



## Who Can I Trust?

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

Imagine you have just been parachuted into a new area or organization where you do not yet know the people. All of us have been in that situation more than once in our lives. You recognize that first impressions are incredibly important and want to start off on the right foot. Of course, you introduce yourself and immediately try to get to know your new working buddies.

There is an interesting dynamic that goes on for the first few days upon entering a new organization. You are sizing up people, and they are evaluating you. Actually, behavioral scientists say the first few moments when meeting another person are incredibly important in terms of establishing the starting point for each relationship.

In his book, *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell refers to a phenomenon he calls "thin slicing." He contends that human beings have a knack of sizing up other people in only 2-3 seconds, and that impression has a lot to do with how well the relationship proceeds. Of course, it is the consistent behaviors over time that ultimately determines the level of trust between people, but the rate of development is hugely impacted by the first impression.

So you are in your new environment. You recognize that some of these people will become your close confidants while others will be held at arm's length and never fully trusted. How can you know quickly who can be trusted? Is that even important to do? I believe it is critical to identify the following seven factors as soon as possible:

1. **Genuine or phony?** - Does this person ring true as a person of high integrity, or is he/she a blowhard who will say things for effect?
2. **Smart or Dumb?** - Is the person capable of operating effectively in the working world, or is he/she bluffing along without the skills needed to be effective?
3. **Friendly or Aloof?** - It is easy to spot someone who is genuinely interested in you versus someone who just talks a good game.

4. **Trustworthy or Shaky?** - To gauge trustworthiness, be alert for eye contact. Either too little or too much eye contact can be a problem. The normal level of eye contact to be viewed as trustworthy is about 70%.
5. **Consistent or Flighty?** - This aspect is difficult to judge quickly. Obviously time will tell if this person is good at follow-up, but you can quickly judge the intent to be consistent. That is a starting point for some trust to grow on over time.
6. **Respected or Suspect?** - Other people will have knowledge of the individual you are just meeting. Watch the body language and comfort level the new person has with others in the area. That will tell you a lot about your chances of connecting with the person.
7. **Honest or a Crook** - Spotting someone who will lie cheat or steal is not as easy as it seems. Competent liars are out there, so you need to read signals carefully. Watch the body language, particularly the eye contact. .

It is inevitable that you will do something during the first few days that appears to be clumsy or goofy. It is normal to have a moment or two of embarrassment as you get to know new people. Don't be thrown when this happens to you. I have found when I have done or said something stupid, it helps to say something like, "Well we always make some bonehead comment at first, I'm glad we got it out of the way so soon." That logic plays well with other people because you signal that you do not take yourself too seriously.

When you are in a new environment, there is a lot at stake. If you get off on the wrong footing, it will take months, perhaps years, to set things right. Obviously it is important to watch your own behaviors, but beware of trying too hard. You cannot fake the body language; people will read you accurately with incredible speed. The best advice is to relax, be yourself, and be genuinely delighted to be making new friends.



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