



Ice Cream

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

Most people think of trust as one thing. We believe we know what the word means, but when I ask groups to define it, they come up with several different answers. Groups typically come up with more than 20 different definitions of trust in about 10 minutes. All of the answers are correct, so it means that trust is a lot more complex than most of us realize. Generic trust, meaning "assured reliance," is easy to understand, but the complexities of the concept can boggle the mind.

If you are blindfolded, and you trust me enough to put some food in your mouth, you will easily identify it as ice cream. You know the consistency, temperature, and creamy-sweet taste instantly. Then, if I ask you what flavor ice cream you are eating, that may cause you to think a bit. When we cannot see what we are eating or drinking, our taste is not nearly as reliable as we might imagine.

For example, I cannot tell the difference between grape and orange soda when blindfolded. Before doing the test, I was 100% certain that distinguishing the two different tastes would be easy. With ice cream, it is likely that I would be unable to tell the difference between cherry and black raspberry or perhaps even chocolate.

The metaphor works because while we know what trust is generically, the subtle distinctions between various types of trust may be harder to distinguish. For example, I might trust you to feed my cat while I am on vacation, but not trust you to overhaul my car engine. I could easily trust you to get change for a 20 dollar bill, but might think twice about giving you \$10,000 in cash to deposit at the bank. I might trust you to admit you made a mistake, but not believe you are capable of discerning truth from fiction. It can get pretty convoluted.

It is impossible to list all the kinds of trust in our lives. Clearly, trust is not just one thing. Most of us have trust in abundance all around us every day. We have some level of trust with every person we know. We may trust the products we use, or we may not.

Hopefully we trust the organizations we work for, but that is not always the case. For example, the Edelman Trust Barometer measurements show that in the United States, roughly 55% of people trust business to do what is right, but less than 20% of people trust their leaders to tell the truth when faced with a difficult situation. We would find it hard to even go to a store if we did not trust the infrastructure of roads and bridges.

When we turn on the news, we find it difficult to trust the validity because we can dial up whatever flavor of news we want to hear at the moment. Our trust in the media has consistently gone down for several years as we watch the various news outlets try to undermine each other. They have given up the pretext of being "fair and unbiased" and readily admit their news is flavored, just like ice cream.

The complexity and variety of how trust is manifest in our lives boggles the mind, yet we need to trust in things and people every day. The whole matter of trust becomes a kaleidoscope of images and textures that we interpret every day all day long without even thinking about it. The result is that we have confidence or not depending on what it all means to us at that moment.

Although we use the word trust frequently and it generally means one concept, we need to recognize the phenomenon is far more ubiquitous and complex than we realize. Take more notice of how trust is working in your life, and you will enhance the quality of your relationships.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *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**

