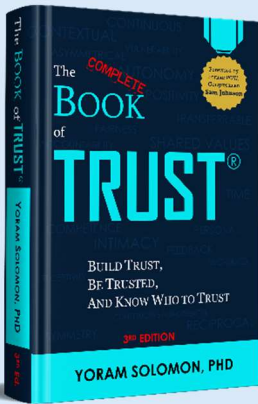# The Book of Trust

3rd Edition
By Yoram Solomon, Ph.D., MBA, LL.B.

Build Trust,
Be Trusted,
and Know Who to Trust

What is Trust?

Trust is the willingness to accept potential negative consequences when giving control over something valuable to another party, with the expectation that they will act to avoid these negative consequences. This definition sets the stage for a discussion on the complex dynamics of trust, which include risk, fear, safety, and danger.

Trust is essential because it reduces fear, which is often based on the perception of risk. By trusting, one expects safety from potential dangers, mitigating the inherent risks involved in any interaction or relationship. The text provides a clear breakdown of these elements, emphasizing that trust operates beyond simple transactions and extends into all aspects of human interaction, including personal relationships, business dealings, and societal functions.

Furthermore, the chapter critiques traditional definitions of trust for their inadequacy in capturing the full scope of its impact and dynamics. Instead, it offers a more nuanced understanding that considers trust as a crucial element in achieving efficiency, innovation, and productivity within any organization or group. Trust is presented not just as a social lubricant but as a strategic element that enhances collaboration and effectiveness.

Who Needs Trust?

The chapter discusses the universal necessity of trust across various domains of life, emphasizing its importance for everyone, from individuals in their personal relationships to professionals in their work environments. Trust is presented as a fundamental component not only in personal interactions but also in maintaining effective teams, successful leadership, and efficient organizational operations.

The chapter elaborates on how trust impacts innovation, productivity, and the general atmosphere within a team or company. It highlights that trust is crucial for creating an environment where team members are motivated, engaged, and willing to contribute creatively. Additionally, the chapter points out that trust influences how team members interact with each other, with a focus on the positive outcomes of a high-trust environment, including better collaboration and reduced conflict.

Moreover, the text discusses the repercussions of a lack of trust, such as decreased morale, reduced cooperation, and a generally less effective team dynamic. The necessity of trust extends beyond professional settings, impacting personal relationships and broader societal interactions. This underscores the point that everyone, regardless of their role or context, benefits from building and sustaining trust.
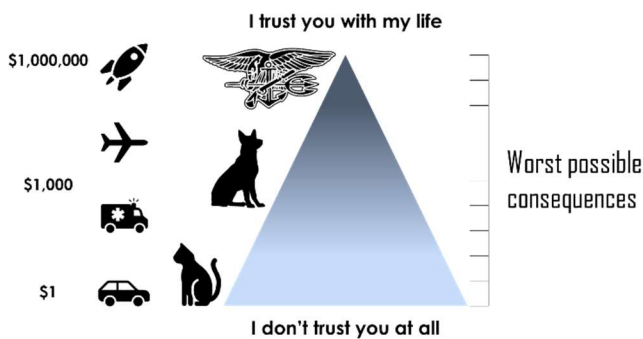
CONTENTS

The 8 Laws of Trust

The 1st Law of Trust: Trust is Continuous

Trust is not a binary, yes-or-no state, but rather a continuous spectrum. This foundational idea asserts that trust varies in degree depending on the situation and the level of risk involved. The chapter illustrates this by asking how willing people would be to lend money—starting with small amounts and increasing to larger sums. As the requested amount grows, fewer people are willing to lend, demonstrating that trust increases or decreases based on the perceived risk and the consequences of the trust being misplaced.

A key analogy used in this chapter compares trust to pole vaulting in the Olympics: while it may appear to be a binary outcome of either clearing the bar or not, the actual level of trust required can vary, similar to adjusting the height of the bar depending on the circumstances. This sets the stage for understanding trust as a dynamic and adjustable element within relationships, rather than a fixed or static attribute. This concept is vital for developing strategies to manage trust effectively in various contexts, from personal relationships to professional environments .

The 2nd Law of Trust: Trust is Contextual

This principle emphasizes that trust varies significantly depending on the specific situation or context. The chapter illustrates this by asking the reader to consider different scenarios in which they might trust someone to perform one action but not another, underscoring that trust is not absolute but tailored to particular circumstances.

A vivid example provided in the chapter involves a social interaction at an event, where trustworthiness in driving someone's car is considered. Initially, the car owner is unwilling to allow a new acquaintance to drive his car, but the context changes dramatically when the need arises to transport the owner to a hospital in an emergency. Suddenly, the trust level changes, and the owner permits the new acquaintance to drive his car, demonstrating how quickly trust can shift based on situational changes.

The narrative explores the dynamic nature of trust, explaining that trust should be evaluated with a clear understanding of the specific actions and contexts involved. This contextual nature of trust helps in making more informed decisions about when and whom to trust, depending on the varying circumstances encountered.

The 3rd Law of Trust: Trust is Personal

Trust is inherently individual and varies significantly between people, even within the same group or team. It emphasizes that trust cannot be universally quantified across a group as it is not a collective experience but an individual one.

The chapter explains that the level of trust one person holds for another is not identical to the trust they might hold for someone else, even within the same circumstances. This law highlights the individuality of trust relationships, pointing out that each trust relationship is unique and dependent on the individuals involved. The personal nature of trust suggests that actions or behaviors that build trust with one person might not necessarily apply or work with another.

This insight is critical for understanding how to approach trust-building efforts. It requires recognizing and respecting individual differences in perceptions and expectations concerning trust.

The 4th Law of Trust: Trust is Asymmetrical

This law highlights that trust between two people does not automatically imply mutual or equal trust. Each individual's trust in the other can vary greatly based on personal perspectives and experiences. The chapter discusses how one person's trust in another may influence their actions, such as granting autonomy or responsibility, but this does not guarantee that the trust will be reciprocated in the same measure.

This asymmetry in trust is significant because it emphasizes that the dynamics of trust are not merely about how much one trusts another, but also how trust is perceived and acted upon by each party. The law challenges the assumption that trust is a simple two-way street and instead presents it as a complex interaction where trust levels can be independent and influenced by different factors for each person involved.

The chapter also suggests that while trust can encourage reciprocal trust-building behaviors, the actual trust levels are independently determined, reflecting a deeper and

more nuanced understanding of trust relationships. This complex interplay is crucial for effectively managing personal and professional relationships, as it acknowledges that trust must be approached with sensitivity to individual differences and situations.

The 5th Law of Trust: Trust is Transferrable

This means that trust can extend beyond direct personal experiences with someone and can be influenced by the trust others place in that person. For instance, if several trusted individuals endorse someone's trustworthiness, this can increase our own willingness to trust that person, even if we do not know them personally.

The chapter explores scenarios such as receiving a friend request on Facebook from someone unknown but who shares many mutual friends. The presence of these mutual friends, especially those whom one trusts, can significantly influence the decision to accept the friend request. This transfer of trust is not limited to personal relationships but extends to professional and online interactions as well.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses the limitations and potential risks of transferable trust, such as the possibility of misplaced trust when relying heavily on others' judgments without direct experience or sufficient evidence. This highlights the importance of a cautious and discerning approach to relying on transferable trust, especially in contexts where the consequences of misplaced trust can be significant.
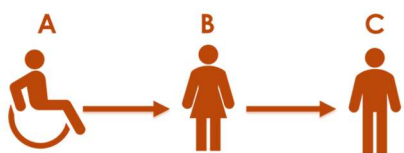
The 6th Law of Trust: Trust is Reciprocal

The chapter discusses how trust influences and is influenced by reciprocal actions between individuals. It explains that trust is a dynamic and mutual process: when you trust someone, they are more likely to act in a trustworthy manner because of cognitive dissonance, the psychological discomfort one feels when their beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent. Conversely, mistrust can lead to untrustworthy behaviors.
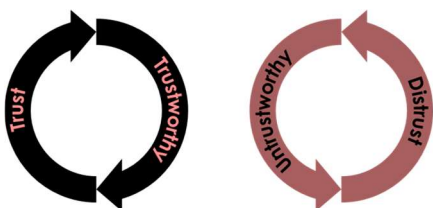
The chapter uses a simple narrative to illustrate this: a child learning to walk looks to their parent after a fall, seeking cues on how to react. If the parent shows trust and encouragement, the child is likely to try again, reinforcing trust through their actions. Similarly, in professional or personal relationships, showing trust can encourage responsible and trustworthy behavior in others, while suspicion can foster the opposite.

This law underscores that the act of trusting can actively shape the behavior and trustworthiness of the people around us, creating a feedback loop where trust begets trust, and mistrust begets mistrust. This reciprocal nature of trust is pivotal in understanding how trust works and can be cultivated or eroded in relationships .

The 7th Law of Trust: Trust is Dynamic

Trust is not a static attribute but one that changes over time through interactions between people. This law of trust illustrates that every interaction influences the trust level either positively or negatively, and that even the absence of interactions can affect trust.

The chapter explains that trust tends to diminish over time without positive reinforcement or continued interactions. This decline happens as a natural defense mechanism to protect oneself from the potential deterioration of the other person's trustworthiness that might not be directly observable. However, during interactions, trust levels are most susceptible to change, based on the behaviors and perceived intentions of the individuals involved.

This dynamic nature of trust underscores the importance of regular, positive, and engaging interactions to maintain or enhance trust. The chapter encourages the reader to consider trust as something that requires ongoing effort and attention, much like maintaining a friendship or a professional relationship, where continuous engagement and responsiveness are crucial for sustaining trust.

The 8th Law of Trust: Trust is Two-Sided

Trust is fundamentally two-sided, involving both the trustor's general willingness to trust (trustability) and the trustee's specific characteristics that make them trustworthy. The chapter emphasizes that trustability is the perception and general inclination to trust, which can apply broadly across many relationships, while trustworthiness is the specific assessment of an individual's trust factors in any given interaction.

This two-sided nature of trust indicates that while you can influence someone's perception of your trustworthiness through your actions and behavior, you have little control

over their overall trustability, which is shaped by broader experiences and attitudes towards trust in general. The chapter suggests that building trust effectively requires understanding both sides of the equation: enhancing your trustworthiness in the eyes of others while recognizing the limitations imposed by their inherent trustability.

This concept also leads into a broader discussion on the dynamic and relative nature of trust, illustrating that trust levels between two people are influenced by each person's experiences and the interaction between their personal trustability and perceived trustworthiness. This relationship dynamic underscores the complexity of trust and the importance of ongoing efforts to maintain and enhance trustworthiness in all relationships.

A New Model of Trust

The chapter introduces an innovative framework for understanding trust dynamics in various relationships, emphasizing its evolving and situational nature. It outlines that trust is dynamic, adjusting over time and influenced by every interaction, and that it is relative, suggesting that trust levels are not absolute but vary across different contexts and relationships. The model comprises six components divided into two groups: 'who you are' (competence, personality compatibility, and symmetry) and 'what you do' (positivity, time, and intimacy), describing how these elements impact the formation and dissolution of trust.
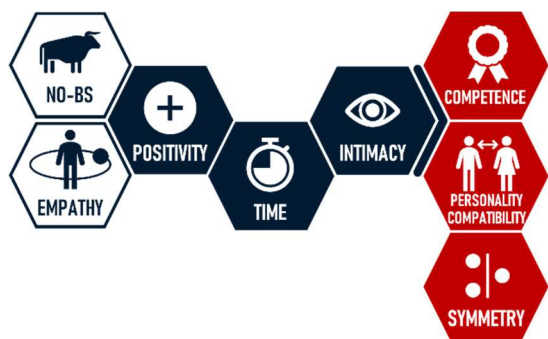
Trust Component 1: Competence

The chapter outlines the concept of competence as a foundational aspect of trust. Competence is defined as the technical or professional ability to perform a task or role effectively. The chapter stresses that competence is specific to tasks and is an objective measure that can often be verified through certifications or past performance.

It highlights that people may excel in certain areas while lacking skills in others, and this does not detract from their

overall trustworthiness within their areas of expertise. The chapter also discusses the challenge of assessing competence when the evaluator lacks similar expertise, suggesting reliance on third-party validations or the reputations within specific fields.

Moreover, the chapter discusses the evolving nature of competence in the workplace, noting that leaders today often serve more as facilitators rather than being the most knowledgeable in technical matters. This shift requires a new approach to assessing and building competence within teams, including trusting external validations more heavily than personal assessments.

Trust Component 2: Personality Compatibility

The chapter delves into how personality compatibility is crucial for establishing trust. It points out that trust is not solely determined by objective measures of competence but also involves emotional and subjective elements. Personality compatibility between individuals can greatly influence trust levels, as it encompasses how well personalities align or complement each other in different contexts.

The chapter also illustrates the concept with scenarios where people feel an instant connection due to shared backgrounds or interests, which fosters trust. Additionally, it discusses the variability of personality compatibility, emphasizing that it is viewed from the perspective of the person desiring to trust. The chapter also addresses how mismatched personalities can significantly hinder trust, despite professional competence or other favorable conditions.

Trust Component 3: Symmetry/Fairness

The chapter focuses on the idea of symmetry as a crucial element of trust. This component is situational and addresses whether individuals or groups are aligned or at odds in certain situations. Symmetry in trust relationships pertains to the notion of 'being on the same side', reflecting shared goals or values, and mutual understanding. It emphasizes the importance of fairness within this alignment and explores scenarios where despite competence and personality compatibility, trust may not flourish if parties perceive themselves to be on opposing sides. The concept of symmetry extends to shared secrets or experiences, which can foster a unique bond and enhance trust, highlighting that even knowledge can influence trust dynamics.

Trust Component 4: Positivity

The chapter explores positivity as a vital component in building and maintaining trust. Positivity here refers to the emotional tone during interactions, focusing on how a positive demeanor can significantly influence trust dynamics. The chapter emphasizes that positive interactions are more likely to enhance trust, while negative interactions can damage it severely. This dynamic is linked to the immediate changes positivity can bring to the existing trust components such as competence, personality compatibility, and symmetry. Positivity is depicted as essential for the successful modulation of trust, particularly through the reinforcement of positive experiences and the reduction of negative ones.

Trust Component 5: Time

This chapter emphasizes the role of time in building trust. It describes trust as a dynamic component that is influenced by the length and frequency of interactions. Trust can deepen over prolonged and frequent interactions, as these allow individuals to better understand each other's intentions, reliability, and competencies.

A significant part of the chapter is dedicated to storytelling, illustrating the importance of time through a detailed account of a Navy SEAL team operation. It underscores how trust built over time is crucial for high-stakes situations where immediate and instinctive team coordination is necessary.

The chapter also discusses how trust declines over time without interaction, serving as a defense mechanism to prevent vulnerability in changing circumstances. This aspect highlights that maintaining trust requires ongoing effort and engagement.

Trust Component 6: Intimacy

The chapter discusses intimacy as a key element in building trust. It emphasizes that intimacy in this context refers to the depth of connection and understanding between individuals, not necessarily physical closeness. The chapter explains that intimacy allows for a nuanced understanding of another person's actions, intentions, and motivations, which can significantly enhance the level of trust between them. Intimacy is achieved through shared experiences, vulnerability, and openness, which help in developing a strong, trusting relationship. This trust component is particularly vital in relationships where a high degree of reliability and mutual understanding is crucial.

Measuring Trust

The chapter discusses the complexities and challenges associated with quantifying trust. It emphasizes that trust is inherently relative, personal, contextual, and asymmetrical, making it difficult to measure trust in a definitive manner across relationships or even within a single relationship. The chapter suggests that instead of trying to measure trust directly, one should assess the presence and levels of the six trustworthiness components (such as competence, symmetry, and intimacy), which can offer more concrete and measurable indicators of trust levels. Additionally, observing symptoms of trust or its absence can provide insights into the practical outcomes of trust levels. These might include the degree of autonomy granted, the level of bureaucracy, or visibility into financial decisions, which all reflect underlying trust dynamics.

Trust in Teams

The chapter delves into the concept that the level of trust within a team can be described as the average of the lowest levels of trust that members have towards one another. This average affects members' vulnerability and, thus, their ability to contribute effectively to the team. The chapter emphasizes the importance of addressing any trust deficiencies, especially in cases where team members do not have equal exposure to each other, which often occurs in modern work environments where team members might be dispersed across different locations.

Furthermore, the chapter discusses how trust dynamics are affected by team members' dependency on each other. If a member doesn't rely on another's work quality, their level of trust may not be as critical. Conversely, when dependencies are high, trust becomes crucial. It also explores how project managers and team leaders should work on building trust within their teams as part of their role, emphasizing the profound impact that trust has on project and team performance.

A 7-Step Process to Improve Trustworthiness

The chapter offers a structured approach to enhancing one's trustworthiness. The seven steps are divided into three phases: Diagnose, Plan, and Execute. The process begins by recognizing there is a problem in trust within a specific relationship and identifying a detrimental behavior that needs change. The planning phase involves selecting

a new habit to replace the negative behavior and creating a detailed, actionable plan using the S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based) framework to ensure success. Execution involves the disciplined application of the new habit over a period of around 90 days, with continuous monitoring and adjustment, to make the change lasting and effective.

- 👫 **Identify Critical Dependency**
- 👎 **Identify Negative Behavior**
- 👍 **Define Good Habit**
- 🎯 **Create SMART Action Plan**
- 📋 **Develop Stickiness**
- 👮 **Appoint Accountability Partner**
- ♻️ **Form Habit, Repeat**

Step 1: Identify One Relationship

The chapter outlines the initial step in improving trustworthiness, which involves choosing a single relationship to focus on. This step emphasizes the importance of selecting a relationship that is crucial to you, where you have a direct impact, and where there is a perceived lack of trust. The rationale behind focusing on one relationship is to manage efforts effectively and leverage trust-building successes to enhance trust in other areas gradually. By concentrating on one key relationship, the efforts to improve trust become more manageable and impactful. This targeted approach helps in setting a solid foundation for broader trust-building initiatives across multiple relationships.

Step 2: Identify One Bad Thing You Are Doing

The chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing detrimental behaviors in oneself that may be eroding trust within a relationship. This step focuses on identifying the most harmful behavior you are exhibiting in a particular relationship where trust improvement is needed. The rationale for this focus is grounded in the principle that negative behaviors typically have a stronger impact on trust perceptions than positive behaviors.

This chapter argues that it is more impactful to stop a negative behavior than to start a new positive one, based on the disproportionate weight negative experiences tend to carry in human psychology. It also discusses the importance of perception over reality in trust relationships,

where how the behavior is perceived by the other person matters more than the intent or truth behind the actions.

The identification process for this harmful behavior involves introspection, asking direct questions to the other person involved, or getting feedback from a third party if direct conversation is not feasible. The chapter underscores the necessity of acknowledging and addressing these perceptions, even if they are based on misunderstandings, as they shape the trust landscape significantly.

Step 3: Choose One New Habit to Work on

This chapter focuses on selecting a new positive habit to replace a detrimental behavior identified in the previous step. This step is crucial because it addresses directly the negative action impacting trust in a specific relationship. The new habit should effectively counteract the bad behavior to restore or build trust. It can range from stopping a negative action to introducing a more constructive behavior that achieves the same goal without the negative implications. The process involves considering why the bad behavior was adopted and ensuring the new habit is practical and sustainable, helping to gradually reshape perceptions and rebuild trust.

Step 4: Develop a S.M.A.R.T. Action Plan

This chapter describes how to create a structured plan to transform a newly selected positive habit into a consistent behavior using the S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-based) framework. This chapter emphasizes the necessity of crafting a detailed action plan, arguing that merely knowing what to do only gives a 10% chance of success, while a structured plan can substantially increase the probability of achieving the desired outcome.

The chapter also highlights that focusing on process over results is crucial. The action plan should be specific, clearly defining how and when the new habit will be practiced; measurable, to track progress; achievable, ensuring the goal is realistic; relevant, aligning with broader objectives; and time-based, with a clear timeline. By adhering to these principles, the plan becomes actionable and effective, increasing the likelihood of the new habit becoming second nature.

Step 5: Make it Stick

This chapter details strategies to ensure that a new positive habit becomes automatic. This step is crucial for making behavioral changes sustainable over time. The chapter highlights that simply choosing and planning a

new habit isn't enough; one must integrate this habit into daily life until it becomes second nature. It discusses using specific techniques to reduce the friction of adopting new habits and incorporating extrinsic motivators to reinforce behavior change. Examples include setting reminders or linking the new habit to existing routines, which help maintain consistency until the habit is fully integrated. This approach ensures that the habit remains in practice long enough to solidify and become part of one's automatic behaviors.

Step 6: Accountability Partner

This chapter discusses the importance of having an accountability partner to increase the likelihood of achieving goals. According to research by the American Society for Training and Development, merely knowing your goal gives you a 10% chance of success, which rises to 65% if you commit to achieving it with an accountability partner. The chapter stresses the need for the accountability partner to be someone other than the person you want to be trusted by, as this setup reduces bias and increases the effectiveness of the accountability mechanism. This external accountability is crucial as it involves regular check-ins that keep you on track toward forming new, trust-building habits over approximately 90 days.

Step 7: Consistency of Forming a Habit

This chapter discusses the development of habits through consistent actions and accountability. It emphasizes the need for a habit to become so ingrained that it becomes automatic and less effortful than discontinuing it. Various techniques are suggested to aid in habit formation, including using an accountability partner, logging progress, and adjusting strategies based on feedback. Additionally, it considers the impact of extrinsic motivation in initially driving the behavior change until the new habit is established. The duration for a new habit to become automatic can vary widely, influenced by the nature of the habit, frequency of practice, and individual differences.

Habits of the Most Trusted People

While acknowledging that trust is relative, there are ten habits that seem consistent to many of the trusted people in different roles. Here are the 10 habits highlighted in the chapter as essential for the most trusted people:

- Empathy
- Own your side of (mis)communications
- Reduce your sensitivity

- Say what you mean and mean what you say
- Give autonomy and reduce bureaucracy
- Accountability
- Sharing vs. Communicating
- Humor, Sarcasm, and Feedback
- Start with Trust
- Plus One

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