



The Politics of Hope Newsletter

*“Helping Ordinary Citizens Become
Extraordinary Public Leaders”*



Leader’s Role in Building and Repairing Trust

By Donna Zajonc

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Trust, or the lack of it, is a popular topic these days. The list of untrustworthy leaders is getting longer everyday: Ponzi schemes, athletes and steroids, bankers and bonuses and well...who **do** we trust these days?

When trust is lost, nothing else gets accomplished. We spend our day working around the situation or the person we have deemed deceitful. Great energy is spent figuring out how to deal with the hidden agenda. Lack of trust, or worst, distrust is a source of great suffering for both individuals and organizations. It is expensive, wasteful and keeps us up at night.

We often hear a comment similar to this: “I don’t always agree with her but I trust her and that is what matters.”
Trust is the heart of leadership and all other leadership attributes originate from its positive core.

Our social capital is based upon trust and is an integral part of the fabric of a free and high functioning democratic society. Citizens trust that our drinking water is safe, parks are maintained and that help will arrive when we call 911. Without trust, society as we know it may close down and ultimately our democracy could crumble.

In a high-trust organization we have more options and opportunities. We interact with less friction and drama resulting in greater creativity and ideas. The “can do” spirit is present when we trust our leaders and fellow team members. There is nothing we cannot do or accomplish when we trust the motives and capabilities of our group.

The opposite is true when trust is damaged or lost. We don’t exactly know what is wrong, we just know that working with a group or individual we don’t trust eats at our heart and soul.

Trying to define trust is a little like the judge who described pornography: “I am not sure how to define it but I know it when I see it.” Trust is the same way. We’re not sure how to describe it but we know it when we have it.

I believe there are two core elements that create the foundation of trust: intent and capacity. We fully trust someone when we understand and agree with their **intentions and we know they are capable** of fulfilling what they say they will do. If either one of these two elements are absent, trust is damaged.

For example, if we are certain someone is capable of carrying out a task but we are not sure of their motives, we only partially trust them. Most likely we will be vigilant as we observe their actions, since we are not sure what they are really up to.

On the other hand, if we know someone’s intentions are good but they do not have the capacity to do what they set out to do, we will be monitoring closely to see if they are working toward completion. We trust their motives but doubt their capacity to follow through. Either one of these scenarios can breed mistrust.

Only when both positive intention and capacity is present do we trust that individuals or teams will do what they say they will do.

It is not only possible to build trust, it is also possible to restore it when others may have lost trust in you. Here are a few steps toward building and restoring trust:

Develop self-trust: Most of us believe we are trustworthy individuals and our desire is to “walk our talk.” The challenge arises when we are under pressure and we communicate or behave in ways that we are not proud of. Once you see these patterns, return to the small things in your day such as being on time to meetings or returning your phone calls or emails on time. This will help you build your self-trust so you can walk your talk.

Keep your word: Doing what you say you will do, on time and without excuses is a powerful step toward building trust. Be vigilant toward not taking on more than you or your team can handle. Say “no” when appropriate so you will increase your capacity to keep your word.



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Speak openly about unfulfilled promises: When individuals or organizations routinely do not fulfill their commitments, create a courageous conversation to talk about the lack of follow-through. Allowing broken promises to go unnoticed and unacknowledged will absolutely breed a culture of distrust.

Model trust: The most difficult situation arises when you have lost trust in others. As individuals, especially in large organizations or communities, we can demonstrate trust and become a model for others to emulate. Eventually others will notice you or your team and say, “We want to work in a trusting environment too.” Trust is contagious and others will want what you have.

These are a few strategies toward nurturing a culture of trust. The fear that is pandemic throughout business and governments today can pull an organization apart during such stressful times. If you focus on building trustworthiness in you and your team, you will greatly improve your joy, life and work satisfaction AND get more sleep!



“Building and Sustaining Trust” is an excellent topic for your next Staff Retreat or Conference Keynote. I enjoy working with teams for a short-term planning session or long-term cultural make-over. I would consider it a privilege and honor to be your partner in building trust! Contact me at donna@politicsofhope.com or 206-780-9300.

“Donna Zajonc knows her business. She has experience in the public sector and is well-informed on issues that create an effective team. Donna has a very engaging style that makes people feel comfortable and ready to learn. I hope you will consider her for your next team retreat.”

***Mayor Cary Bozeman
Bremerton, WA***



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On Donna’s Reading List



The Speed of Trust By: Stephen Covey

Written by the son of the well-known leadership guru, Stephen Covey, this is a thorough book on the elusive subject of trust. We must all think more deeply about trust, how to live it, re-

[Find it online at Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

store it and maintain it. Put this book on your reading list.

Quote of the Month

“To believe something and not to live it is dishonest.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Comments?

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