

The Trust Edge

Authored by Wendall Pietersen
Managing Director
Europe, Middle East, Africa
wpietersen@rowhill.org

Original work by David Horsager
www.davidhorsager.com

THE TRUST EDGE

No matter what your role is, trust affects your influence and success. It has an impact at every level of business. Those who are trusted are effective.

Take responsibility for yourself. When you focus on increasing your own trust edge, you will enjoy greater success and impact. When you change yourself, you have the best chance of affecting your organization, your family, your relationships and even your world.

Without trust, transactions cannot occur. Without trust, influence is destroyed. Without trust, leaders lose teams. Without trust, people lose sales. Without trust, organizations lose productivity, relationships, reputation, talented people, customer loyalty, creativity, morale, revenue and results. John O. Whitney, of the Columbia Business School, found, "Mistrust doubles the cost of doing business."

Trust Defined

Trust is a confident belief in someone or something. It is the confident belief in an entity:

- To do what is right
- To deliver what is promised
- To be the same every time, whatever the circumstances

You are trusted to the degree that people believe in your ability, your consistency, your integrity and your commitment to deliver. The trust edge is the competitive advantage gained when others confidently believe in you.

While it may appear to be static, in reality trust is more like a forest — a long time growing but easily burned down. Trust requires time, effort, diligence and character. Inspiring trust is not slick or easy to fake.

Impact of Trust

Trust, not money, is the currency of business and life. In a climate of trust, people are more creative, motivated, productive and willing to sacrifice for the team. What happens when the business gains the trust edge? Every aspect of business becomes more profitable. Customers will pay more, tell others

and come back. With suppliers whom you trust, one call is enough. Delivery time and costs decrease because there is less double-checking, paperwork and follow-up.

THE EIGHT PILLARS OF TRUST

Pillar 1: Clarity

Without a clear plan, employees are confused and become ineffective. It's difficult to have faith in someone who has fuzzy plans or unclear expectations. Confusion breeds fear, frustration and lack of focus.

For the trusted leader, clarity starts with honesty. Clarity is also increased when a message is heard or seen frequently. According to Edelman's 2009 Trust Barometer, people need to hear information about a company three to five times in order to believe the information.

In your quest for the trust edge - your quest to become a trusted leader- clarity has **three** different and equally important areas:

- **Vision and Purpose.** Few things inspire trust or hope like every member of the team working together toward a shared vision. A clear vision unifies and motivates. Do one or two things well. It signals to clients that you know what you're doing and you're going to be competent in your specialty area instead of trying to be all things to all people. Narrow your organization's choices to a few good things, with specific groups in mind.
- **Expectations and Communications.** A clear communication of expectations will prevent both misbehaviour and failure. When I'm specific with my request about what I want, I almost always receive what I asked for. When I'm vague in my requests, I typically receive something other than what I had in mind. Part of being clear is being transparent and authentic. Those who are trusted are candid; they aren't afraid to tell the truth in the clearest terms possible.
- **Daily Tasks.** People spend lots of time planning but very little time turning their plans into daily action- able tasks. Daily clarity leads to accomplishing the most important things every day.

Pillar 2: Compassion

Do not underestimate the bottom-line impact of compassion. The ability to show care, empathy and compassion is a strong component of trust. The following aphorism is true: "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." People want to do business with those who have concern for the whole of humanity.

There are four key ways we show we care. I call them the "LAWS" of compassion.

- **Listen.** Listening is a fundamental skill of genuine success, and it's hard to be great or trusted without it. Bad listening habits are not just rude; they are expensive. Keep eye contact. Listen with your body gesture with your hands. Practice patience — listen carefully before you answer. Make a habit of seeing things from others' point of view. Hold one conversation at a time.
- **Appreciate.** Everyone longs to be appreciated and recognized. One of the most effective things you can do is to notice people doing good work and encourage, appreciate and

thank them for it. People and their accomplishments are what give an organization its value.

- **Wake up.** Life is short. Many people go through life in a comatose state, never really engaged with those around them. It is so easy to be focused on the future that we forget to be present with people today.
- **Serve others.** It has become normal to think of ourselves first. To be trusted, we need to break free of that mind-set. Those who act selflessly give us cause to rely on them.

Pillar 3: Character

One side of character is integrity. Integrity is being consistent in thoughts, words and actions. The second side of character is having high morals by which to live. Those who live according to a strong moral compass have the trust and admiration of those around them.

Like any element of trust, character takes time, intentionality, selflessness and discipline. Doing what one says is essential to building trust. Great leaders keep their word and take responsibility. They do what is right over what is easy.

Advantages of implementing character in the workplace include enhanced morale, increased productivity, reduced staff turnover and strengthened customer relationships.

Character is formed by continued hard work and intentional effort. A great way to get started is by asking the fundamental question: Am I doing the right thing?

Breaking promises is a quick way to lose trust. We must hold ourselves to standards of high character if we want to foster positive impact and success.

We must think about our pattern of thoughts because all actions start as thoughts. Trusted people control their thoughts because they understand that pure thoughts lead to good actions. Good input leads to good output.

Pillar 4: Competency

We tend to trust those who we know can do the job.

Apple has created a following of committed customers who are willing to pay more than competitors' customers because Apple delivers fresh, innovative technology again and again. Apple has created an environment where high standards of competency result in innovative usable technology. We must be highly competent in the areas where we want to be trusted.

The ability to learn quickly, amid rapid change and even crisis, is more important than learning any specific skill today. A new MBA may feel equipped with many skills, but those specific skills change quickly in the current environment. The greater need is learning and adapting even in the midst of crisis.

Join a Mastermind Group

Synergy occurs when the output is greater than the sum of the parts. When things work in concert to create an outcome that is more valuable than the total of all individual inputs added together, synergy is manifested.

As professionals, however, we sometimes get so individualistic that we let teamwork fall by the wayside, and we lose the benefits that can come from being part of a team with a unified purpose. Others might seem like competitors, and we end up trying to fight the world alone. Obviously, this is no path to success. That's where the support of a mastermind group is helpful.

When you're facing a major roadblock, five heads are more likely to have the experience and answers than one. Life is better as a team sport. If you really want to get the best out of yourself and make a bigger impact, find a circle of like-minded individuals. Being part of a mastermind group is an excellent tool for sharpening your strengths and competencies.

Pillar 5: Commitment

Commitment is what true friends enjoy. There will always be people who will enjoy your company, laugh at your jokes and eat your food, but it's the ones who stick with you when effort and sacrifice are involved whom you really trust.

Martin Luther King Jr. endured 30 arrests, physical assaults and threats against his family because of his determination that men should live as equals. His commitment to that goal was so obvious to everyone around him that men and women followed him into confrontations with angry mobs, trained police dogs and fire hoses.

The strongest leaders in history demonstrated an unwillingness to give in when things were tough, and so they were able to unite others in support of their cause. These leaders were committed to something beyond themselves. Commitment reveals devotion and loyalty.

Own Up

Leaders who are committed take responsibility for their actions. In our litigious culture, there's always someone to blame. Deflecting blame is no way to build trust. Take personal responsibility and spread praise.

If you want to build trust and earn the faith and respect of every person in your life, stick to this simple principle: Consistently do what you say you'll do, when you say you'll do it. We have all been misled by leaders, salespeople, politicians and maybe even friends who make big promises but have weak follow-through. Don't be like them.

Pillar 6: Connection

At its core, trust is about relationships. It's a way to measure how we feel about our interactions with the people and organizations with whom we deal. People like to do business with friends, and friendship starts with a connection.

It's amazing how much we can learn about our colleagues and friends if we just learn to ask the right questions. When we find something in common, a connection is even more quickly established.

Because we often don't get past the surface, we miss out on a depth of understanding that could allow us to better see the opinions, needs and challenges of others. If you are a leader, sharing the benefits of a project rather than making demands creates a feeling of ownership. Asking questions and then providing solutions forms a solid connection.

Pillar 7: Contribution

Contributors deliver results. And results are what make a person indispensable.

Some people are takers and some people are givers. Takers are in relationships only to receive. Givers invest in others. Givers understand the fundamental truth, "The more you give, the more you receive."

Consider how you can be a giver of the following:

- **Attention.** Can you notice or acknowledge people more?
- **Resources.** Can you set a plan to give away a larger percentage of your income every year?
- **Time.** Can you spend more time making a positive difference?
- **Opportunity.** Can you give someone a chance or an opportunity?
- **Help.** Can you help someone in a practical way? Become a Contributor Every Day

How do you improve your individual contribution? Here are 10 key strategies for becoming a daily contributor:

- **Plan tomorrow today.** Plan out and prioritize the activities for the next day. Count the items on your list, and then number them in order from most important to least important.
- **Deliver with Difference-Making Actions.** Write down your most important current goal. Then write down the numbers 1 through 5. Next to 1, write the most important thing you can do today to accomplish that goal. Then write the next most important things under 2, 3, 4 and 5.
- **Bundle.** Phone calls, emails, and paperwork are prime candidates to be grouped together. They can be done more quickly and efficiently in a batch than one at a time. A great way to get through all of your meetings is to bundle them together. Have a “meeting” day.
- **Email efficiency.** Email can be an effective form of communication, or it can be a costly interrupter. Close your email. Check it at the top of every hour.
- **Keep a clear desk.** A messy desk invites your mind to wander. A clean desk leads to productivity and concentration.
- **Make meetings matter.** Hold fewer meetings. Be clear about what you want to accomplish. Distribute an agenda in advance. Set shorter agendas. Schedule meetings back-to-back.
- **Make a flight plan.** Come prepared to work. Bring along something you can work on if you find yourself with an unexpected block of free time. Take to the skies only when you are sure it’s necessary.
- **Practice a power hour.** For 60 minutes each morning, we don’t do meetings, phone calls or emails. We don’t take any interruptions. We focus on the activities we identified as most important for long-term impact.
- **Decide now.** Don’t let indecision weigh you down. Delayed decision-making causes stress, pileups and time wasted searching for lost items. Make little decisions along the way.

Pillar 8: Consistency

All of the pillars are critical, but if they’re not practiced consistently, they crumble.

Consistency is the only way to build a brand or reputation. With consistency comes trust. You will never get one big chance to be trusted in your life; you will get thousands of small ones.

Habits don’t change on their own, and even with good intentions, they’re difficult to alter. Here are some of the steps that help create a habit-changing environment:

Apply It!

Ask yourself: Am I the same every time? Do I deliver the same quality, act with the same consistency and speak with the same honesty all the time regardless of the circumstances or the people around me?

- Write down the habit you want to change. Writing it down solidifies commitment.
- Note the benefits of changing and consequences of not changing.