

# Improving the disconnect between leaders and employees



When we received the results from Arbinger's workplace survey for our 2024 trends report, one of the most standout findings was the significant difference between how executives perceived their organizations versus how their employees felt about them. It was immediately clear that there was a major disconnect in the workplace.

Just take a look at some of these results:

- Executives feel 2.5x more strongly that their company is providing adequate opportunities to enhance skills and career development
- Executives feel nearly 3x more satisfied with the steps their company has taken to address the well-being and mental health of employees
- Executives feel over 3x more satisfied with their company's current level of communication and collaboration

With this information at hand, it becomes a lot clearer why overall job satisfaction hit an alarming low this past year,

with just 22% of professionals giving their company a rating of excellence.

Employees have expressed challenges with collaboration, communication, efficiency, innovation, and more, and executives simply aren't seeing it that way. And while to employees, it may seem like leadership is turning a blind eye to their concerns, what's likely happening is that leadership has no idea about the problems that their teams are facing (or if they do, they don't truly understand the impact of them).

Teammates feeling disconnected at work can have an extremely damaging effect on your organization's culture and results. For this reason, it's critical that leaders prioritize bridging this gap in 2024 and work to foster more trust between leaders and employees.

## **The disconnect between managers and employees**

In our research, we found that less than half (43%) of organizations offer conversations or communications with leaders regularly to employees. That's a huge misstep when it's been proven that those who have the opportunity to provide feedback for leadership feel more heard than others.

But that also helps us understand why when we asked executives and non-executives to rate their organization's performance in the following areas, we got such different answers:



We're calling this the ***disconnect effect***. If executives, often with the best of intentions, are out of touch with how their employees and teams feel, then it will ultimately impact performance and company growth. Not to mention the culture, leading to lack of employee engagement and feelings of resentment that can truly impact productivity and innovation.

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One of the most special feelings is being truly seen by someone. And as you can imagine, employees feeling like they aren't seen or heard by their organization's leadership team can have detrimental effects. We know that sometimes (especially when work gets busy), it's easy to forget that our colleagues are human too, each with challenges and frustrations and goals of their own. That's why it's important to take the time to [recognize the humanity in our peers](#).

Whether you're in a leadership role or not, try doing these three things and see how your mindset shifts at work:

- **Get to know your colleagues as people.** Book a 30-minute meeting and get curious, ask questions, and start to understand your teammates as more than just their job titles. You'd be surprised what you'll learn and how differently you'll see them!
- **Regularly check in on how you impact those around you.** Your team, your boss, your peers—how have you unknowingly made their jobs harder? What can you do to be more helpful?
- **Focus on facts rather than interpretations.** Making assumptions, rather than taking the time to communicate with those around us, is a surefire path to

miscommunication. Watch how your perspective changes as a result of this exercise.

Watch the short video below to see an example of a disconnect between manager and employee—and then, how easily that relationship was completely transformed.

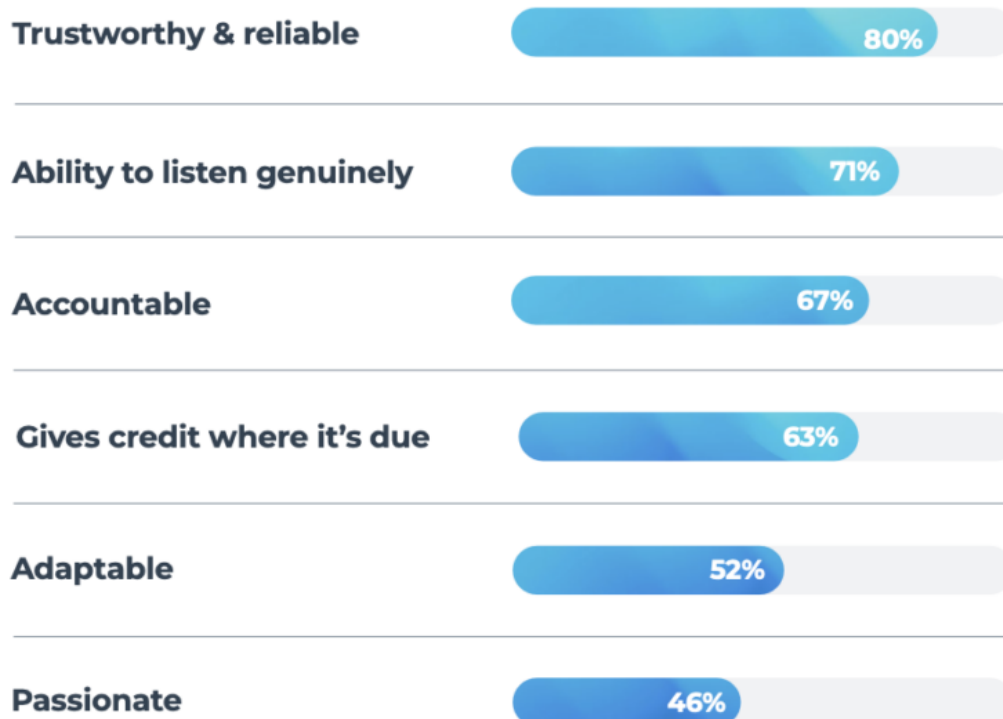
We know your relationships at work may not feel exactly like Judie and Nelson's. However, as our survey results revealed, we also don't know what we don't know. Seeing people as people is the first and most significant step to solving disconnect in the workplace.

## **Becoming a leader that others love to follow**

Now that you have a better understanding of the leader/employee disconnect in the workplace, let's talk about how to be a leader at work that others love to follow.

When we asked, our survey respondents indicated that they seek a leader with specific qualities, including trustworthiness, reliability, genuine listening, accountability, recognition of contributions, adaptability, and passion.

# What qualities do you look for in a good leader?



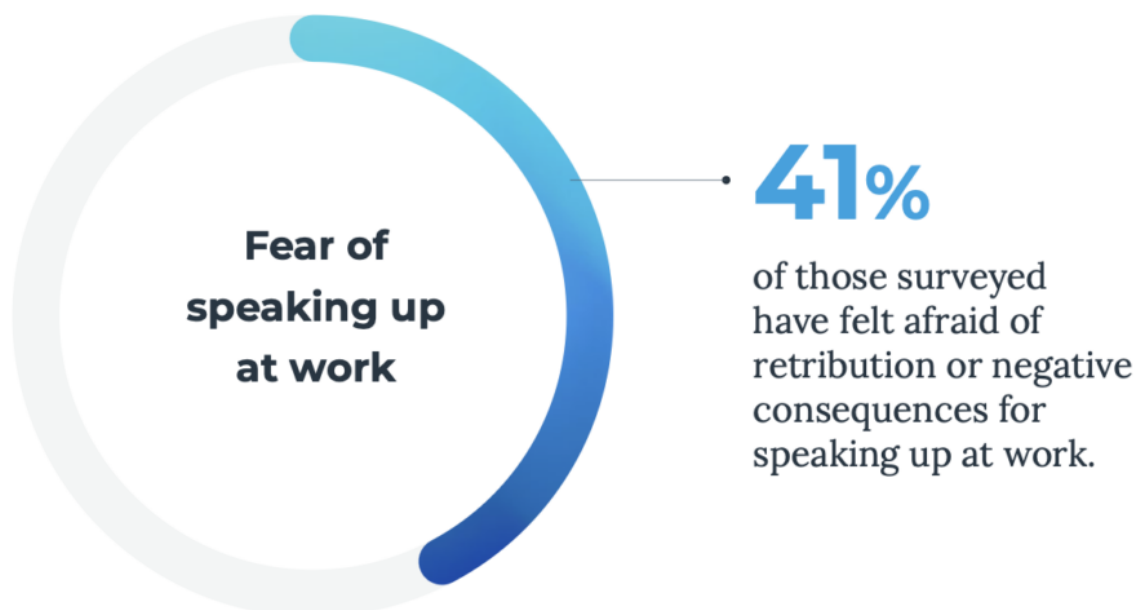
*Find out what else leaders should prepare for in 2024. [Get Arbinger's Workplace Trends Report here.](#)*

Looking at the top responses above, we can see that employees are ultimately looking for a leader who treats them like they matter. At the end of the day, we're all people who are no better than or less than our peers. By leading with empathy and understanding, we're able to take another step towards bridging the disconnect in the workplace, ultimately improving relationships and boosting employee engagement on the job.

Some ways to take a more empathetic approach to leadership include:

- Showing appreciation for employees' contributions
- Owning up when you make a mistake
- Providing ongoing feedback
- Being a good listener
- Recognizing when employees are overloaded
- Helping employees see their impact
- Asking how you can be more helpful
- Showing genuine interest in employees' wellbeing
- Demonstrating self-awareness
- Investing in future leaders

One of the other key themes that emerged in our survey data is a leader's role in creating a work environment that's [psychologically safe](#). Unfortunately, 41% of those surveyed have felt afraid of retribution or negative consequences for speaking up at work. Even in work environments that aren't inherently "toxic", it can be difficult for employees to speak up if they feel like they don't have the space or tools to do so.



A hallmark sign of a great leader is being able to foster



safe, honest, and self-reflective dialogues at work. In turn, employees are more likely to innovate, voice their opinions, and collaborate freely, which contribute to more overall organizational success.

## Bridging the gap for a better workplace

Solving the disconnect in the workplace isn't something that's going to happen overnight, but by implementing some of the suggestions in this blog, you will start to notice night and day changes in your relationships with your employees and teammates.

**ARBINGER RESEARCH REPORT**

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