

Building a high level of trust within an organization can seem like the search for the Holy Grail: It's highly valued, but very elusive.

Some of us believe that trust must be earned. We're not willing to accept the risk of betrayed trust. Some of us grant trust more freely until we have reason to withhold it. We recognize that people give their best when we expect the best out of them. Most of us start off relationships somewhere between extreme trust and extreme lack of trust.

### ***We Don't Need Trust Where There Is No Risk***

When we bias toward distrust, we start a downward spiral that weakens us all and is difficult to stop. When we accept some level of risk and bias toward trust, we start an upward spiral that strengthens us all – more than enough to withstand the hits from the times when trust is broken.



When we say an unqualified, “I don't trust him”, we swing a broad axe that does more damage than is usually warranted. “Trust” has multiple sources. I can trust your *character* but not your *competency*. That's why I wouldn't ask even a virtuous nine-year-old to drive my car. I can trust your competency but not your character. Your technology skill has nothing to do with whether I'll let you date my daughter.

Closely tied to character is the question of whether I trust your *motivation*. If I know you're looking out for my best interest, I don't need to know every detail. But if I believe you're all about you, I need to know everything you know so I can take care of myself.

It's unwarranted and unhealthy to demean a person's character because they lack a competency. Declaring – even to ourselves – that we don't trust someone is dangerous if we aren't clear about the source of our distrust. Without a clear diagnosis of what is lacking, we can't fulfill our primary responsibility as leaders: Seeing our followers reach their full potential.

- **Is it their *competence* I don't trust?** How can I help them develop it?
- **Is their *character* the issue?** Have I built their trust in *my* character and motivation enough that I can address this with them?
- **Is it their *motivation* that I question?** How well do I understand what drives them? Depending how deeply rooted the untrustworthy motivation, maybe I can help them shape it, or maybe it's time to part ways.

Trust works best as a two-way street. The best way to gain trust is to give it. If you don't trust others, they have little reason to trust you. To start that upward spiral, someone has to take a risk. If you see yourself as a leader, that someone is you. Sure, you'll get burned sometimes. But good leaders are good risk-takers, and the best risk-takers aren't afraid to lose a few to win a lot.

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