

# Trust issues

**Emma Egerton-Jones shares her simple six-step framework to help law firm leaders build trust and increase their influence with both employees and clients**



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**W**hether you're leading a team, advising clients or building your law firm's brand, the ability to inspire confidence and drive action is critical to achieving long-term success. The need to influence others is central to both leadership and business development. Greater influence gives you the ability to change minds and drive buy-in for decisions. It allows you to shape behaviours, strengthen relationships, foster loyalty, inspire action and amplify your impact both in your firm and in the wider sector.

In today's intensely competitive market, client expectations are high, technology is transforming the way we work and our employees are seeking greater fulfilment. Most law firms are facing challenges in retaining staff and clients, and it is becoming harder to maintain trust with key stakeholders. Loyalty can no longer be assumed, even in long-term relationships.

In this context, building your influence is a game-changing skill that is no longer optional. Understandably, it can sometimes feel like an intangible and unattainable goal to become more influential – but there are simple, actionable steps you can take, every day, to build trust and influence with your team, your clients and your prospects, without investing huge amounts of time.

In this article, I set out the six elements of my 'influence builder' framework, which combines the well-researched emotional drivers of client and employee experience with the basic psychological principles of trust and influence.

## **1 Deliver: The power of being exemplary**

Being able to deliver involves two key elements:

- At the heart of building trust is reliability. Consistently deliver on your promises, whether they are meeting deadlines, following up on commitments or exceeding expectations. Doing what you say you're going to do is foundational to building trust – and without trust, you will lack influence.
- Remember that in a professional setting, your actions define your reputation. As a leader, your example sets the tone for your team's

performance, so showcase the attributes you want to see in your fee earners. Demonstrate resilience, positivity and a solutions-oriented mindset, embracing a 'lead by example' ethos. When you consistently embody the qualities you expect from others, and role-model the kind of behaviours you want to see, you cultivate a culture of accountability and trust.

**Top tip:** Begin by reflecting on your leadership and asking yourself: "Am I the kind of leader others aspire to follow?" If not, identify a few core areas in which you can make simple improvements.

## **2 Connect: Build genuine relationships**

Connection is a fundamental human need. People naturally gravitate towards those who show genuine empathy and understanding. By dedicating time to nurture empathy and build rapport, you create an inclusive environment where every client and team member feels valued.

Active listening is indispensable. It's more than just hearing: it's about understanding and valuing the other person's perspective. Go beyond surface-level interactions and ask open-ended questions, focusing fully on the speaker and taking the time to respond thoughtfully. These deeper, more meaningful interactions lay the groundwork for enduring trust and allow your influence to grow over time.

**Top tip:** Expressing gratitude, even for small contributions, is a powerful way to strengthen connection. Set a reminder once a day to thank a client, key contact or team member for their efforts – this will elevate connection, build rapport and reinforce positive behaviours.

## **3 Make it easy: Simplify to amplify**

Clarity is an underappreciated yet powerful tool in leadership and client relations.

Whether you're articulating a complex legal strategy, providing crucial feedback or introducing a new firmwide initiative, the key is simplicity and transparency. When communications are straightforward, they build trust and facilitate smoother cooperation.

This approach is about eliminating unnecessary complexities for both clients and team members and being intentional about how you frame things. Avoid legal jargon, clearly outline action steps and provide context for your recommendations. Remember, the easier it is for someone to understand your decisions, act on your advice or follow your guidance, the more likely they are to trust its credibility and take the next step forward.

**Top tip:** Cultivate a habit of asking yourself: "How can I make this easier for them?" This will amplify your impact.

#### 4 **Serve and solve: Lead generously**

In law firm leadership, consistently serving others and adding value should be a priority. Whether you're tackling a client's legal challenges or mentoring a junior lawyer, leading with a spirit of generosity – and being motivated to help and problem solve – distinguishes you as an influential leader. It sets you apart as both someone worth following and as someone with great integrity.

Solving client and employee complaints with transparency and efficiency is obviously important and has been shown to build trust more quickly when done well. However, effective leadership goes beyond resolving issues: it also involves understanding and anticipating needs, proactively offering help and resources, and consistently contributing to the success of those around you.

Giving to others without any expectation of immediate returns will foster an environment of mutual loyalty and encourage your team and clients to look for ways to reciprocate.

**Top tip:** Remember, being committed to others' success will almost always result in your own. Take all the people you work with – regardless of their position – forward on their journey and look for ways in which you can serve them.

#### 5 **Inspire: Drive action and growth**

Inspiration is the catalyst that transforms trust into action. Influential leaders don't just agree with everything – they motivate their teams to think bigger, act better, improve their skills and strive for excellence. This involves understanding and aligning with the individual aspirations, challenges and values of each team member.

Enthusiasm can be infectious: by demonstrating optimism and passion, you uplift those around you, fostering a culture of collective growth and achievement.

The same applies to your clients: advise them in a way that inspires them to be bold, to take proactive steps and to strive for more. Align your recommendations to their commercial goals and their business values, so it's easier for them to imagine what is possible with your support.

**Top tip:** Frame your ideas and suggestions in a way that aligns with others' values and priorities to increase their buy-in and build motivation.

#### 6 **Trust: The cornerstone of influence**

Trust is the culmination of all the elements mentioned in points one to five. It's built on a foundation of competence and character:

- Competence is about consistently delivering high-quality expertise and leadership.
- Character involves demonstrating authenticity, transparency, integrity and genuine care.

As lawyers, we often excel in showcasing our competence, our expertise and thought leadership – but can forget to nurture the valuable character aspects of trust that directly correlate to influence. This involves openly sharing your values and relatable stories, being transparent in your actions and showing vulnerability where appropriate. Such practices deepen connections and solidify trust.

Internally, fostering psychological safety within your team – so individuals feel safe to challenge and express ideas – is critical for long-term success. It encourages employees to innovate and explore creative ways to improve service delivery and stay ahead of the competition. It makes staff feel safe enough to come to you with any issues that you may not be

aware of, so you can address them head on before they escalate.

Externally, building trust makes it far easier for clients to connect with you, rather than a faceless law firm identity. As an authentic leader prepared to showcase your character as well as competence, clients and contacts will find it easy to trust you – and consequently, the services you sell.

**Top tip:** Think about how you can make your service delivery and leadership more of a shared experience with those you serve. Shared experiences build rapport and create a sense of belonging and safety.

#### **Practice makes perfect**

In a demanding legal sector, it's easy to let the pressure overshadow the importance of genuine interactions. By staying present, engaged and empathetic, you foster deeper connections, inspire confidence and open the door to further opportunities to inspire and influence.

This influence-builder framework is simple but powerful, combining the foundational elements of trust (integrity, connection and reliability) with the key drivers of influence (clarity, value and inspiration). Trust and influence are not static qualities – they are cultivated through long-term, deliberate practice. By adhering to the framework, you can lead with intent, strengthen relationships and achieve meaningful impact in every aspect of your professional life.

For more support and guidance on legal professional development, connect with Emma Egerton-Jones on LinkedIn or contact her directly at [emma@egertonjones.com](mailto:emma@egertonjones.com)