

## Building Higher Trust 72 Trust and Ice Cream

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Most people think of trust as one thing. They believe they know what the word means. When I ask groups to define it, they come up with numerous different answers.

Groups typically come up with more than 20 different definitions of trust in about 10 minutes. All the answers are correct, so it means that trust is a lot more complex than most of us realize.

Generic trust, meaning "assured reliance," is easy to understand, but the complexities of the concept can boggle the mind.

### **Taste, Like Trust, is Complex**

Suppose I blindfold you. You trust me enough to put some food in your mouth, and you easily identify it as ice cream. You know the consistency, temperature, and creamy-sweet taste instantly. Then, if I ask you what flavor ice cream you are eating, that may cause you to think a bit. When you cannot see what you are eating or drinking, your taste is not nearly as reliable as you might imagine.

For example, I cannot tell the difference between grape and orange soda when blindfolded. Try it sometime and see if you can. Before doing the test, I was 100% certain that I could easily distinguish between the two. With ice cream, I would likely be unable to tell the difference between cherry and black raspberry.

### **Different Kinds of Trust**

The ice cream metaphor works to describe trust for most people. While you know what trust is generically, the subtle distinctions between various types of trust may be harder to distinguish.

### **Trust is Contextual**

For example, I might trust you to feed my cat, but not trust you to overhaul my car engine. I could easily trust you to get change for a 20-dollar bill. I might think twice about giving you \$10,000 in cash to deposit at the bank.

I might trust you to admit you made a mistake, but not believe you can tell truth from fiction. The logic can get pretty convoluted.

It is impossible to list all the kinds of trust in life. Clearly, trust is not just one thing. We have trust in numerous things every day without giving it a thought. We have some level of trust with every person we know. We may trust the products we use, or we may not.

### **Trust within Organizations**

People may trust the organizations they work for, but that is not always the case. The Edelman Trust Barometer measurements show that in the USA, roughly 55% of people trust business to do right. However, less than 20% of people trust their leaders to tell the truth when faced with a difficult situation.

People would find it hard even to go to a store if they did not trust the infrastructure of roads and bridges. They would not drive if they didn't trust the brakes on their cars.

### **Trust in the Media**

People find it difficult to trust what they hear on the news. They can dial up whatever flavor of news they want to hear at the moment. Trust in the media has consistently gone down for several years. Various news outlets try to undermine each other. They have dropped the pretext of being "unbiased" and admit their news is flavored, just like ice cream.

### **Images and Textures**

The complexity of trust in our lives is daunting, yet people need to trust in things and other people every day. The whole matter of trust becomes a kaleidoscope of images and textures. Everyone experiences trust every day all day long and rarely think about it. The result is that people have confidence or not depending on what it all means personally at that moment.

### **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of trust is far more ubiquitous and complex than people realize.

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