You Do Not Have to Agree to Hand Off the Shift

Two people on your crew avoid each other, and you have started to doubt the handoff between them. This week, put them on one job that needs both and judge it by one thing: did the work move?



You do not need a crew that agrees. You need one where the work gets done at shift change.

THE NUMBER

Edelman's 2026 Trust at Work report says trust in co-workers fell from 82% to 73% in two years. That is the lowest in the series. Trust in managers fell from 79% to 72%. The same report says comfort discussing discrimination with colleagues who disagree fell nine points to 56%. Edelman is a communications firm, and this is a survey of more than 10,000 employees across ten markets. It shows a pattern. It does not show a cause.

THE IDEA

Most crews do not fall apart because people disagree. They fall apart because somebody decided that disagreement means they cannot be counted on.

Those are two different kinds of trust. One says, I think like you. The other says, I know what you will do when the shift turns over. The first one is nice. The second one runs the plant.

When trust drops, leaders usually try to fix the first kind. Team lunches. Values posters. A survey about belonging. All fine. None of it answers the question a tired operator is really asking at 2 p.m.: if I leave this with you, does it get done?

PICTURE THIS

Picture a second-shift lead and a first-shift lead who cannot stand each other. Different politics, different style, one of them posts things the other rolls their eyes at. They never talk about any of it. But every day the first-shift lead leaves a handoff sheet with three lines: what is running, what is down, what to watch. And every day the second-shift lead reads it, does what it says, and leaves the same three lines back. Ask either one if they trust the other and you get a shrug. Ask whether the line is in good hands at shift change and you get a yes.

That is working trust. It was built out of a repeatable promise, not a shared opinion.

WHAT THE THINKERS SAID

In 1954 Muzafer Sherif ran the Robbers Cave study with boys at a camp in Oklahoma. Two groups became hostile. What cooled it was not a talk about feelings. It was a shared problem neither group could solve alone, like restoring the camp's water supply. Sherif called these superordinate goals.

In the same year Gordon Allport published The Nature of Prejudice. He argued that contact between groups helps most when four conditions are present: equal status, a common goal, cooperation, and backing from the people in charge. A 2006 meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that contact generally goes with lower prejudice.

My take for the floor: a crew is a small version of the same setup. Put two people who disagree on the same job, give them equal standing, a clear shared target and a boss who backs the arrangement, and the disagreement gets smaller than the job. Leave them in separate corners with a values poster and it does not.

Aristotle drew a similar line in the Nicomachean Ethics. He called it concord: citizens agreeing on what is to be done, not on everything.

THE MISTAKE

Treating a disagreement about opinions as a problem with reliability. You start routing around the person. You stop handing them real work. They notice. They stop offering. Now you have a dependable person who got labeled and stopped.

THE EDGE

Some things are not up for a handoff. Safety, harassment and discrimination follow the rules and the reporting path, whatever the working relationship looks like. Shared-goal trust is for ordinary friction between decent people. It is not a way to excuse conduct.

ONE MOVE FOR THE NEXT SHIFT

Pick the one pair on your team who avoid each other. Give them one task this week that needs both, with one clear outcome and one name on the result. Write the handoff in three lines. Check Friday: did the work move? Do not ask them to like each other. Ask whether the work got done and whether either would hand the next one to the other.

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