

## The Speed of Trust

by Steven M.R. Covey

*“The number one job of any leader is to inspire trust.”*

This quarter, we review a book whose central message and theme is essential in all areas of our lives: TRUST. Think to a time in your personal or professional life in which trust was low or broken. What was its effect on future interactions? How did you, if it was possible, recover the relationship? We have all had times in which trust was broken; more likely than not, we have also been the one to cause that break. The effects of a low trust environment permeate beyond individuals; it clouds and hampers action throughout the organization and sometimes to external customers. Steven M.R. Covey’s The Speed of Trust addresses the sources of trust, the negative and positive effects of low or high trust, and ways in which both individuals and organizations can improve and repair trust. Despite being almost 10 years old, its message may be even timelier this decade after the continued episodes of trust breaking behavior in politics, business, and society.

We all have definitions of trust and although they may differ slightly, we all know when trust is low and the effects of its absence. However, where does trust come from? Is it earned or granted until lost? Covey identifies 2 key components to trust: Character and Competence. Without both, trust will be limited. Think of someone with whom you’ve worked who had high character but couldn’t produce. Or someone who got results but perhaps with unpalatable or shady methods. Do you trust that person? Would you go into business with him or her? The reality is

without both, trust is low and it has real effects on the relationship. But this doesn’t just apply in a work situation. Not to open old wounds, but when have you or someone close to you made a commitment to be at a school performance, game, or social event but didn’t show? Even when there were mitigating circumstances, the reality is that it affected trust and had a future effect. Every interaction either increases or decreases the trust balance.

Within Character and Competence, he delineates 4 components that lead to credibility: Integrity, Intent, Capabilities, and Results. Credibility is the hallmark of trust. When trust is high, things happen fast. When trust is low, limits are emplaced, defensiveness rises, and things don’t get done. Morale decreases and people leave jobs or relationships. It’s easy to see this in the marketplace. Apple lovers trust that the next generation of products will be even better and stand in line the night before release. Tylenol, despite its significant prior safety issues, rebuilt trust and remains highly profitable and trusted as a brand. Organizations with high trust retain top talent; those with low trust lose their best. Often, individuals leave not the organization itself, but because they lose faith and trust in their leaders.

The middle section of the book explores 13 Behaviors of High Trust individuals and gives practical ways in which we can improve in those areas. The first 5 focus on Character, the middle 5 on Competence, and the

### 13 BEHAVIORS OF HIGH TRUST INDIVIDUALS

- 1) Talk Straight
- 2) Demonstrate Respect
- 3) Create Transparency
- 4) Right Wrongs
- 5) Show Loyalty
- 6) Deliver Results
- 7) Get Better
- 8) Confront Reality
- 9) Clarify Expectations
- 10) Practice Accountability
- 11) Listen First
- 12) Keep commitments
- 13) Extend Trust

remaining 3 fall into both categories. All are important, but I’d like to discuss a couple in more depth:

- 1) Talk Straight: Leaders must communicate clearly and directly. Few things erode trust more than not believing you’re getting a straight answer or explanation from the boss. Countless anecdotes recount cases where one party believed they were developing exactly what the boss needed only to be surprised and upset when their work missed the mark. Straight talk is also essential when delivering bad news; in medicine when telling patients and families about bad news (e.g. cancer), there’s no substitute for clarity. During counseling,

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make every effort to be exceedingly clear on previous shortcomings and future expectations. This benefits both parties and leads to increased trust for both.

- 2) Create Transparency: The book provides multiple examples of high value business partnerships and acquisitions in which transparency on both sides streamlined the process because trust was high. Lack of transparency leads to distrust, more reviews, posturing, tentativeness and ultimately delays. Obviously you can't be so far to one side to be gullible or neglect the responsibility for due diligence; however, transparency is a sign of trust from leadership. Don't be afraid to "open the books." In my opinion, this is vital during difficult times and facilitates understanding as to why decisions were made. I witnessed this personally in the Baptist Health System; multiple times throughout the year the executive leadership held sessions for all their employees on the state of the hospital and future plans. Part of these meetings included reviewing the financial performance and standing of the hospital. Through transparency, the leadership built trust that facilitated restructuring, cost-saving measures, and other initiatives. Although some decisions may not have been universally popular, shared knowledge led to trust and therefore more support than if everything was held too tightly.
- 3) Deliver Results: As mentioned previously, Covey identifies two components

to trust: character and competence. Directly proportional to competence is the ability to deliver results. Whether it's delivering presents on time at Christmas or following through on a stated commitment, delivering results builds trust. As Steve Jobs said, "Real Artists Ship." Seth Godin expanded on this statement by stating that fear is the reason most fail to produce the final product. Is an author that never publishes his or her book really an author? A leader or manager that fails to produce is no different; we must deliver real results. In doing so, our credibility (and thus trust) rises.

The positive upside of trust is easy to see; it resonates within us. It is equally important to remind ourselves of the downside. Trust moves people and organizations from coordination and cooperation to collaboration. Organizations with low trust sacrifice innovation, decrease productivity, and lose customers. Often, the lack of trust leads to increased bureaucracy, an activity rarely associated with efficiency, effectiveness, or positivity. In our own areas, why do policies exist? Obviously some must be in place for standardization and safety; but for those that don't? Are they based in trust? Have we extended trust (Behavior #13) or showed loyalty (Behavior #5)?

The final section of the book is dedicated to the development of Covey's third major construct in the book, the Waves of Trust. The first wave is "self trust," the second "relationship trust," the third

"organizational trust," the fourth "market trust," and the fifth "societal trust." The first two are discussed within the 4 credibility components and the 13 behaviors; the final three are the firm emplacement of these behaviors at an organizational level and their interrelationship with stakeholders (internal and external). The external "trust" of an organization is its reputation; misalignment within the organization permeates to those external players and levies a large cost. Covey's message is one that is important for all to understand and has realities within private, public, and government organizations. "Credibility and behavior...inspire the trust of external stakeholders." Just as when a rock lands in water, the concentric rings originate from and look the same as the first one. As leaders, we have the responsibility to ensure we maintain our own personal standards, those of our team members, and the organization.

*"If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even more."*

-GEN (R) Shinseki

Leadership is about change, for our environment is always changing. In which ways can we as individuals and we collectively as organizations improve trust? I highly recommend you read this book to identify the areas in which you can improve. The investment now will pay dividends in all aspects of your personal and professional life.