

## Building Higher Trust 37 Degrees of Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Most people recognize that there are degrees of trust; you can trust someone a little or a lot.

Many people use the word “trust” as if it is a singular concept. You either trust someone or you don't. A common perception is that the word means one thing, as Webster puts it, "Trust - belief in the honesty, reliability, etc. of another." The "etc." in that definition actually covers a lot of ground.

I believe trust is far more complex than can be captured in a single concept. Picture an infinite variety of types of trust and numerous levels of trust for each type.

We might consider the different shades of trust to be as plentiful as the different shades of color, and the intensities of trust going from fully saturated to almost transparent. I will share six categories of trust with some specific examples.

Notice that in every single category there has been a significant degradation of trust since the start of 2020. The world is a very different place these days.

Recognize this is not an exhaustive treatment of the types of trust, but rather some typical concepts to illustrate the variety and complexity of trust.

### 1. Trust Between People

Between any two people who know each other, there is some balance of trust, rather like a bank account balance. The variety of trusting relationships are nearly infinite. Examples are easy to describe, like: parent-child, spouse, boss, peers, people who you have not met but know online, and employees.

In every pair of individuals there exist two threads of trust: one is person A's trust in person B, the other thread is the reverse of that. The levels of trust from one person to the other are never exactly duplicated in reverse.

The level of trust fluctuates on a moment-to-moment basis as we go about our daily interactions. It is like there are tiny deposits or withdrawals going on whenever these two people interact in any way (even virtually).

Sometimes a special circumstance allows a large deposit. Often small withdrawals can become large ones if not handled correctly. I call this "The Ratchet Effect," meaning trust is usually built up with many small clicks of the ratchet but can quickly spin back to zero if the pawl becomes disengaged. Here is a [brief video that explains The Ratchet Effect](#).

## **2. Trust in Systems or Agencies**

We have some level of faith in a myriad of supportive groups at all times. We often take these things for granted. We trust (or don't trust) governments at all levels to take care of our society. Other examples in this category are easy to name. For example, we have a level of trust with the military, FDA, banking, the Stock Market, the media.

Trust in the media is particularly interesting because a lack of trust in this system has huge impacts in our trust in all the other agencies. Data shows that trust in the media in the United States is low at 45%, according to the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer. This means that most people do not believe what they are being told is happening in the world, at least not fully. The data also shows that many people suspend judgment on what they will believe until they have received the same information at least three to five times from different trusted sources.

## **3. Trust in products and supply chains**

Our trust in products is also something we take for granted until we experience a product failure that grabs our attention. Many of us did not recognize how fragile and complex the various supply chains were until they were broken due to the COVID Virus.

When you stop and think of the trust we place in products of all kinds, it is staggering. Consider the following tiny subset of products we rely on: medications, automobiles, airplanes, tools, internet, and elevators. How often do you worry when getting into an elevator that the cable will break?

## **4. Trust in Concepts**

We all have various levels of trust with certain concepts or ideals and rarely stop to think about them. For example, we might trust in: the power of prayer, positive thinking, Murphy's Law, supply and demand, the value of education, or living by values.

These concepts help define our relationship to the world and form our total world view. They were programmed into us by the forces impacting us during our formative years.

They govern our sense of what is right and wrong and are the basis of our moral and ethical perspectives on life.

## **5. Trust in Organizations**

We can describe some highly tangible examples of trust in institutions. For example, your level of trust in your own organization, the Red Cross, your grocery store, your auto mechanic, a hospital, the insurance company.

Any time we interface with any organization, we are relying on or modifying our perception of our trust in that entity. We do not stop and think about it, but our level of confidence is fluctuating based on every interaction, large or small.

For example, if the insurance company finds some fine print in your contract that states you cannot be compensated for your water-damaged house because you could not prove it was specifically caused by "the **weight** of ice and snow," you begin to wonder why bother to have insurance in the first place. In other words, you no longer trust that what you think you purchased is actually what you purchased.

I know a physician who went into a hospital for a routine knee operation and had his leg amputated above the knee by mistake. Imagine the trust betrayal he felt when he awoke from the anesthesia.

## **6. Trust in Infrastructure**

Many of the items in this article are things we take for granted. Trust in infrastructure is probably the thing we take for granted the most. We turn on the light switch and expect there to be electricity. We turn on the faucet and expect potable water to come out.

We expect not to have any deep potholes in the road (although some of us get disappointed on that one). Public transportation is expected to be there on time barring some kind of natural disaster.

We expect the school bus to come by to pick up our kids. When we drive over a bridge, we rarely worry that it will collapse and kill us.

All of the infrastructure items are things we just assume will be there whenever we want to use them, and we don't spend energy worrying about them unless there is some kind of emergency situation.

The list could go on forever, and the possibilities for positive or negative trust are infinite. For every situation, there is a unique aspect to the trust that exists between individuals. In addition to different types of trust, there are different degrees or levels of trust, and the variety of these is also infinite.

## Conclusion

The different types of trust are really infinite. We just do not pay attention to the many ways trust is manifest in our lives unless there is some kind of failure. Also, a systemic issue such as COVID 19 can impact how we experience trust across the board.

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