



Betrayal of Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

A total breach of trust can take your breath away because it violates a sacred bond between two people. There was a connection that was solid and true, but all of a sudden something happened that appeared to violate everything the relationship was built on. Here is an example of a trust violation from my experience.

I was Mike's boss, and we had a relationship built on trust. Mike was a manager in my Division. We had been together a long time, and I knew him well. Mike knew that I always put a high premium on honest communication, so when I heard a rumor that he was having an inappropriate relationship with a female employee reporting to him, I could not believe it. After all, Mike was an upstanding pillar of the community with a wife and four kids. He was also the leader of a large bible study group at his church.

Several weeks later, I was provided indisputable evidence that he actually was having an affair with the female employee reporting to him. Since this was totally out of character for Mike, I stopped into his office one day to confront the situation. I shared that I had heard a rumor that turned out to be true, and that I was extremely disappointed. Mike looked me straight in the eye and said it was not true: there was no affair and no relationship. He lied to my face in order to get out of a tough spot. Obviously the lie cut me much more deeply than his sexual indiscretions did.

In this case the damage was irreparable because all trust was lost. Mike had to find another job, because I could no longer have him reporting to me. When trust is totally violated, it is sometimes impossible to rebuild. The first question after a trust betrayal is whether the relationship can be salvaged or not. If it can be, then take steps in that direction immediately, if not, then you must take your lumps and end the relationship.

When a trust betrayal happens, both parties usually feel awful about it. It is important to move quickly to confront the situation. Sitting on the problem will not resolve it, and it will make you feel worse. Do not just float along pretending the problem had not

occurred. That does a total disservice to the valuable relationship you had. Often there are steps that can repair broken trust.

The first question to ask is whether the relationship is salvageable. It is an important decision because sometimes the violation is so serious, there is no going back, as was the case with Mike. When a trust violation occurs, the question to ask is “do I feel strongly enough about our relationship to find some way to patch it up or is it over.”

Here is a case where a misunderstanding nearly ended a strong relationship.

I trusted Martha completely, but then I found out she tried to steal a resource out from under me. I felt totally violated, but decided our relationship was worth saving. I arranged to meet with her so we could get to the bottom of the problem. It took a lot of courage to confront her, but I am glad I did.

The first point I established was that we both felt rotten, and wanted to recover our former relationship of trust. Once we agreed to invest in the relationship, we were able to share the facts, apologize, and generate a plan for renewal. Actually in this case, as often happens, there was a misunderstanding, so the repair process worked out for us. By sharing facts and discussing future intent as adults, the violation was repaired.

This case was a great example of when trust is repaired quickly after a violation. In such circumstances, the relationship can end up stronger than it was before the problem occurred. The process is to:

- open the lines of communication,
- confirm that the relationship can be saved,
- share with each other your perception of what happened,
- determine what things would need to happen for full redemption,
- make a plan,
- and follow through with the plan.

It is very much like marriage counseling.

Exercise for you: Today think about a relationship in your life that has gone sour, but that you wish could be brought back to life. Relive the experience and pay special attention to how you felt at the time. Would you play the scene differently if you had the opportunity to do it over? Meet with the person and find out if the feeling is mutual. If it is, then make the investment in time and energy to salvage trust. You may find it to be stronger than ever after you do.

Recognize that not every relationship can be saved. It is a matter of deep introspection, and it really depends on the nature of the violation as well as the character of the people

involved. Making a conscious effort to repair lost trust is a blessing in your life because in many cases it can restore a precious bond. That is an enriching experience.

The preceding was derived from an episode in “Building Trust,” a 30 part video series by Bob Whipple “The Trust Ambassador.” To view three short (3 minutes each) examples at no cost go to <http://www.avanoo.com/first3/517>

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change*, *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763**

New Book in 2014 - ***Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change*** For more information go to www.astd.org/transition

