# What Jaws reveals about trust and employee engagement in 2024 workplaces



In Steven Spielberg's 1975 classic “Jaws,” the cautionary tale of Police Chief Martin Brody and Mayor Larry Vaughn underscores a fundamental issue that resonates in today's workplaces: the breakdown of communication. Brody’s inability to convince Vaughn to close Amity Island’s beaches in the face of a violent shark attack showcases how vital it is to connect with others before addressing problems. This stark example becomes particularly relevant as global employee engagement plummets to just 21% in 2024, with managers experiencing the most significant declines. The nuance in Brody's missteps offers critical lessons on fostering a thriving work environment.

A pivotal error made by Chief Brody was failing to connect with Vaughn's priority—ensuring a successful Fourth of July weekend for the economically reliant island. By neglecting the Mayor’s perspective, Brody approached the problem of the shark from a place of authority rather than empathy. This disconnect illustrates the "connection before correction" principle, essential for driving engagement within organisations. Storytelling expert Will Storr posits that everyone operates within their own "story world," where their priorities become paramount. For leaders, understanding these priorities is crucial to bridging the gap and fostering an atmosphere conducive to collaboration.

In a recent analysis of workplace trust, a 2024 PwC survey revealed a striking disparity: while 86% of executives reported high levels of trust in their employees, only 60% of employees felt similarly. More alarmingly, 61% of these employees indicated that a perceived lack of trust hinders their performance. This trust gap echoes Brody's failure to establish intimacy with Vaughn, as described in the Trust Equation framework developed by David Maister et al. Trust is fundamentally reliant on credibility, reliability, and intimacy, and Brody’s abrupt proposal to close the beaches alienated him from Vaughn. A workforce lacking in trust results inevitably in disengagement, resistance, and ultimately, turnover—an expensive cost for any organisation.

In his analysis, Paul Foote suggests that organisations can emulate the proven connection strategies demonstrated in successful change management. By creating an environment where stories coalesce through conversation, leaders foster mutual understanding, akin to an application programming interface (API) in technology. Encouraging discussions that acknowledge both successes and fears not only builds rapport but also aligns team objectives with organisational goals. This collaborative narrative has the power to transform confrontational dynamics into partnerships aimed at addressing challenges.

The framework known as DNA—Dream, Nightmare, Action—presents a structured method for leaders to engage employees meaningfully. Starting with an acknowledgment of employee aspirations allows leaders to discuss potential threats and collaboratively derive solutions. This approach fosters emotional buy-in and cultivates a sense of security for employees who may otherwise recoil at proposed changes. It closely mirrors insights from various sources that advocate for empathy and understanding in fostering workplace engagement.

Practical applications for these insights are straightforward yet require conscious effort from leaders. Redesigning feedback mechanisms to incorporate a "Connection before Correction" ethos encourages managers to seek understanding before issuing critique. Creating open forums or listening sessions prior to announcing changes can open dialogues about employee values and fears, helping to shape a more harmonious environment. Prioritising collaboration also means allowing space for team members to express their concerns, especially in cross-functional contexts where diverse perspectives can drive richer solutions.

Ironically, while “Jaws” became a cinematic phenomenon, Brody’s failure to communicate effectively serves as a cautionary tale for organizations today. The high cost of neglecting to build trust—measured in disengagement and turnover—could be viewed as far more menacing than the fictional shark. Leaders equipped with the ability to master "connection before correction" can cultivate a workplace where co-created narratives flourish, driving meaningful change amid today's complex challenges. In the end, it’s a lesson worth learning, even from a shark-infested waters narrative half a century old.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.smartbrief.com/original/what-jaws-can-teach-us-about-employee-engagement-50-years-on), [[2]](https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9507-employee-trust-benefits.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.smartbrief.com/original/what-jaws-can-teach-us-about-employee-engagement-50-years-on), [[3]](https://www.electives.io/resources/manager1-models-to-help-managers-build-trust-reduce-micromanagement), [[5]](https://www.advisorpedia.com/inclusion-initiative/truth-and-trust-go-hand-in-hand/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://lsaglobal.com/how-to-increase-engagement-through-trust/), [[4]](https://www.resultmaps.com/performance-resource-library/2024/9/21/the-trust-equation-how-building-confidence-boosts-your-bottom-line)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.smartbrief.com/original/what-jaws-can-teach-us-about-employee-engagement-50-years-on), [[2]](https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9507-employee-trust-benefits.html), [[7]](https://www.workdesign.com/2024/10/trust-the-key-to-an-engaged-workplace/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://lsaglobal.com/how-to-increase-engagement-through-trust/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9507-employee-trust-benefits.html), [[4]](https://www.resultmaps.com/performance-resource-library/2024/9/21/the-trust-equation-how-building-confidence-boosts-your-bottom-line)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.smartbrief.com/original/what-jaws-can-teach-us-about-employee-engagement-50-years-on), [[6]](https://lsaglobal.com/how-to-increase-engagement-through-trust/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[6]](https://lsaglobal.com/how-to-increase-engagement-through-trust/), [[5]](https://www.advisorpedia.com/inclusion-initiative/truth-and-trust-go-hand-in-hand/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.smartbrief.com/original/what-jaws-can-teach-us-about-employee-engagement-50-years-on> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9507-employee-trust-benefits.html> - This article discusses the importance of trust in the workplace and offers strategies to boost employee happiness through trust. It emphasizes fostering a culture of transparency, being authentic and honest, establishing open lines of communication, and minimizing employee monitoring. The piece highlights that trust leads to increased productivity, reduced stress, and higher employee engagement, underscoring the critical role of trust in enhancing workplace dynamics and performance.
3. <https://www.electives.io/resources/manager1-models-to-help-managers-build-trust-reduce-micromanagement> - This resource introduces the Trust Equation framework, which helps leaders understand the components of trust and how to enhance each element to build stronger relationships with their teams. The equation is Trust = Credibility + Reliability + Intimacy / Self-Orientation. It provides insights into assessing and improving these elements to foster trust, reduce micromanagement, and enhance team performance, offering practical steps for leaders to apply in their management practices.
4. <https://www.resultmaps.com/performance-resource-library/2024/9/21/the-trust-equation-how-building-confidence-boosts-your-bottom-line> - This article explores the Trust Equation and its impact on organizational performance. It discusses how trust influences productivity, employee engagement, and retention, highlighting that high-trust workplaces see significant improvements in these areas. The piece provides actionable insights for leaders to build trust within their teams, emphasizing the direct link between trust and business success, and offering strategies to enhance trust and, consequently, organizational performance.
5. <https://www.advisorpedia.com/inclusion-initiative/truth-and-trust-go-hand-in-hand/> - This article examines the relationship between truth and trust in employee engagement. It discusses how leaders can build trust by demonstrating consistency, embracing diverse perspectives, taking accountability, and seeking feedback. The piece emphasizes that leaders who exhibit integrity, empathy, and tenacity in turbulent times garner respect and trust, fostering a culture of openness and collaboration that enhances employee engagement and organizational success.
6. <https://lsaglobal.com/how-to-increase-engagement-through-trust/> - This article discusses the importance of trust in increasing employee engagement. It presents research showing that high-trust workplaces have employees who are more productive, energetic, and engaged. The piece emphasizes the need for leaders to evaluate the level of trust within their organizations and provides strategies to build and maintain trust, highlighting that a solid foundation of trust is essential for fostering a high-performance culture.
7. <https://www.workdesign.com/2024/10/trust-the-key-to-an-engaged-workplace/> - This article explores the role of trust in creating an engaged workplace. It discusses how psychological safety, fostered by trust, leads to higher employee engagement and encourages innovation. The piece highlights that organizations with high psychological safety are more likely to report higher innovation and productivity, translating to business growth. It also addresses the challenges organizations face in building trust and the importance of prioritizing people to lead the way.