

# ***Highlights of The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work***<sup>1</sup>

## **Ch. 1 – Trust in the Work Environment**

*“We’re never so vulnerable than when we trust someone – but paradoxically, if we cannot trust, neither can we find love or joy.” – Walter Anderson*

- a. As an executive coach and consultant I often find myself engaged by companies where good work is being sabotaged by interpersonal conflict, political infighting, paralysis, stagnation, apathy, or cynicism. I almost always trace these problems to a breakdown in trust. It not only kills good work, it also inevitably creates some degree of misery, annoyance, fear, anger, frustration, resentment, and resignation. By contrast, in successful companies where people are innovative, engage in productive conflict and debate about ideas, and have fun working together, I find strong trusting relationships.
- b. Assess The Environment [For Trust] - Ask yourself these questions:
  - How would you rate your own trustworthiness?
  - How would you rate the trustworthiness of your co-workers?
  - How would you rate your immediate supervisor?
  - What about your organization’s top management?
- c. My colleagues and I asked the questions above in a survey using a 1-10 scale where ten equals “can be trusted in all situations” and one equals “can rarely or never be trusted.” Respondents rated:
  - Their own trustworthiness at an average 8.72
  - All of the other people they work with as a group averaging 7.59
  - Their immediate supervisors a bit higher, at an average 8.33
  - Their company’s top management the lowest, at an average 6.43
- d. We generally judge others to be less trustworthy than ourselves. If most of the people you work with are also like our survey respondents, they are making the same judgments. That means it is very likely some of the people you work with judge you to be less trustworthy than you consider yourself to be.
- e. People act on *their* assessments of your trustworthiness, not *yours*. Your best *intentions* can’t change their opinion. Only by changing what you say and how you act can you affect how others assess your trustworthiness.
- f. Trust is defined as *choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person’s actions*.

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<sup>1</sup> Feltman, Charles. *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*. Thin Book Publishing Co.: Bend, OR, 2009.

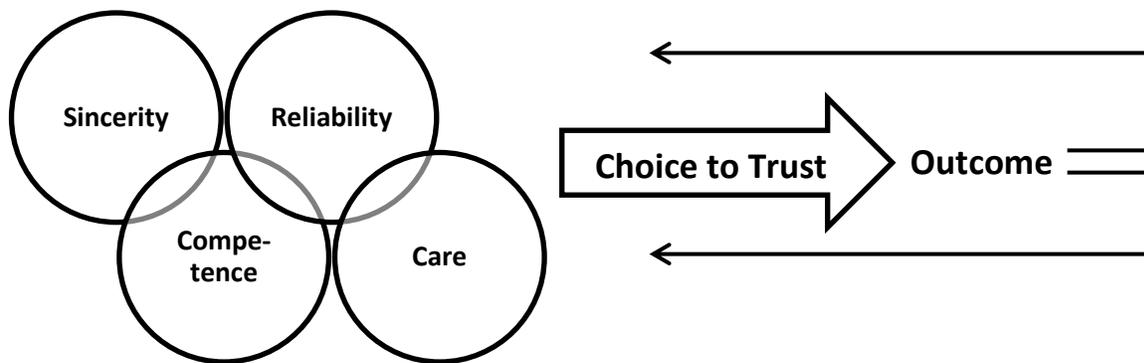
- g. Think of someone you trust.
  - What is it you are willing to entrust to them that you consider valuable?
  - Why do you trust them with this?
  - What do the people you work with entrust to you?
  - Why do you think they trust you?
- h. The choice to trust consists of four distinct assessments about how someone is likely to act. These assessments are *sincerity, reliability, competence, and care*. Together they define what we consider to be a person’s trustworthiness.
- i. Distrust is essentially the opposite of trust in that it is a choice not to make yourself vulnerable to another person’s actions. It is a general assessment that *what is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation)*.
- j. If I start “protecting” myself, the strategies I typically use—resistance, withholding, avoiding, arguing, ignoring, or direct attack—are guaranteed to produce or intensify the other person’s distrust of me. And so we spiral down into deeper distrust.
- k. Trust is a continuum

	Trust ←	→ Distrust
<b>Assessment About Other Person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can trust this person</li> <li>• I am safe with this person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is dangerous to trust this person</li> <li>• This person poses a threat to me</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment About Self</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am safe</li> <li>• I can handle whatever happens</li> <li>• I can be open and forthcoming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not safe</li> <li>• I can’t handle what this person might do</li> <li>• I need to protect myself</li> </ul>
<b>Associated Emotions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope, curiosity, generosity, care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear, anger, resentment, resignation</li> </ul>
<b>Behaviors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperating, collaborating, engaging in conversations, dialogue and debate of ideas, listening, communicating freely, supporting others, sharing information, offering ideas, expecting the best, willingness to examine own actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defending, resisting, blaming, complaining, judging, avoiding, withholding information and ideas, expecting the worst, justifying protective actions based on distrust</li> </ul>
<b>Neurophysiology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal to elevated levels of oxytocin.</li> <li>• Full availability of neocortex (the “thinking brain”) and limbic system brain structures to make decisions and take action.</li> <li>• Ability to intervene in and change pre-programmed neural patterns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brain’s primary defense system (i.e. the amygdala) is “warmed up” and primed for any sign of imminent danger.</li> <li>• Elevated levels of adrenaline, cortisol and other “fight/flight/freeze” chemicals.</li> <li>• Limited use of neocortex, greater reliance on defense-related, pre-programmed neural patterns for making decisions and taking action.</li> </ul>

## **Ch. 2 – The Language of Trust**

*“Trust each other again and again. When the trust level gets high enough, people transcend apparent limits, discovering new and awesome abilities for which they were previously unaware.” – David Armistead*

- a. Trust is fundamental to our sense of safety, autonomy and dignity as human beings. It is also an integral part of every relationship we have. When we trust someone we feel safe to share what is important to us including our thoughts, ideas, efforts, hopes and concerns. When others trust us they reciprocate in kind. It doesn't mean we always agree, just that we listen to, respect, and value what each other has to offer. In fact, trust allows us to disagree, debate, and test each other's thinking as we work together to find ideas and solutions...We get a lot done and have a good time doing it.
- b. Model of trust as a decision



### c. The Distinctions

- **SINCERITY**—is the assessment that you are honest, that you say what you mean and mean what you say; you can be believed and taken seriously. It also means when you express an opinion it is valid, and is backed up by sound thinking and evidence. Finally, it means that your actions will be aligned with your words.
- **RELIABILITY**—is the assessment that you meet the commitments you make, that you keep your promises.
- **COMPETENCE**—is the assessment that you have the ability to do what you are doing or propose to do.
- **CARE**—is the assessment that you have the other person's interests in mind as well as your own when you make decisions and take actions. Care is in some ways the most important for building lasting trust. When people believe you hold their interest in mind, they will extend their trust more broadly to you.

## **Ch. 3 – Sincerity: I mean what I say, say what I mean, and act accordingly.**

- a. Being sincere takes intention, attention and dedication.

- b. When they express their intentions, expectations, desires, beliefs and values, *they aren't just describing themselves, they are creating expectations about their future behavior in the minds of those who listen to them.*
- c. The greater your span of influence and responsibility in your organization, the more people will be observing what you say and do. I believe this is one of the main reasons that the survey quoted in the first chapter indicates top leaders were considered least trustworthy. *While leaders want to be seen as sincere, when they don't take the time to fully consider how the consequences of their actions align with what they say, they expose themselves to judgments of insincerity.*
- d. Your sincerity can also be questioned if you appear to say one thing to one person and something different to another, or if what you say isn't consistent over time.
- e. Building Trust: Sincerity
  - Be intentional about what you say to people.
  - Be intentional about what you say when you talk about your interests, expectations, ideas, beliefs and values.
  - Check with people regularly to align expectations with intentions. If they're not aligned, begin a conversation about the differences, as soon as possible. "When I said I wanted this to be a collaborative effort I expected that we would all share our ideas and information openly. Is that what you expected?"
  - Check your internal congruence, your *doubt-o-meter*. It is usually better to preface a statement with, "I'm not completely sure about this, but here's what I think..." than to sound sure about something when you're not.
  - Check your external congruence. Is what you're saying now consistent with what you've said to this person or someone else in the past?
  - Ask people to tell you how they interpret what you say.

**Ch. 4 – Reliability: You can count on me to deliver what I promise!**

- a. Reliability is about keeping commitments.
- b. You make commitments in two ways: in response to someone else's request (or, if they are higher up in the organization, it might be direction or a command) *or* by making an offer to someone. When the other person accepts your offer they usually consider it a commitment on your part...But here is the problem: if the request is unclear and you say yes anyway, they will still assume you have committed to do exactly what they had asked, only you won't be clear on all the specifics of what they want.
- c. Unclear or incomplete requests, offers and commitments are often the source of unintended breaches of trust.
- d. Requests and responses are part of an action cycle that gets work done.

- e. People often “soften” their requests, because they believe that direct requests are “impolite.”
- f. Commit-to-Commit: “I need to check on something before I can commit. I will let you know by...”
- g. *“Half the promises people say were never kept were never made.”* – Edgar Watson Howe ‘
- h. Revoking or renegotiating a commitment should be done as soon as you realize you will not be able to fulfill it.
- i. Here are some ways to build and maintain trust in this area, even in the face of constantly changing priorities and opposing demands:
  - Before you respond to a request make sure you can do what is asked.
  - If someone makes a request of you that isn’t clear, ask for clarification.
  - When you make offers to other people, be clear about what it is you will do and possibly what you won’t do, as well.
  - Listen and determine what kind of conversations the people you are talking to think they are having.
  - With your team, create a common understanding and language on requests, offers and commitments.

**Ch. 5 – Competence: *I know I can do this. I don’t know if I can do that.***

*“Often the desire to appear competent impedes our ability to become competent, because we are more anxious to display our knowledge than to learn what we do not know.”* – Magdeleine Sable

- a. Competence is the assessment that you have the ability to do what you are doing or propose to do.
- b. Being competent does *not* mean being perfect. Part of doing something well is knowing what you don’t know, being willing to learn, and to ask for help when you need it.
- c. Building Trust: Competence
  - Make a list to clarify to yourself and others the areas you claim competence in.
  - Define the standards by which your competence is assessed.
  - When you don’t know something, say so and ask for help, clarification, training, or whatever you need to perform what was asked.
  - Ask for feedback from others about your performance.

## **Ch. 6 – Care: We’re in this together.**

*The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say “I.” They don’t think “I.” They think “we;” they think “team.” They understand their job is to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but “we” gets the credit. This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done. Peter Drucker*

- a. Care is the assessment that you have the other person’s interest in mind as well as your own when you make decisions and take actions.
- b. Building Trust: Care
  - Some degree of intimacy is fundamental to the assessment of care in a relationship. Think of the people you believe have your interests at heart. In every case I will bet they have in some way honestly shared with you some of what is important to them – their values, hopes, dreams, and/or concerns. If you want people to believe you are concerned about their interests, listen to what is important to them and tell them what is important to you.
  - Listen to others, to what they say and what they are trying to communicate.
  - Before you speak or act, ask yourself the following questions. Will what I am about to say or do serve the people I work with, work for, my employees and my company, as well as me? Why do I believe it will serve them?
  - Ask the people you work with what their interest and concerns are, and point out where you both have common interests.
  - Tell the people you work with what your hopes and desires are for the work you’re doing together. Ask them theirs.
  - If you manage people, clearly tell them what you expect from them and what they can expect from you.
  - When you make decisions or take action, let people know you understand how it affects them, even if the effect is adverse.

## **Ch. 7 – Confronting Distrust**

*“Mistrust doubles the cost of doing business.” – John O. Whitney*

- a. Distrust is a choice not to make yourself vulnerable to another person’s actions.
- b. When we distrust, we engage in strategies to protect ourselves. Those strategies inevitably impede the ability to get good work done and this is part of the cost of distrust in the workplace.
- c. [Tony] Simons uses the term “behavioral integrity” to describe a particular set of behaviors I have called reliability (keeping promises) and sincerity (demonstrating espoused values). He notes, “Employee perceptions of their managers’ integrity—both keeping promises and demonstrating espoused values—were strongly linked to profitability. Employees’ belief in their managers’ integrity, and their trust in managers,

have a lot more impact on profits than more traditional issues like employee 'satisfaction' or even 'commitment.'" In those organizations where employees believe their managers to be trustworthy, everyone was a beneficiary.

- d. As Simon's studies and other research on employee engagement show, there is direct value in maintaining high trust at work. People who are deeply engaged in their work feel committed to and positive about what they are doing and those they are doing it with. They also tend to derive a positive sense of purpose from their work. Yet people fail to have intentional conversations to build and maintain trust even when they believe trust is low. Instead they pretend outwardly that trust exists even though they know it doesn't.
- e. Trust Check
  - What do you mean when you say you don't trust a particular person?
  - If you were to have a conversation about trust with someone you distrust, what would you want to say?
  - How would you respond if someone you work with told you he didn't trust you?
  - What would you ask them in order to understand their specific concern about your words or actions?
- f. Six Things To Do Before The Conversation [about distrust]
  - i. *Decide if you are willing* to talk to the person about it by asking yourself the following questions:
    - What might I lose by having the conversation?
    - What will I lose by continuing to distrust this person?
    - How will it benefit me, my team, and my organization to work this out so I can trust this person?
  - ii. *Identify the assessment(s)* you are concerned with:
    - Sincerity
    - Reliability
    - Competence
    - Care
  - iii. *Define the "standard"* you are using. The point of this step is to realize that the other person may well have different standards than you. If this is so, then you can focus your conversation to arrive at a shared understanding.
  - iv. *Identify the specific actions or behaviors that have led to your assessment of distrust.* This is a critical step. Telling the person specifically what they do and/or say (or don't do/say) that you interpret as untrustworthy can help them understand how to rebuild trust with you.

- v. Determine what you need from them in order for them to regain your trust. What can they do that you will address your concerns and reassure you that you can begin or resume trusting them? Think it through from the other person's perspective. Is this something they have the capacity to do? Can they do it in the context of their work environment? How can you help them regain your trust?
  - vi. *Ask the other person* if he/she would be willing to have a conversation with you about something that concerns you. Agree on a time and place that are mutually convenient and private. Avoid blindsiding them by bringing this up as part of a conversation about something else. You want the other person to be calm, thoughtful, and open to listening to your concerns, and not defensive.
- g. Five Steps to the Conversation [about distrust]
- i. Start the conversation by expressing your desire to fully trust the person.  
For example: "In order to get good work done here we need to really trust each other."
  - ii. Describe the specific actions or behaviors that have impacted your trust in this person using neutral language. Tell them that as a result you do not fully trust their reliability, competence, sincerity or care at this time.  
For example: "The last three times you took on assignments for the team you didn't get them done in the time you committed to. All three were at least a week late. Because of this, at this point I don't trust you will meet your commitments in the future." *Talk about what they have done, not what they are.*
  - iii. Ask them to tell you how they see the situation you described. Their response to this may be to attempt to excuse their behavior and/or blame other people or circumstances, or possibly even blame you. *No matter what they say at this point, the best thing you can do is listen without interrupting, contradicting, or attacking until they have finished.* Consider what they have said and respond honestly.
  - iv. Describe what they can do to regain your trust.
  - v. Ask them if they will commit to do what is needed to regain your trust.
- h. Whatever conversations you have with someone whose behavior has led to your distrust, ultimately you will need to find a way to forgive him or her for the breach or betrayal of your trust. Forgiveness means withdrawing your attention from the past and focusing on what you are doing with him or her now and in the future. When you forgive, you in no way change the past – but you sure do change the future. Or, as Lily Tomlin put it, "Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past."

### **Ch. 8 – How to Communicate When Trust Has Been Betrayed**

The only known antidote for betrayal of someone's trust is to *acknowledge* it and apologize for it.

## **Ch. 10 - Putting It Into Practice**

Building, maintaining and restoring the trust of those you work with takes an understanding of how people judge trustworthiness; attention to your language and actions related to these assessments of trust; and an intention to be a trusted leader, colleague, manager, and employee.