



## Trust Seeds

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

We are all aware that interpersonal trust is precious. Trust is fragile; it is difficult to build, and easy to destroy. Most people believe it takes a very long time to build up trust with another person. There is an alternate view; if certain conditions are present when people first meet, a "seed" of trust is created upon which further trust will grow if both people continue to nurture it.

In his book "Blink," Malcolm Gladwell describes the "Thin Slices" we humans use to size up other people within seconds of meeting them. We absorb an enormous amount of data instantly in the body language and the first words uttered by a new acquaintance.

I can recall meeting two influential men last year within seconds of each other. The first one gave me a solid handshake and a smile. He made great eye contact and asked me a question about my family. The second individual gave me a half-limp handshake while his eyes were scanning the room to see who else was there. He did smile, but it was forced and phony. Since that time, I have effortlessly developed a relationship of high trust with the first individual, and I have felt uncomfortable to be in the same room as the second one. The relationship with the first man took several months to develop, but the seed was planted in the first 5 seconds. With the second man, there was nothing for trust to grow on, so a relationship never kindled.

There are numerous things people instantly assess about us. Here are five conditions that allow you to plant a seed on which trust can grow.

**Competence** - People must be convinced that you know what you are doing to view you as being trustworthy. If they sense that you have the ability from a knowledge and skill set to deliver on your statements, then you pass the competence test. If they have doubts that you can deliver, then they will remain skeptical until there is enough time to test you.

**Integrity** - Do you have the character to do what is right? People 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 you always need to agree with others on every point, but people need to see you as a person of high moral and ethical fiber before they are going to trust you.

**Reliability** - People need to be convinced that you will do what you say. This characteristic normally takes people a long time to test, but it actually can happen quickly. People can discern your reliability through the way you phrase intentions and even the body language you use to chat with them. 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 no intention to actually do them.

**Attitude** - To gain trust, you need to project a positive attitude when another person is meeting you and ensure that it comes from the heart. Depending on the contextual background of the meeting, a smile is the usual way to show a positive attitude toward another person. Caveat: putting on a false smile is the kiss of death, because it pegs you as someone who cannot be trusted at all. In a different context, a look of concern or sympathy might be a more appropriate way to show a positive attitude toward the other person. Your attitude and demeanor must be heartfelt and congruent with the situation.

**Care** - It is vital to project that you really do care about the other person. People might say it takes years to know if someone else really does care about you. In reality, care can be displayed in hundreds of small gestures, just as selfishness can be easily spotted. 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 you come across as a phony in terms of really caring about other people, you will not have the ability to detect this in yourself, but others will see it instantly.

On the back of my business card, I have a picture of a pile of various seeds. The words say:

Seeds for Growing Leaders

Plant in an environment of trust,

Sprinkle daily with humility,

Weed out negativity,

Place in the light of truth,

Be patient,

Enjoy the fruits of great leadership.

It does take a long time of consistent performance for a very strong bond of trust to build, but the first seeds of trust can be established quickly upon meeting someone. Make sure when you meet a new person that you genuinely project the five conditions above, and you will be well on your way to a trusting relationship.



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