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Restoring trust in the workplace

More core issues arise in recession.

Mismanaged changes, employee treatment blamed.

By **Laura Raines**
For the AJC

The recession has seriously impacted morale, as well as the bottom line of many organizations.

One-third of American workers say they plan to look for a new job when the economy improves. Of those, 48 percent cite a lack of trust in their employer as the reason, according to the 2010 Ethics & Workplace Survey conducted by Deloitte LLP.

"Trust isn't a word that business leaders talk about very often," said Hilary Potts, president and CEO of CLG Inc., a global behaviorally based management consulting firm. "They'll say that the company isn't performing up to par, or a team isn't clicking. Rarely do they say that it's about trust, yet trust is often the missing element that is keep-

ing them from moving forward."

With her company going through significant transition, Potts read about 15 business books in January 2010. "I had a handful of books about trust, but the one by Dennis and Michelle Reina really resonated with me," Potts said. She took notes and gave "Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace: Seven Steps to Renew Confidence, Commitment and Energy" (Berrett-Koehler, 2010) to colleagues.

"Other books made you feel good when you read them, but you'd finish and say, 'So now what?'" she said. "These authors said it was OK to acknowledge that not all of your business relationships were fully trusting and to realize that building trust is never a 'once and done' thing. It's a process."

Although she'd never called an author before, Potts called the Reinas and enlisted their help in coaching her and her firm's senior leaders.

"We're a 17-year-old company that is asking, 'How do we maintain our culture, grow and add new people while work-



Leita Cowart Special

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Michelle Reina
Consultant

ing within a dynamic, shifting business environment?" It's a challenge," she said.

But she knows they are on the right path. "It's a leader's constant job to create an environment where people are heard, share, keep agreements and honor each other's talents and gifts. We've found the Reinas' principles extremely useful."

The Reinas explored the concept of trust for their doctoral theses originally. They began consulting and speaking and co-founded the Reina Trust Building Institute in Stowe, Vt. They have been helping corporate clients measure, develop and restore workplace trust for two decades.

"Trust speaks to our core human need for connection. In all relationships, trust will be built and it will be broken because we're all human. So it is essential to learn how to rebuild it," Michelle Reina said.

The workplace is full of unintentional betrayals that are the consequence of careless actions, and the intentional betrayals of actions taken deliber-

ately to hurt others.

There are minor betrayals like gossiping, blaming, hiding mistakes, withholding information and taking credit for someone's work, and the major betrayals that are commonly associated with the mismanagement of organizational changes and result in layoffs, mergers and acquisitions.

These betrayals can cause loss of confidence, worker engagement, productivity and profits. While trust issues are nothing new to the workplace, the recession has brought many more of them to the surface, the Reinas said.

"Many of our clients come to us because the change processes they have implemented aren't delivering the results they want," said Dennis Reina. "We help them see that the presence or absence of trust is the key to the success or failure of any change initiative. It's not necessarily what a company is going through that creates the problems, but how it is being implemented and how people are being treated through it."