

Building Higher Trust 57 Right Wrongs

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In his timeless book *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M.R. Covey describes 13 behaviors that can enhance trust. Behavior Number four is “Right Wrongs.”

Covey comes at the topic from a point of view of you having made a mistake. To reduce the loss of trust, you must admit your mistake and then go beyond with some form of appropriate restitution.

In this article, I will support Covey’s position and also extend the subject to a trickier area of setting things right when you were not involved in the wrong.

Admitting Mistakes

In an [earlier article](#) in this series, I wrote about the power of admitting mistakes. In most cases, admitting a mistake and apologizing for it actually enhances trust. The reason is that you are not trying to duck the issue or blame it on someone else.

By taking personal responsibility for a mistake and then doing everything you can to atone for it, you are actually manufacturing trust. There are some kinds of mistakes where admitting them is not likely to grow trust.

Two categories of mistakes where admitting them will usually not build higher trust are 1) Making the same mistake repeatedly, and 2) Making a stupid mistake that reveals you are sinister or basically clueless.

Covey stresses that you need to “do what you can to correct the mistake...and then a little more.” Here is a link to an [interview](#) I did with Stephen in 2020 that has an interesting perspective on how the level of trust pre-pandemic can impact how trust progresses during the pandemic and post-pandemic.

Other Wrongs

Going beyond correcting for your personal mistakes gets a little more challenging. Suppose you observe someone else doing something wrong to a third individual. Now you have a dilemma of whether or not to inject yourself to “right the wrong” when it is really not your business.

These cases come up from time to time in our lives, and it takes a good deal of judgment to identify a positive path forward that will demonstrate that you care in the right way. In essence, you are trying to Right a Wrong the Right Way.

In some cases, like safety issues, it is incumbent on you to let someone in authority know what happened. If you do not, there is a chance that the other person could be hurt or killed.

Other times, you might approach the person who made the blunder and suggest that he admit it to the person he wronged and apologize. Whether that is a good or bad way to handle the situation depends on your relationship with both people and the consequences of the wrong.

In extreme cases, you may be forced to reveal to the person who was wronged that something happened out of your control but that might impact the individual. Whether or not you reveal the perpetrator is a matter of judgment.

Conclusion

Righting a wrong that you did to someone else is normally an easy call, although it will be a delicate discussion. Righting a wrong that someone else has caused calls for a lot of judgment and care.

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