

The eight trust windows

A guide for People leaders

Skills are built over years. Reputations are decided in weeks.

Every organization has moments when trust is formed or re-formed: a new job, a promotion, a new manager, a merger. We call them trust windows. It's when impressions form, alliances are read, and the informal verdict on someone's potential is quietly written.

Trust windows are bounded and predictable. People & Talent teams usually know they are coming: new hires start on a known date, promotions are announced, reorganizations are planned. That makes them some of the few career-defining moments an organization can see in advance and prepare people for.

This guide describes the eight trust windows, what is at stake in each, and the questions worth asking about them in your organization.

Why it matters

Over one-third

of newly hired employees quit within their first year. (Work Institute)

One-half to two times

an employee's annual salary: what it can cost to replace one person, by Gallup's own conservative estimate. (Gallup, 2019)

66%

of managers and executives say most recent hires were not fully prepared, and experience was the most common failing. (Deloitte, 2025 Global Human Capital Trends)

68%

of executive transitions founder on issues related to politics, culture and people. (McKinsey, 2018)

Most of that cost lands before a first annual review, in the trust window formal onboarding doesn't cover.

The eight trust windows

1. New Job

When: Within 90 days at a new company. Peak intensity in weeks 1 to 4.

At stake: credibility starts from zero, and everyone forms a first impression at once.

The research: over one-third of newly hired employees quit within their first year (Work Institute).

Questions to ask: How does a new hire learn what their manager means by success, beyond the job description? Who helps them read the unwritten rules in their first month?

2. Promotion or New Internal Role

When: Within 90 days in the new role. Heightened scrutiny in weeks 2 to 8.

At stake: a past reputation helps, but credibility in the new role has to be earned again.

The research: standard orientation programs are considered effective by only 11 percent of internal executive hires (McKinsey, citing IED and McKinsey research on executives).

Questions to ask: What support does someone get after the promotion is announced, rather than before it? Who tells them how their new peers judge the role?

3. New Manager

When: Within 90 days under new management. Peak intensity in the first four weeks.

At stake: the job is the same. The person judging it is new.

The research: when leaders struggle through a transition, their direct reports' performance is 15 percent lower, and they are 20 percent more likely to be disengaged or leave (McKinsey, citing CEB).

Questions to ask: When a team gets a new manager, does anyone help the team, not only the manager, through the change? How quickly do people learn what the new manager values?

4. Return from Leave

When: Within 90 days of returning. Peak intensity in weeks 1 to 3.

At stake: the organization kept moving. Presence has to be rebuilt.

The research: we found no study on this window that meets our standard for citing, so we cite none.

Questions to ask: What changed while the person was away, and who tells them? How do they reconnect with the people whose view of their work matters most?

5. Layoff Aftermath

When: Within 90 days after a layoff. Peak intensity in weeks 1 to 4.

At stake: trust in the organization is shaken just as the pressure to show value rises.

Questions to ask: What do the people who stayed need to hear, and from whom? How do they show their value in a team that has been reshaped?

6. Taking Over a Team

When: Within 90 days as the team's new manager. Peak intensity in weeks 2 to 8.

At stake: judged from two directions at once: by the team, and by peers and leaders.

The research: when leaders struggle through a transition, their direct reports' performance is 15 percent lower (McKinsey, citing CEB).

Questions to ask: How does a new manager learn the team's history before changing anything? Who helps them build trust with peer managers as well as their own team?

7. High-Stakes Project, Board or Advisory Role

When: Within 90 days of the engagement. Peak intensity in weeks 1 to 4.

At stake: a new group of senior stakeholders decides quickly how much weight a voice carries.

The research: 68 percent of executive transitions founder on issues related to politics, culture and people (McKinsey).

Questions to ask: How does someone learn who really decides things in a group they have just joined? What does a strong first contribution look like to these stakeholders?

8. Transformational Moments

When: Within 90 days of the announcement. Peak intensity in the first 60 days.

At stake: M&A, restructuring and succession reset trust for everyone, and alliances are rewritten.

The research: within the first year of an acquisition, 33 percent of acquired workers left, compared with 12 percent of regular hires with similar skills and experience (MIT Sloan, on a study of startup acquisitions in high tech).

Questions to ask: Which people are most exposed when alliances are rewritten? How do they learn the new organization's unwritten rules while the old ones still apply?

What carries people through: three disciplines

- **Clarity.** Understanding what success looks like from the perspective of the people evaluating you, not from your own perspective.
- **Communication.** Making your thinking, priorities, and progress visible to the right stakeholders in the right way at the right time.
- **Consistency.** Aligning what you say, what you do, and how you show up across days, meetings, and interactions so that the signal about who you are becomes stable and reliable in the minds of others.

Where to start

Pick the trust window your organization can see most clearly and that affects the most people. For most organizations that is the New Job window: start dates are known in advance, the group is large, and the cost of first-year exits can be estimated (see our first-year cost calculator at impressionadvantage.com/first-year-cost).

About The Impression Advantage Coach

The Impression Advantage Coach is AI coaching that guides people through trust windows: a private coach for each person, a companion for their manager, and insight for People & Talent leaders across groups of 10 or more, never individuals. It was built by Isaac Adesugba, 20 years in People & Talent with global organizations headquartered in the US, UK, Japan and France, a Cornell-trained People leader, and author of *The Ultimate Impression*.

Design partner program. Three places for pilots launching April 15 to May 15, 2027.
impressionadvantage.com/design-partners

Request a demo: impressionadvantage.com/request-a-demo

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