

Building Community Relationships and Trust

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In this ever-changing and opposition-focused world we live in, it's inevitable that organizations – both profit and non-profit – must handle public misperceptions and build trust with the community at large. Public approval is one of the highest priorities among many business leaders because relationships with the community also mean trust among products and services offered.

So what do you do when your business is struggling with developing and/or enhancing community relationships? Below are some suggestions to help you better understand the issues you are faced with so you can create a stronger, more positive public perception.

- Determine perception vs. reality. Are the concerns or issues you are faced with real? Or are there rumors or innuendos of which you haven't yet responded. The former is something you need to work on internally; the latter is one in which you need to communicate better externally.
- Identify internal patterns of behavior. How are you communicating internally? If you have no companywide meetings, perhaps you should hold them to provide information to your team. If you already hold these types of meetings, you might need to organize smaller group meetings or one-on-one discussions.
- Identify external communication patterns. The first question to tackle is: Are you even communicating to the community? Take the time to line up speaking engagements to local groups, schedule one-on-one meetings with key influencers, and meet with the media to help them understand the issues.

Building relationships and trust with the community will not be an overnight success; it will take time and commitment. However, the benefits are many and can be long term.