

# Trust's Many Facets

By Henry S. Givray



**T**rust is foundational to building strong relationships and achieving results. Without trust, small issues become big issues and ineffective relationships lead to inefficiencies, wasted time and energy, conflict, missed opportunities and ultimately failure. With trust, small issues become non-issues and big issues become opportunities for mutual problem solving and learning. Trust deepens relationships and unleashes tremendous human potential. As a result, trust boosts productivity, lowers costs and improves individual and organizational performance.

It is hard to imagine anyone arguing with my opening paragraph. For most, the word trust evokes a strong, visceral reaction. We recall feelings of security, contentment, connection and certainty in relationships and situations where trust abounds. And we vividly remember our insecurity, suspicion, hesitancy and vulnerability when trust is absent.

So what is trust? Former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, said, "You know it when you feel it." While that is true, his answer is not very satisfying. Yes, there is probably general agreement on what trust looks and feels like. But digging a bit deeper reveals nuanced and varying definitions that could be highly personal and based on one's own interpretation and experience.

For example, try this exercise. What do you **most** mean when you say, "I trust you"?

- (a) I believe that your opinion or judgment has a high likelihood to be accurate.
- (b) I have faith in an expected result or outcome because it has your name on it.
- (c) I know that you are principled, truthful, honest and consistent in words and actions.
- (d) I defer to you because of your position, knowledge or experience.
- (e) I have unwavering allegiance and devotion to you.

If you answered (a), you tend to see trust in terms of *credibility*. If you picked (b), *confidence* is what you most likely link to trust. Selecting (c) means you equate trust with *integrity*. And

if you chose (d) or (e), you associate trust with *respect* or *loyalty*, respectively. These are trust's many facets, each with its own subtle distinctions and applications dependent upon who is making the statement, for whom it is intended, and the situation's context.

So why is it important to recognize that trust encompasses multiple facets and that each of us has a natural inclination to one of them? First, dissecting such a complex human phenomenon leads to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of it. That combined with self-awareness

around our natural inclination related to trust helps us more accurately interpret the actions and intentions of others. It also helps us communicate our own expectations when it comes to earning and giving trust, especially in different situations and contexts. Moreover, knowing trust's different facets helps us avoid the trap of an "all-or-nothing" approach when a specific, time-defined desired outcome is the goal.

For example, if I am in charge of a tight-deadline, high-stakes project, I need people I trust in terms of *confidence* and *credibility* on my team. For this specific project, I am probably less worried and may not have the luxury to be concerned about the other facets of trust. On the other hand, in assessing a new attorney with whom I hope to build a lasting relationship, *integrity*, *credibility* and *respect*, in that order, are at the top of my list.

Trust is like a diamond. A diamond is one of the most precious gems. Trust is one of the most cherished human conditions. A diamond has great value. Trust creates value to both the recipient and giver. We use diamond-coated tools to perform some of the most difficult cutting tasks. Trust can overcome stubborn obstacles, loosen immovable logjams and resolve fierce conflicts. We say that a diamond is forever. Trust builds and nurtures meaningful, enduring relationships. The quality of a diamond is dependent upon the cut of its facets, which reflect its brilliance, fire, sparkle and luster. As noted above, trust also has facets. Probably the highest honor and praise another person can bestow upon you is to utter the words, "I trust you absolutely." That means that you have elicited confidence, established credibility, exemplified integrity, gained respect and built loyalty – you have earned trust in all of its facets.





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The phenomenon of trust has been extensively explored, researched and written about. In fact, if you type “trust” in the books section of Amazon.com, you get thousands of hits. Many of these books are quite comprehensive, and you could spend literally years exploring the concept. But renowned leadership scholar and author, James O’Toole, described it simply and clearly, “Trust is an outcome of actions and behaviors.” I could not agree more. In fact, over the years, I have developed my own list of trust-building actions and behaviors. The seven below are timeless and without qualification – they work in all situations with all people. Embodying and adhering to them faithfully and without compromise will earn you the trust of others in all its facets and in virtually all contexts of your personal and professional life.

- 1. Do the right thing versus what is convenient, expedient, popular or personally beneficial.** Decide to do the right thing for the right reasons. Then do it in the right way.
- 2. Be clear, straight and consistent in your words, decisions, actions and dealings with others.** Confront difficult or uncomfortable situations with fairness, openness and objectivity balanced with diplomacy and empathy. Say what you mean and mean what you say. And always tell the truth, whether you are delivering good news or bad.
- 3. Dedicate yourself to lifelong learning and personal excellence.** Work diligently and tenaciously to continually build skills, accumulate knowledge, acquire experience, and gain new insights and perspectives in order to achieve high-quality results, solve difficult problems and produce best outcomes.
- 4. Always, always keep your word, no matter what.** Do what you say you are going to do, when you said you were going to do it. No excuses, no exceptions.
- 5. Go out of your way to serve.** Embrace the tenet that service to others is one of life’s truest meanings, highest honors and greatest obligations.

- 6. See others as principled and well-intentioned.** Lacking indisputable evidence to the contrary, always maintain this stance in your dealings with those in your network of relationships, including colleagues, customers, partners and service providers.
- 7. Connect your actions, decisions, choices and behaviors to whom you are at the core and the values and beliefs you have communicated to others.** Do this consistently, deeply and genuinely – every day and without compromise.

While it may not always be practical, possible or even necessary, we should strive to earn trust absolutely in our relationships. By doing so, we will forge deeper and more meaningful ones. This in turn, will expand our influence and capacity to inspire. From there, we are better able to produce tangible outcomes with and through others in order to create value for the people and the organizations we serve. For these reasons and more, earning trust – in any and all of its facets – offers us unbounded potential to achieve enduring success and experience fulfillment in all dimensions of our lives. •

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**Henry S. Givray** is Chairman of the Board of Directors of SmithBucklin, the association management and services company more organizations turn to than any other. He served as SmithBucklin President & CEO from 2002 to 2015. Henry is a dedicated, ongoing student of leadership, committed to speaking and writing as a way to teach and give back. His insights and ideas on leadership have been prominently featured in business books and top national news media. Henry has been invited to speak at numerous association conferences, corporate meetings and educational forums that were attended by diverse audiences. Recognizing that growing leaders from within is essential to an organization’s enduring success and vitality, Henry created and facilitates two intensive, high-impact leadership learning programs. The SmithBucklin Leadership Learning Forum is a nine-month program for top performing employees at various levels within the company. The SmithBucklin Leadership Institute is a six-month experience for board members of SmithBucklin client associations.