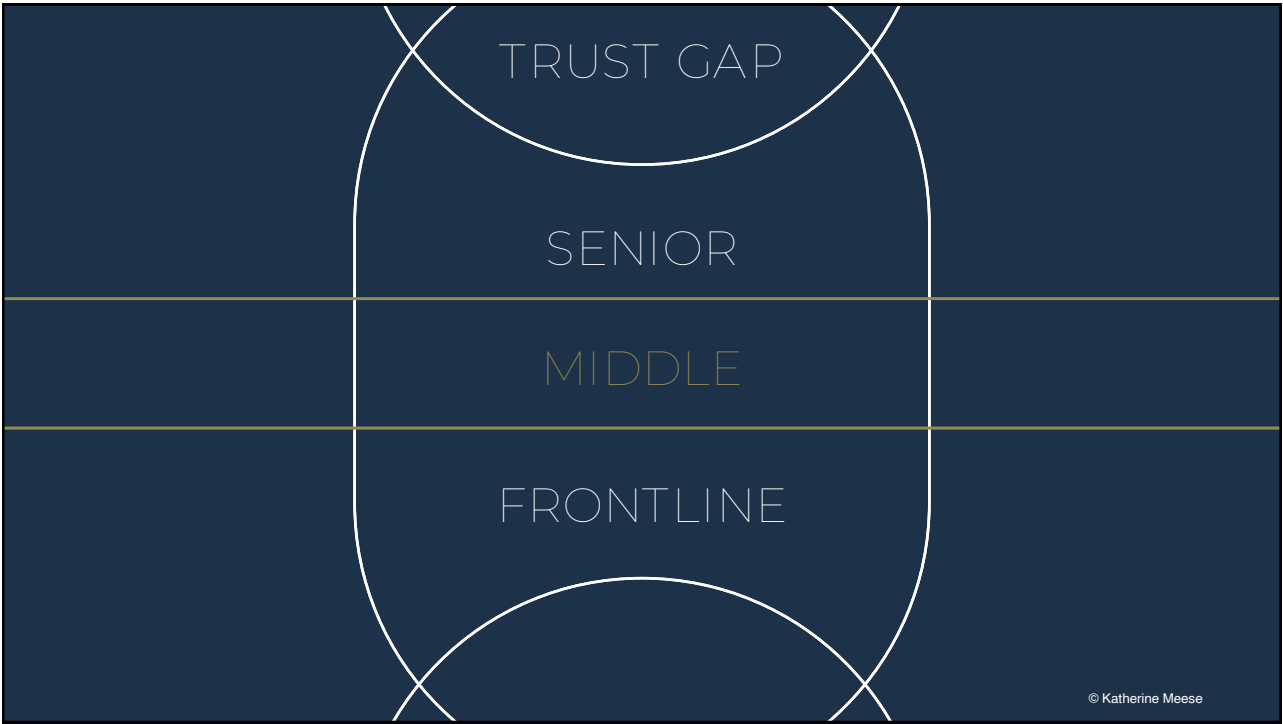
— % Strongly agree



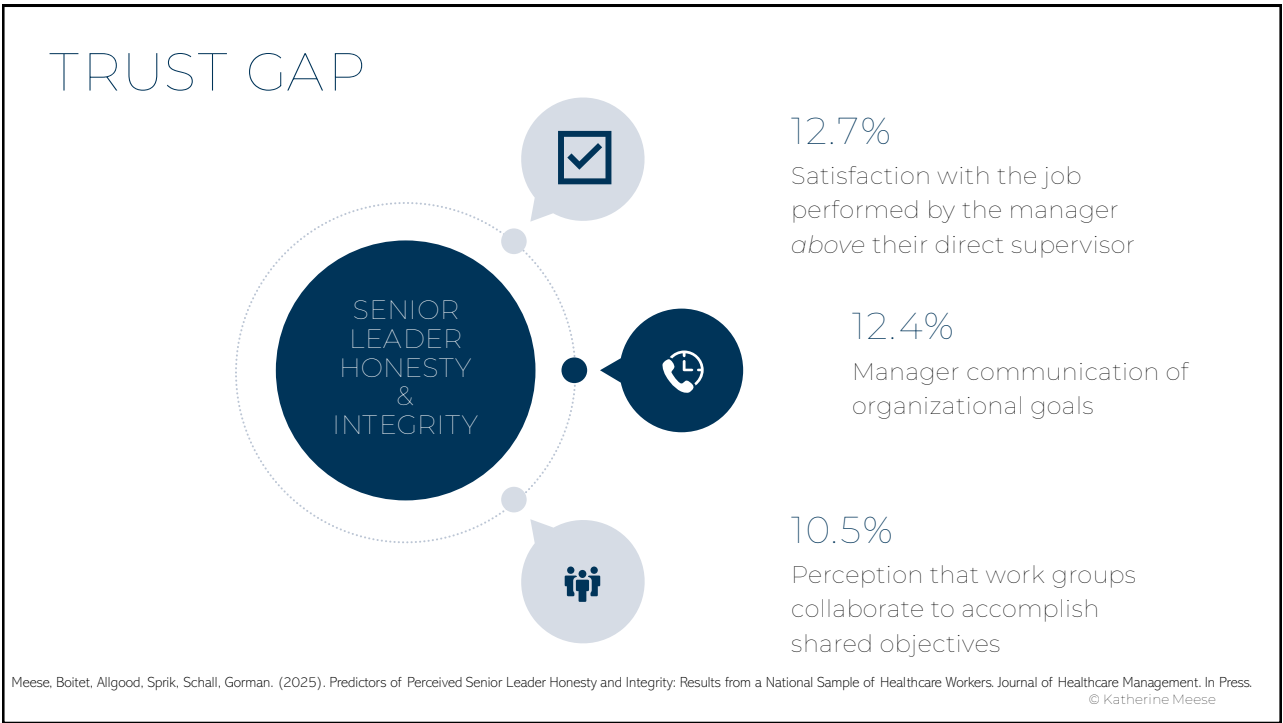
WHAT
MATTERS
TO ME IS
SAFE WITH
YOU

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When employees strongly agree that the leadership of their organization communicates effectively with the rest of the organization, they are



73%
Less likely
to feel burned
out at work

Gallup

2.8x

Employees are 2.8 times more likely to be engaged when they speak with their manager regularly about their goals and progress



Only
7%
of US workers strongly agree that they get timely, accurate and open communication at work

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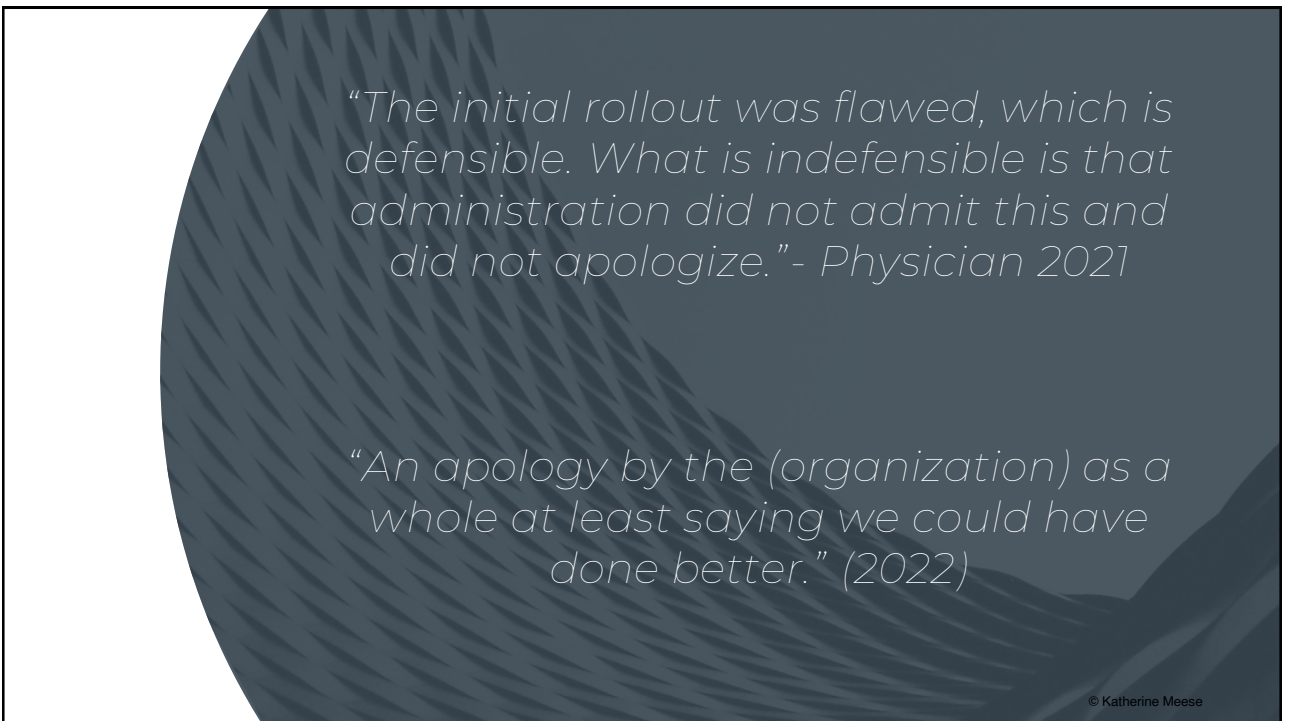
BEWARE THE
UNTOLD STORY

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FORGIVENESS



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FAIRNESS & Assumptions

Inputs & Outputs

- ✓ Reducing inputs: putting in less
- ✓ Trying to increase outputs: getting back more
- ✓ Changing perceptions: Making up a story for the differences
- ✓ Changing our comparison other: Comparing ourselves to somebody else

4.6x

More likely to leave if they don't believe the organization values people from different backgrounds.

$$\frac{\text{INPUTS}}{\text{OUTPUTS}} = \frac{\text{INPUTS}}{\text{OUTPUTS}}$$

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DO YOU CARE ABOUT ME?

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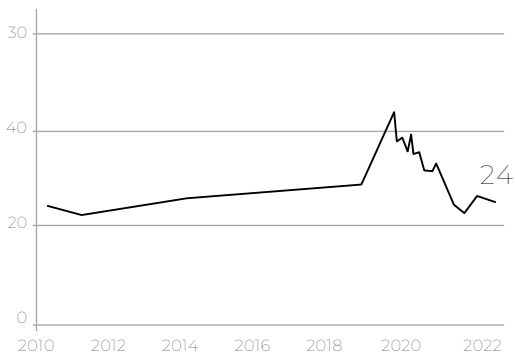
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PERFORMANCE BENEFITS OF CARING

U.S. Employee Perceptions of Organizational Caring About Their Wellbeing

My organization cares about my overall wellbeing.

— % Strongly agree



GALLUP

Employees who strongly agree that their employer cares about their overall wellbeing are:

- 3x more likely to be engaged at work
- 69% less likely to actively search for a new job
- 71% less likely to report experiencing a lot of burnout
- 5x more likely to strongly advocate for their company as a place to work
- 5x more likely to strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization
- 36% more likely to be thriving in their overall lives

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BURNOUT

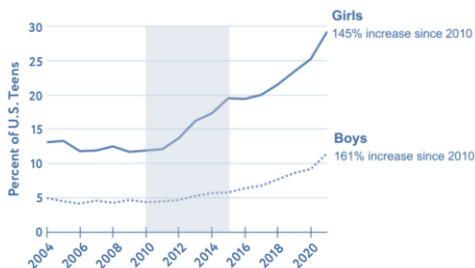
High emotional exhaustion, high depersonalization or cynicism, and a low sense of personal accomplishment from work.



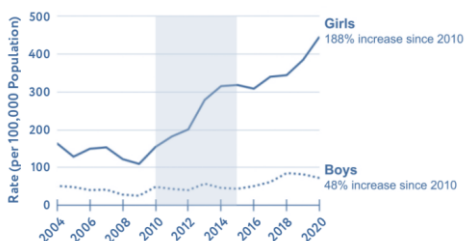
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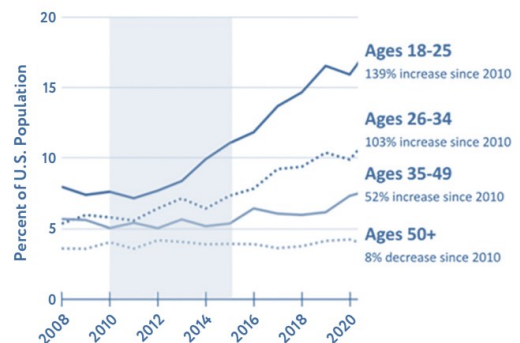
MAJOR DEPRESSION AMONG U.S. TEENS



EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS FOR SELF-HARM



ANXIETY PREVALENCE BY AGE



Source: Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt, NSDUH, CDC

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FIND A FRIEND

Those who report having a best friend at work are more likely to:

-  Engage customers and internal partners
-  Get more done in less time
-  Support a safe workplace with fewer accidents and reliability concerns
-  Innovate and share ideas
-  Have fun while at work
-  Recommend the employer
-  Intend to stay



Chronic loneliness is
as bad for your health
as smoking 15
cigarettes per day

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CULTURE

Importance relative to compensation



Sull, Sull & Zweig, 2022



47%

SATISFIED WITH RECOGNITION

- "More frequent rounds by leadership to see our struggle"
- "Being rounded on up to executive leadership..."
- "Having our department recognized by senior leaders as contributing..."
- Just a simple thank you every now and then would suffice. (130 mentions)
- Just a simple "good morning" or "thank you" would be greatly appreciated

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MATTERING



Your VOICE doesn't matter

- Failing to solicit input for decisions that affect them
- Openly criticizing ideas
- Dismissing suggestions with phrases like "that will never work."
- Interrupting or talking over others



Your EXPERIENCE doesn't matter

- Diminishing training or lived experiences of team members, particularly in younger and older employees
- "You're too junior"
- "He's too old"
- It is cheaper to have lesser-trained people do your job



Your TIME doesn't matter

- Allowing meetings to run late
- Expecting people to volunteer their free time for work-related events or training
- Demanding responsiveness during evenings, weekends, holidays or vacations



You are invisible

- Failure to recognize contributions or achievements
- Not addressing people by name
- Not noticing when somebody is missing or absent
- Not saying hello, good morning, or thank you

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MYTHS OF RECOGNITION

- 1 WAITING FOR SOMETHING BIG
- 2 BEING SEEN, NOT SEEING
- 3 GROUP RECOGNITION REPLACES INDIVIDUAL
- 4 MUST COME FROM THE LEADER

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WILL IT GET BETTER?

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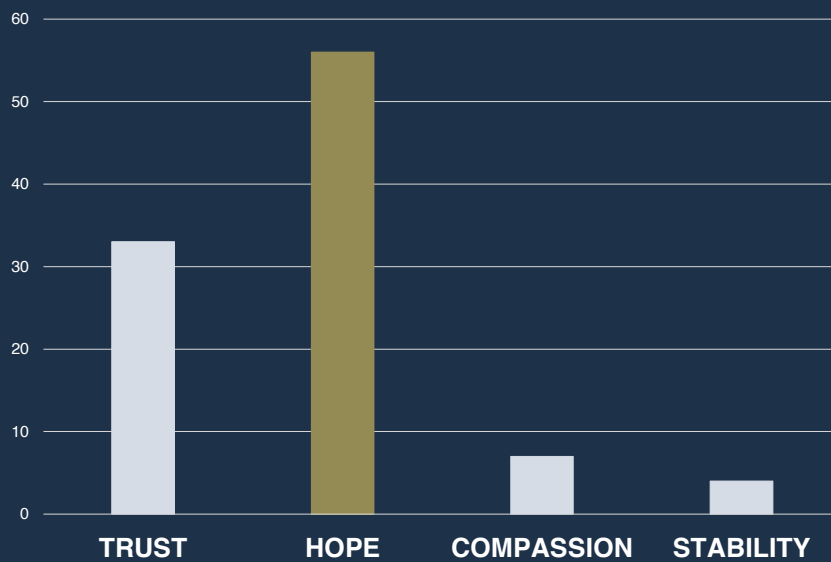
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HOPE IS NOT A STRATEGY

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GREATEST NEED FROM LEADERS



GALLUP

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