



Initial Trust Rests on a handful of C's

by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP

It has been said that trust takes years to kindle. You cannot trust another individual until he or she has had the opportunity to interface with you in a number of circumstances over an extended period of time. I disagree with this analysis. I think trust can kindle very quickly between two individuals. There is even a name for this, "swift trust," coined by Debra Meyerson. Beyond the initial flame of trust, the fire grows or shrinks based on the interactions (I call them transactions) that occur between the individuals over time.

Trust can be kindled in only a few minutes time, if the proper conditions are present. Trust rests on the relationship between two individuals. If I am going to trust you, I need to be personally convinced that you fulfill 5 conditions that all begin with the letter C. These items form the basis for trust to start, and they can be conveyed from one person to another in short order. The first two conditions I borrowed from Stephen M.R. Covey's bestselling book, *The Speed of Trust*. The rest of the list is from my personal experience and background. Here are the 5 C's on which initial trust is built:

Competence - I must be convinced that you know what you are doing to view you as credible. If I sense that you have the ability from a knowledge and skill set to deliver on your statements, then you pass the competence test. If I have doubts that you can deliver, then I will remain skeptical until I have an extended time period to test you.

Character - Do you have the integrity to do what is right? I need to feel that you are not duplicitous and that you will stand up for what you believe is right. It does not mean that we always need to agree on every point, but I need to see you as a person of high moral and ethical fiber before I am going to give you my trust.

Consistency - I need to be convinced that you will do what you say. This characteristic normally takes people a long time to test, but it doesn't need to take months for someone to convince me that he or she is consistent. I can discern the value of consistency through the way a person phrases intentions and even the body language he or she uses to chat with me. The ability to follow through with intended actions or at least get back to the other person if conditions change is easy to spot, just as it is easy to observe a blowhard who says nice things but has little fortitude to actually do them.

Congeniality - I am not going to trust someone who comes across as morose or stern. To gain my trust, I need to see a smile and know that it comes from the heart. One bit of body language to build trust when shaking hands is to show your teeth in a smile. According to Bill Acheson in his program on "Advanced Body Language," showing teeth at one time meant giving the other person the ability to quickly judge a person's social status. That is not usually the case today, but a genuine cordial facial expression when

meeting a person for the first time is a prerequisite for trust to kindle. Putting on a false smile is the kiss of death, because it pegs you as someone who cannot be trusted at all.

Care - The final "C" in this handful is to project that you really do care about me. Again, people might say it takes years to know if someone else really does care about me. I disagree. Care can be displayed in hundreds of subconscious ways, just as selfishness can be worn like a suit of armor. Giving deference to the feelings of others is an important component of Emotional Intelligence. The interesting observation about this is that the people who have low Emotional Intelligence have the biggest blindspots, according to Daniel Goleman. Translated, if I come across as a phony in terms of really caring about other people, I will have little ability to detect this in myself, but others will see it instantly.

You cannot fake the 5 C's, but if your words, actions, tone, and body language are all consistent to demonstrate the 5 C's with respect to someone you have just met, trust (at least at a starting level) can be kindled in a matter of a few minutes. It is then up to you to remain consistent and keep building on that base.

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