

Building Higher Trust 120 Trust Triangle

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



In this article, I will summarize three conditions for trust that I call the Trust Triangle. First I will review the work of three other authors who are friends and have written on trust. I will share the essence of their models and then add my own to the analysis.

The most prolific author I know on trust is my friend Stephen M. R. Covey.

The Speed of Trust

Stephen presents a trust model of thirteen behaviors that are separated into two categories of “character” and “competence.” The thirteen behaviors together give a holistic view of trust that is inspiring. He points out the opposite of each behavior and also the counterfeit that seems consistent but is not.

Smart Trust

Stephen’s second book was Smart Trust. In that book he hypothesizes that we make trust decisions based on three core competencies. The first is “Analysis,” the second is “Judgment,” and the third is “Action.” He points out that trust is an ongoing process that requires continual attention.

Trust and Inspire

Stephen’s most recent book (2022) points out that the world has changed. The old style of leadership, known as “command and control,” will no longer work in a post-COVID world. His theory is that it is time for a “Trust and Inspire” form of leadership. His model is based on three stewardships of leadership. These are “Modeling” (who you are), Inspiring (connect to why), and Trusting (how you lead).

Charlie Green wrote a fascinating book entitled *The Trusted Advisor*.

Charlie believes leaders need to show a combination of Competence, Credibility, and Character to create trust. He points out that trust is situational and requires constant effort to maintain.

Charles Feltman wrote a great book entitled *The Thin Book of Trust*

In it, Charles provides one of the better definitions of trust that I have ever heard. “Trust is choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person’s actions.”

Charles’ model for trust focuses on sincerity, reliability, competence, and care. He posits that violations can damage trust. To rebuild trust, individuals must 1) acknowledge the violation, 2) take responsibility, and 3) make amends.

My own model

Trying to keep things simple yet operational, I offer the idea that trust is a triangle. It consists of three sides that all begin with the letter L. The first side is a “**Lack of Fear.**” This means that leaders have built a culture of high psychological safety. People are not fearful that their opinions are going to cause them pain.

The second side is “**Laughter.**” When we refuse to take offense at other people we can maintain a culture of goodwill and trust. The atmosphere will be light and pleasant.

The third side is “**Love.**” When we demonstrate that we really care for each other, it allows trust between us to grow.

Conclusion

There are literally hundreds of models on the topic of trust. I have highlighted the work of four authors in this article. If one of the definitions resonates with you, then feel free to embrace it. If another model suits your fancy, then create your own.

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