

Can We Build Mutual Trust?

“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle...A man of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 18:19, 24

Why do many relationships fail? Some marriages that begin with great passion and hope come to a bitter end. Likewise, friendships that people hope will last a lifetime can still falter and die. Ministries that begin with promise can fade, and successful business partnerships can come to a disastrous termination. Why? The reasons for such breakdowns are many, but the cause that outweighs them all is broken trust.

Remember: relationships are the currency of God’s Kingdom. If we fail at these, we fail spiritually (1 John 4:20). The people principles we will examine in this lesson all answer the question: “Can we build mutual trust?”

1. The _____ Principle: Trust Is the Foundation of Any Relationship.

This principle is where the relationship journey begins with people. Leadership operates on the basis of trust. Without trust, you may have employees, but you don’t really have followers. Whether they know it or not, people ask these trust questions of their leader: Do I trust you? Are you trustworthy? Can we build mutual trust?

Three Truths about Trust:

1. Trust begins with _____.

If you are not honest with yourself, you will not be capable of honesty with others. Self-deception is the enemy of relationships. Become a trusting and trustworthy person, and it will impact others.

2. Trust cannot be _____.

If you cannot trust a person at all points, you cannot trust them at any point. There is no such thing as business ethics. We are either ethical people or we are not; we can’t be ethical in one place and not in another.

3. Trust works like a _____.

We must keep making deposits if we want the account to grow. As leaders earn trust, it is like having “change in their pockets.” This helps a leader when adversity comes. People innately trust them.

Biblical Case Study: Samson (Judges 13:1-16:31)

Samson is a heartbreaking example of a leader who failed to follow “The Bedrock Principle.” Samson could have been one of Israel’s greatest leaders, but when all was said and done, he turned out to be one of the worst. In terms of his relationship with God and the leadership of his people, look at Samson’s life and you see a pattern of negative behavior that spells trouble. Like Samson, leaders who are eroding the ground of trustworthiness in relationships and leadership will usually show one or more of the following traits:

1. Failure to deal with _____ weaknesses.
2. Uses _____ to try to protect himself.
3. Uncontrolled _____.

Discussion: Are any of these signs of trouble present in your life? What corrective measures will you take?

2. The _____ Principle:
Rarely Let the Situation Mean More than the Relationship.

Leaders must determine what's most important to them. Sadly, many leaders ignore the high value of people and relationships. They choose to focus on projects over people. Sometimes they will prioritize results at the expense of relationships. Effective leaders don't make this mistake. They recognize that people are their most appreciable asset when they are loved and developed. Successful leaders don't allow the situation at any moment to become more important than the relationship. (To clarify, there are some rare exceptions to this rule as in an abusive marriage relationship). As a rule, the question for all of us is: when tough times come, what will be more important to us: the situation or the person?

The Key Rule to Follow: Determine to always try to first value people more than situations.

How Can I Keep The Situation in Proper Perspective in Tough Times?

1. Do I see the _____ picture or just the bad picture? In tough times, remind yourself of why that relationship is so important in the first place.
2. Do I _____ the big picture along with the bad one? Our temptation is to focus on a disappointing situation rather than remembering the value of a person.
3. Is this a _____ situation or a frequently repeated one? A recurring, damaging situation will require both parties in a relationship to commit to improvement.
4. Do I make too many situations a life or _____ issue? Leaders must choose their battles. How often do you get tense or upset?
5. Do I show my unconditional _____ during difficult situations? There is no time when a person needs grace more than in a failure or a difficult situation.

Biblical Case Study: Paul and Philemon (Philemon 1:1-25)

The story is about a slave, Onesimus, who escaped from Philemon. Paul led Onesimus to Christ and desired to have Onesimus remain with him. However, Paul decided that his relationship with Philemon was so important that he should not keep Onesimus with him without the consent of Philemon. Paul honored his friendship with Onesimus without violating his relationship with Philemon. Paul believed that Philemon would receive Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a beloved brother. His actions were motivated by love for both men. Christian love works like this:

1. Seeks the _____ of others (v.10-11).
2. Deals _____ with others (v.12-14).
3. Bears the _____ of others (v.18).
4. Believes the _____ of others (v.21).

Discussion: Do you allow the circumstances of life to cause you to place relationships at a lower priority than they should be? Do you allow the pressures of life to cause you to neglect relationships with your family?

3. The _____ Principle:

When Bob Has a Problem with Everyone, Bob Is Usually the Problem.

This is a relationship truth that was discovered years ago. Consider this example: If Bob has problems with Paul, and Bob has problems with Elizabeth, and Bob has problems with John, and Bob has problems with Sam, then Bob is usually the problem!

Sometimes the reason a person has so many issues with others is because they are the problem, not the others. Yet, these problem people seldom blame themselves for the problems they face. They always seem to look outward, fixing the blame on someone else. Consequently, problems just seem to follow these people around.

How Do You Recognize a “Bob?”

1. Bob is a problem _____. Like a contagious disease, these people carry a “virus” that magnetically attracts negative situations.
2. Bob is a problem _____. It takes talent to fix problems; not to find them. Bob has eyes to see them everywhere.
3. Bob is a problem _____. These people seem to generate problems wherever they go.
4. Bob is a problem _____. Other people seem to know that Bob is a safe place to gossip, complain and insult others.

Biblical Case Study: Herod and the People of Israel (Acts 12:1-23)

King Herod is a good example of a bad leader. He was driven by his ego, just as his grandfather and father were. Herod was the surname of a family of Jewish rulers who served under the Roman Empire. Herod the Great is the one who had the babies killed after Jesus was born. Herod Antipas is the one who had John the Baptist beheaded. Acts 12 refers to Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great. (Herod Agrippa II is the king Paul spoke to in Acts 25-26.) In this chapter, problems follow Herod around everywhere he goes. You could almost create a resumé on him, giving examples of what not to do as a leader from this chapter:

1. He _____ his own citizens, executing innocent people (v.1-2). He unjustly ordered Jewish believers arrested in order to harass them. He had James executed.
2. He made decisions based on _____ (v.3). When he saw it pleased the Jews to kill James, he had Peter arrested too.
3. He acted _____ in difficult times (v.19). He was reactionary and went to extremes when things went sour. He killed 16 guards.
4. He harbored _____ toward others (v.20). He remained angry toward outside ethnic groups and looked for ways to get even.
5. He sought power out of _____ (v.20). He enjoyed controlling others, and he especially loved people being at his mercy.
6. He projected an infallible _____ (v.21-22). He was plastic. He loved wearing his royal garb and being worshiped by people.
7. He was blinded by his _____, and it later killed him (v.23). He lived in an unreal world, and he couldn't see how his ego sabotaged his leadership.

How to Respond to a “Bob”

1. Respond with a positive comment: Don’t join Bob in his negative view. See the bright side.
2. Show your concern for someone being criticized: Don’t judge their motives or heart. Express belief in them as a person.
3. Ask Bob to think before he speaks: Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? Is it kind?
4. Encourage steps to a resolution: When Bob criticizes, persuade him to talk to the person, not *about* them.
5. Keep Bob away from others: When possible, prevent Bob from exposure to people; isolate the problem.

Discussion: Am I a “Bob?” If so, what do I need to do to change? If not, how do I treat “Bob” in my organization?

4. The _____ Principle: Being at Ease with Ourselves Helps Others Be at Ease with Us.

There is no greater relationship gift we can give to others than putting them at ease. Good leaders are secure and don’t project an “untouchable” image. Even a leader who is famous can be authentic and approachable. There are some important questions: Can the people closest to you talk to you about nearly anything? Do those who don’t know you feel at ease approaching you? When was the last time someone brought you bad news? What was your reaction?

Biblical Case Study: Rebekah and Abraham’s Servant (Genesis 24:1-66)

Abraham instructed his oldest servant to find a wife for Isaac. The servant traveled to Mesopotamia as Abraham had instructed him. The servant made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time. He waited for the women of the city to come draw water, and he prayed for a favorable response when he asked a young woman for a drink. When he, a total stranger, approached Rebekah and asked for a drink of water, she responded with kindness and generosity. How easy it would have been for Rebekah to ignore the stranger’s request for a drink. She certainly could have given him a quick drink and continued on her way. But she engaged him in conversation and went the extra mile to provide water for a group of thirsty camels. As a result of her approachability, her life changed in ways she could not imagine. As Isaac’s wife, she would become a part of the lineage of the Messiah.

Discussion: Are you approachable? Do your associates feel free to bring you bad news, to disagree with your point of view, to question you about something you did wrong? Are you prone to moodiness?

5. The _____ Principle: When Preparing for Battle, Dig a Foxhole Big Enough for a Friend.

We face many battles in life, and the “foxholes” we inhabit come in many shapes and sizes: our home, the organization we work in, our communities where we live, a sports team or a fellowship group. These are places where we develop close relationships with others. When life gets tough, we have companions who face those times with us. Recent research demonstrates why this is important:

Foxholes Without Friends Are Unhealthy:

1. If you isolate yourself from others, you are two to three times more likely to die an early death.
2. If you isolate yourself from others, you are more likely to contract terminal cancer.
3. If you are isolated, you significantly increase your chances of emotional stress and depression.

Facts about Foxhole Friends:

1. Few in number.
2. Provide strength before and during a battle.
3. See things from the same perspective.
4. Make a difference in our lives.
5. Love us unconditionally.

Biblical Case Study: Paul and Barnabas (Acts 9:26-27)

When Saul (later to be known as Paul) arrived in Jerusalem after his conversion; the disciples were afraid of him and refused to accept him as a disciple. However, Barnabas befriended him and became his advocate before the disciples. Barnabas was willing to take a risk by standing shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart with Paul, the same man who had stood by and approved the stoning of Stephen. Because the apostles had utmost confidence in the integrity of Barnabas, they decided to take a chance on Paul. Barnabas was a foxhole friend because:

1. He believed in Paul _____ anyone else did.
2. He _____ Paul's leadership to other leaders.
3. He helped Paul reach his _____.

Discussion: Am I a friend that others depend on during difficult times? Have I been “in the foxhole” with a friend, colleague or family member?

Assessment and Application

Assessment: Based on these five principles, do you foster or diminish trust in your relationships?

Application: What is one relationship in which you need to build trust? What will you do to strengthen that trust?