



Helping You Select and Develop Great Leaders

## **The Trusting Leader**

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Are you a trusting leader? In what do you trust—yourself, your team, your peers, or something else to help you succeed? Trust is the cornerstone of building and maintaining powerful working relationships, which is the key to effectiveness as a leader. However, many leaders struggle with trust.

As a psychologist, I can tell you that there are many reasons why people grow up to be distrusting. They may have suffered major disappointments as a result of the action or inaction of others, were forced to adjust to severely negative circumstances over which they had no control, or were deliberately taken advantage of and hurt in ways that had lasting impact.

While this is true from the stories I have heard as an executive coach, not everyone becomes distrustful after experiencing these kinds of life events. In fact, some people develop persistence and depth of character through such circumstances, and, in spite of the pain they have experienced, continue to trust.

How can you become a trusting leader, or a more trusting leader? Let's start with a definition of TRUST.

***Trust is the firm belief  
that you can rely on yourself, others, and/or God  
to deliver on a promise.***

From this definition, we can determine there are three basic pillars that form the foundation of trust. In this Leadersynth article, we will look at each of these three.

**Trust in yourself.** In most cultures, children are taught, encouraged, or pushed into trusting themselves to move from diapers to continence, from crawling to walking, from having others dress them to dressing themselves, and from being fed to feeding themselves. Trusting in YOU started early in life. As you built confidence and self-assurance, you began to take on greater responsibility. You learned that you could trust in yourself to do many things. When you grew into adolescence and young adulthood, you may have begun to develop trust in your ability to assert leadership over others and direct their efforts, whether on an athletic field, in a dramatic production, or on a work task.

Goethe wrote, "Just trust yourself, then you will know how to live." However, trusting in only yourself and not trusting in others can become a leadership fatal flaw. Tennessee Williams once wrote, "We

have to distrust each other. It is our only defense against betrayal.” However, in my experience, leaders who distrust others as a way of protecting themselves actually create low trust and poor results.

**Trust in others.** I have coached executives who struggled with delegating to others, micro-managed the tasks and, ultimately, stepped in to do it “the right way.” Leaders often hesitate to trust others when the project is highly visible, when the cost of a failure is worrisome, or when the situation forces them to delegate to the person they perceive is the weakest member of the team. I have also worked with leaders who recognized early on in their careers the importance of trusting and leveraging the efforts of others in order to multiply the results and build competence on the team.

It is impossible to lead others effectively, without establishing some degree of trust in them to carry out their responsibilities. Trust in others includes trusting in the leadership of the organization, itself, which is comprised of “others”. For successful leaders, trusting others usually includes establishing a network of leaders inside and outside the organization, as well as some type of advisory board.

Horsager, in **The Trust Edge**, describes trust in others as the “confident belief in someone...to do what is right, to deliver on what is promised, (and) to be the same every time, whatever the circumstance.” When you trust enough in others to delegate with some follow up, there are at least three positive outcomes: you build their **confidence** as they see and respond to your trust; they grow in their **competence** as you hand off stretch assignments; and your trust grows when they successfully complete tasks, with some degree of guidance from you. Trust in others, it turns out, is infectious.

**Trust in God.** The money we make and spend in the U.S. clearly states, “In God we Trust.” Trusting in God means that, instead of placing trust solely in your own abilities or the competence of others, you recognize that there is a greater power at work in your work. In his bestselling book, **God is my CEO**, author Julian emphasizes trust in God and quotes from Proverbs that you should, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall make your paths straight.” This is the essence of trust in God—the firm belief in the existence of a power greater than you, your team, or your organization that can guide you in your decisions.

Recognizing that your success is not just the result of your own efforts and those of your team is the key here. In my business, now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, I actively participate in a monthly small group forum of other business owners (my advisory board, and part of my trust in others). In the challenges, failures, and successes about which we share and seek perspective every month, we often acknowledge the hand of God in the increase of business, the resolution of challenges, and the strength and encouragement we feel through the circumstances.

**Bottom line.** From my experience in organizations, the most effective leaders are trusting leaders. They trust in themselves to bring out the best in their team, trust in their team to follow through competently and responsibly, and trust in a God who is invested in their success. Trusting in yourself builds self-assurance, trusting in others multiplies results, and trusting in God increases your resilience and perspective. Establishing and growing trust is a key leadership success factor.

Please write to us to share your perspective on the role of trust in leadership.