

Trust Yourself

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

I was chatting with a colleague about the nature of trust, and he made a statement that brought me up short. He said that most people overlook self trust as an extremely important concept in life. I had to admit that in all my years of studying trust in people and organizations, I had not spent much time dealing with self trust. This article is an attempt to remedy that.

Self trust is kind of a spooky business. We tend to rationalize the things we do that may be marginal in terms of being right, either for us or for others. If we do something that we know deep down is just wrong, we think about the reasons that drove us to do that and give ourselves a pass on the transaction. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how hard it really is to determine one's level of self trust.

Ask yourself right now if you can trust yourself. It should give you a chill as you wrestle with your own personal level of integrity when nobody else can know your thoughts. We all have habits or weaknesses that are not particularly good for us. For example, I do not purchase large containers of ice cream. Can you guess why?

If you are a person with no temptations or secret things you do that cannot be justified, then let me know; I will nominate you for sainthood. For the rest of us, recognize that your personal private integrity can never be 100%. You will do some things in your life out of convenience, habit, addiction, laziness, ignorance, or greed (just to name a few). How do you know where to draw the line? How do you know if you have integrity?

My colleague suggested that we cannot help others to develop more trust until we are sure we can trust ourselves. I believe that is true, but only with a caveat of degree. I cannot say that in every instance in my life I have done what I know to be right, yet I do see myself as basically worthy of my own trust. How do I rationalize the dichotomy?

One way to keep from going insane as you wrestle with this conundrum is to become more conscious of the decisions you have made that you later regret. For example, I was once given the wrong change by a cashier. I kept the extra money and felt really rotten about it for a day or two. Reason: my self image had been tarnished by my actions. But I overcame the sin by learning from my mistake. I vowed to never be guilty

of that kind of thing again. Now, if I am ever aware of an error that has gone in my favor, rather than accept it as good fortune, I point out the error. It has cost me a little bit in terms of cash, but I gained an immense amount in terms of self trust.

I love the look of surprise when I tell a cashier "Oops, you only charged me for one, but there are really two there. They were nested together." Yes, I had to pay the extra \$11; my self esteem gained much more than that.

If we take a personal transgression as a signal to learn and resolve to become a different type of person on that dimension, we triumph over the issue and become more robust in our own integrity. That does not mean we will be perfect from that point on, but it does mean we are really trying to be true to ourselves.

I believe self trust is important. It is part of a healthy individual to believe in him or herself and know there is integrity. Work on your self talk in this way and you will grow in your ability to live the life you want to live.

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