

How Do I Build Trust?

The Face of Trust

Most pastor leaders realize that trust is foundational to their success. If the people they lead don't trust them, how can they be expected to follow (unless it's the military, where they have to follow). But even in the military, where there is forced compliance, leaders need to be trusted in order to exact the highest performance from those they lead.

I have said that the truly effective leader is the well-defined leader. This well-defined leader is one who has a great deal of (and ever-deepening) self-awareness. As a result of this, the well-defined leader is able to first trust him/herself. S/he has a good sense of his/her strengths and weaknesses. S/he knows his/her talents, and s/he has developed these talents into strengths. S/he knows when to employ these strengths, and when these strengths might be a detriment. S/he has a good sense of what it's like to be on the other side of him or her – how his or her actions and attitudes are perceived by and impact other people.

It is this well-defined leader who will be able to most effectively build trust in his or her people. Being well-defined, this person is internally aligned – S/he is able to match her words with his/her actions. This is directly opposite of the person we say who 'speaks out of both sides of his/her mouth.' It is this congruence (actions match words) that is the key element in building trust. Let's unpack this further. This concept seems so simple and straightforward. But it is a principle that, in coaching leader after leader, I see violated time and again.

To begin our discussion on trust, take a look at these elements that make for a fully functional organization, each point building on the one preceding it:

The Functional Organization¹

- 1. Trust one another.**
- 2. Engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.**
- 3. Commit to decisions and plans of action.**
- 4. Hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.**
- 5. Focus on the achievement of collective results.**

¹ Adapted from Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

Notice that trusting one another is the foundation of a functional organization of any size. Once trust is established, the team can enter into appropriate, constructive conflict, without fear that it will turn destructive.

Trust has to do with a willingness on people's part to be vulnerable within the team and share in the teams ups and downs. It's an openness about mistakes and weaknesses. Teams that lack trust are unable to engage in unfiltered and passionate disagreement around the mission of the organization. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.

Once you have a trusting team, you can have honest disagreements that lead to decisions and plans of action *to which people are actually committed*. So much of what I see in organizations is compliance ("I'll do what you ask, but my heart's not in it"), but very little commitment. Commitment arises only after each member of a team has been able to wrestle with the initiatives that are presented, offer their disagreements, and grapple with all of the alternatives before arriving at a decision. Once that occurs, the team can hold one another accountable, because there is a shared sense of ownership in the decision.

**Trust → Dispute → Commit to Decisions → Mutually Accountability →
Focus on the Achievements Created**

In my coaching/consulting life, I coach several people in the federal government who are responsible for over ten thousand people. That's a lot of people to direct. What I tell these leaders is actually they are not directing ten thousand people, they are directing the eight or ten people who are their direct reports. Those are the people of whom they must win trust and lead effectively. Unfortunately, for leaders of large organizations, distractions and interruptions run high, and the ability to keep one's eye on the main thing becomes extremely difficult. It is also difficult for leaders to understand when their words no longer match their behavior, thus setting in motion the erosion of trust.

How is Trust Established?

Let's look at the building blocks that are critical to the growth of trust:

I AM WELL-DEFINED AND CONGRUENT

(What I say equals what I do)

I AM CONSISTENT (My behavior is predictable)

I CAN BE DEPENDED ON (I am a person of character. I am a person of integrity)

WHEN I'M WRONG, I ADMIT IT AND OWN IT

Let's begin with predictability -- You're able to **predict** in advance what I will do. That's because I'm **consistent**. I do the same thing, over and over again, free from variation or contradiction. But I could do the same *wrong* thing over and over. So that means I have to be **dependable**: I get the same positive result over and over again from the person or organization. And as we've said, the whole thing rests on **congruence** – I'm well-defined and internally aligned – a person of integrity. Therefore what I say I believe and value matches how I behave.

Note now the very bottom – **When I'm wrong, I admit it and own it**. In all arenas of leadership, we have heard over and over again the inability of the leader to own his or her mistakes. Blame shifting has become a leadership art form. Jim Collins explains this in his book, *From Good to Great*. He states that for the Level 5 Leader (well-defined as I label her), when there is acclaim, the leader looks out the window, downplaying her part in the success, and sharing the spotlight with her subordinates. When there is a problem, this leader looks in the mirror, embracing to herself the responsibility.

Andy Crouch picks up this theme in his book *Strong and Weak*. The truly effective and flourishing leader is one who is able to combine his or her authority with vulnerability. If my authority means I can never admit when I'm wrong, neither me nor those I lead will flourish.

The arena in which being well-defined and congruent is on display and, indeed, where it is validated is in the area of communication. Indeed, it is in communication where trust will either be won or lost. Refer back to what we said about multi-channeled communication in chapter 3.

Building Trust

You can either build trust with those you lead or allow cynicism to breed (“He talks out of both sides of his mouth”). Unfortunately, it is easy for pastor leaders to moan about problems in their churches and for cynicism to creep in. So let's talk about your own, personal team.

Remember our first principle: The effective leader is one who is well-defined and is self-aware. When it comes to building trust, it is critical to have a really good handle on yourself – where your strengths lie, where you are vulnerable (we're back to understanding yourself). Let's look at the specifics of this to see exactly how this works.

When the leader is well-defined and congruent, s/he can then go about doing the following. These are activities that build strong trust in those who are led. Note that each one of these often is counter-intuitive as to how people normally assume leadership practices should unfold.

Admits weaknesses or mistakes. The well-defined leader who knows him/herself well is not threatened by admitting to weaknesses and mistakes. “I'm so sorry, I

blew it” is a phrase that comes easy. This leader also, because she knows herself well, not only understands where her weaknesses lie, but is able to speak of these freely so that others have that understanding.

Asks for help. Because the well-defined leader understands and articulates weaknesses and mistakes, s/he is able to reach out and ask for help. For some leaders, this going into the ‘one-down’ position is very difficult. Often these people feel very vulnerable in this position, and refuse to assume it. But this is also a part of self-understanding (It is very difficult for me to ask for help. But it is also critical that I do this, in order to maintain the integrity of the organization).

Accepts feedback and input. Once help is solicited, the well-defined leader is able to accept the feedback and input offered. This may seem obvious, but certain people, though able to articulate weaknesses and ask for help, find themselves paralyzed when it comes to accepting the help offered. And in fact, one critical aspect of leadership is the ability to face reality. Ron Heifetz details three realities that must be faced: First, what we say we stand for (our values), and the gaps between those values and how we actually behave. Second, the reality of the skills and talents of our company -- and the gaps between those resources and what the market demands. Third, the opportunities the future hold, and the gaps between those opportunities and our ability to capitalize on them.²

Gives others the benefit of the doubt. The well-defined leader is able to give people the benefit of the doubt. This actually flies in the face of what is often the unconscious automatic response when we see someone doing something of which we disapprove – assign immediate negative intent. “I know why you got that report to me late. You wanted me to look bad.” This assigning intention, like communication itself, is a ubiquitous activity that is highly destructive to achieving and maintaining trust. It is impossible to trust someone when they assign negative intentions to that person’s behavior. Rather than assigning intent, the far better course is to give the benefit of a doubt, and inquire as to motive. “You got me the report late. Can you tell me what happened?”

Takes risks in offering feedback. Giving feedback to people can be risky, both to self and to the relationship. Often feedback, as in the above point, involves ascribing negative intent to other people’s behavior. This activity of negative intent usually has more to say about the assigner than to the person to whom the intent is ascribed. But honest constructive feedback can be very helpful both to the person and to the organization. There are always risks, however, to offering feedback. Recipients may reject what is offered, while imputing bad motives on the feedback giver. But this possibility is diminished when the offerer is well-defined with a reputation of giving feedback that is constructive and centered on the enhancement of the person and the organization.

² Ron Heifetz, “The Leader of the Future.” *Fast Company*

Focuses time and energy on issues, not politics. Well-defined leaders understand those issues that will enhance the organization, and tend to spend the majority of their time focused on these. Politics swirl around all organizations, and certainly have to be monitored. But the self-aware leader understands when s/he has handled contentious issues appropriately rather than sinking down into political haggling that is usually more centered on personalities than on the good of the organization whittled large.

Shares in the team's ups and downs. One glaring problem with the preponderance of leadership across the organizational spectrum is the propensity of leaders to be first in line to grab the benefits of leadership, while leaving the leftovers to those they lead.

Trust and the Principle-based Organization

Human nature draws each one of us to default to self-interest, and value those things most advantageous to self over other considerations (e.g. advantages to the mission of the organization). This is seen again and again in leader after leader, especially those who have not been successful. That's why the leader who puts others above him/herself stands out. These are the ones who are most readily followed and trusted. People know that these leaders are looking out for the good of the organization.

A discussion of trust goes hand-in-hand with a discussion of values or the principles that govern our behavior. Values are like force fields that protect the organization. When the leaders demonstrate a coherent set of principles consistently over time (they're congruent), these values permeate the system and influence all those who come in contact with that organization. The principles are not only spoken of frequently, they are lived constantly. When a person comes in contact with anyone from the organization no matter the position, that person experiences the whole organization -- for good or for ill.

What is critical about trust is having a set of principles (what matters most in the organization), making sure that my life and subsequent behavior is aligned with those principles (congruent), making decisions based on these values (my operating or decision-making values, which often conflict with core values), and judging performance based on these values.

When organizations are misaligned, trust is destroyed, and cynicism rises. Misalignment can be compared to sails that are not properly trimmed. This creates a drag on the boat as it moves forward. Take a look at Enron's core values:

Communication – We have an obligation to communicate.

Respect – We treat others as we would like to be treated.

Integrity – We work with customers and prospects openly, honestly, and sincerely.

Excellence– We are satisfied with nothing less than the very best in everything we do. (*Enron*, Annual Report, 2000, p. 29).

Now the disgraced leadership of that failed company are held in derision because of their utter disregard for these principles. That's what incongruence looks like. Obviously, the leadership of Enron posted those values, but when it came to making key decisions about the direction of the company, those values were discarded, and a whole new set of values was put on the table, beginning with: *Make all the money we can, any way we can, no matter who we hurt*.

So it's critical for the leaders within an organization to be aligned with the principles of the organization (only truly achieved when those leaders are well-defined). Now the question arises, How do we actually get people within the organization to align themselves with the values of the organization?

First, you need to remember: Stating a set of values, and actually *practicing* a set of values are two different things. Our statement of values is all too often the "right" thing to value. In other words, organizations say they value people, they value honesty, they value customer service. But, when they actually have to make decisions, it's as if they throw their stated values out the window, and pull out a whole new set of values (operating values). Congruence has to do with alignment of values – you *do* what you *say*. If you don't, people won't trust you, and cynicism will reign.

Establish the principles →

Reduce these to behaviors ("by this we mean")→

Select competencies based on the behaviors ("in short")→

Note those competing behaviors that clash with the stated principle →

Coach individuals in areas where there is weakness

Establish the Principles

This first step of establishing the values cannot be perfunctory. What are the true core values, and are these the actual template that is used when decisions are made? Often we think about values to which we aspire, but don't currently employ. This can become a convenient escape hatch when it's obvious the organization is not living out its values. An organization may declare their core value is caring for people. Then they go about trampling on their employees in a mad pursuit of profit. Their core value isn't caring for people, it's making lots of money. That value determines how they make decisions. When and if this incongruence is noted, the leadership then declares, Well, we aspire to care for people, it's just so hard to actually do it in the real world! Remember, when the operating and core values are aligned, there is a high level of trust in the organization. When they are not, cynicism reigns!

Reduce Values to Behaviors

In this next step, we take the values that the organization espouses, and begin to reduce these to specific behaviors. Okay, you care about people, so what does that look like? If I was to bring a video camera into your organization and begin to film, what activities would be recorded that show caring - something that is observable and measurable? Otherwise, we end up with these subjective, airy-fairy performance evaluations that are useless to everyone. When it comes to the value of caring for people, a behavior that supports this might be: *Each employee's opinions are taken seriously.* Or, *Approaches people with an open mind and sensitivity toward the individual.* Or, *Pays attention in meetings rather than read email.*

Note the Competing Behaviors that Clash with the Principle

We'll talk more about competing values when we discuss Adaptive Leadership. For now, it is important to recognize that no matter what principle you establish as important to your organization, there will emerge competing behaviors that will pull you away from that stated principle. Recognizing these, admitting they are there, and then navigating these, is critical to successful operation. Often the competing value is financial in nature. 'If we actually employ this principle, we'll lose product value, or customers, or competitive advantage.'

First we look at the overview of our principles (usually cobbled together in a strategic planning session):

Principle	And by this we mean.... Behavior(s) that readily supports this.	In Short . . .	Competing Behaviors that clash with this principle.
Empowerment	We identify gifts within the congregation, develop those gifts, and employ people to do the ministry here.	It's not the paid staff who primarily minister here, it's the congregation.	We are concerned that ministry is done right. Therefore we often micro-manage.

Collaboration	We are stronger as a community than as individuals. The best solution is with a community rather than a single mind.	It's good to consider others but better to involve them. If you do it yourself, how do others grow?	I have to make a quick decision that doesn't allow the luxury of community involvement.
Integrity	I do what I say and say what I mean. We are quick to acknowledge our mistakes. We give and receive feedback.	Our actions are consistent with our beliefs.	Situations arise when I must act incongruently from what I have said.
Innovation	We consistently seek to improve, to discover new ways of accomplishing our mission.	We either grow or become irrelevant.	The nature of our church demands efficiency over innovation periodically.

Next, we ask questions of each principle to see how it must be operationalized. This is critical to actually driving the principles down into the organization, so that they're not just slogans on the lobby wall, but actual lenses by which we monitor organizational behavior.

Principle	
Integrity	I do what I say and say what I mean. We are quick to acknowledge our mistakes. We give and receive feedback.
What does this look like in action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being prepared • Clearly communicating expectations and asking questions when expectations are unclear. • Robust dialogue, open conflict, controversy is accepted, voice of dissent is honored. • Timely response.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others experience me living congruently with my values.
How do we measure it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's a feeling that's going to come across in a 360.it can come across via feedback from internal/external communications. • Demonstrated self-reflection and self-awareness regarding accountability. • Quick to listen and slow to speak. • Are people closing their actions and following through with deliverables?
What happens if we fail this principle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative management • Trust erodes or no trust • Withdrawals versus deposits • Instability and cynicism
What is the biggest obstacle to this principle?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying what others may not want to hear. • Unrealistic expectations • Pace, pressure, time constraints • People's habits; personal feelings; competing values
What is the key questions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What additional information do you need from me? • Do customers/peers believe in us? Do we believe in each other? • Are you putting yourself in the shoes of others? • Do I trust you? Am I treating others like I want to be treated?

Take Away

- Think of a team you were on somewhere in your life that was successful. List the characteristics that made that team successful.
- Fill out the chart below.

Principle	By that we mean...	In short:

What does this look like in action?	
How do we measure it?	
What happens if we fail this principle?	
What is the biggest obstacle to this principle?	
What is the key question?	

Here are three questions to ask yourself concerning trust:

1. What am I doing to establish trust?
2. What am I doing to contribute to the distrust?
3. Is the lack of trust I feel a personal or a professional issue?
4. Have I done things to create feelings of distrust?
5. When I feel a lack of trust in someone, is there something I am doing to contribute to that?

Mutual Respect- Closely tied to mutual trust, respect is not readily given, rather, it is earned. One key difference between managers and leaders is that managers demand the respect they believe is due to them because of their title or position, whereas leaders know respect is earned through long-term consistent behavior. Mutual respect is crucial in complex and large organizations if for no other reason than one person cannot know or do it all. There should be a fundamental belief that we are in this thing together in collaboration. When addressing mutual respect issues it is important to ask these questions:

1. What am I doing to garner the respect of those I work with?
2. What am I doing to garner the respect of those I work for?
3. What have I done in the past that would make people disrespect me?
4. What role do I think respect plays in my interactions with others?
5. How do I respect people who know more than me at lower levels of the organization?

Additional Reading

- Steven M.R. Covey. *The Speed of Trust*.
- Andy Crouch. *Strong and Weak*.
- Jim Collins. *Good to Great*.
- Patrick Lencioni. *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.