
Trust vs. Doubt

“As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live.” — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.” — Stephen R. Covey

People who develop trust are generally empowered to take action and follow up on their goals. Doubt has the opposite effect: it can stop us in our tracks, bringing fear, insecurities and clouded thinking in its wake.

Living in trust gives us a sense of confidence and security that brings freedom to our lives.

It's the anchor that holds us fast amidst the many challenges that can pull us off course.

It's important to recognize doubt as part of being human. Having doubt can sometimes be the first step in creating change. But often it is our judgments about ourselves that hold us back. The source of much doubt comes from our judgment about things. If we believe there is a right way to behave, we will be concerned about behaving in the wrong way. If we believe certain things are good, we will be concerned about the bad and even about losing what is good.

Our way of thinking and how we judge someone or something has an effect on how we perceive the world, people and ourselves. Some forms of judgment can lead us to doubt our decisions. For example, we may doubt we are in the right job or doubt that things will “work out” for us after all. It is only possible to live like this if we entertain certain kinds of judgments or beliefs.

Doubt appears in our life when we are not confident. We shift from being self-confident and self-acknowledging to being uncertain. We step outside of our intuition. We seek approval or praise from others. At this moment our ego steps in and doubt becomes an element of our ego. Trust is a muscle we need to regularly exercise.

Self Application

Doubt

If you are not trusting then you are doubting. Remember the last time you had that niggling feeling and couldn't quite work out what was wrong. A relationship perhaps or a project at work just wasn't going as planned. You were never sure about it, though maybe it might not work out. This is doubt. If we don't resolve why we have doubt and move into a trust then we are committing to failure. This may seem harsh but think back to the last time this occurred in your life. Did you doubt something and it ended up as you thought – not working out?

However, we can move out of doubt by exploring what we are doubting, and then what we need to move into trust.

Trust and Perfection

Consider this: Who are we to judge that something is actually imperfect? Where did we get that idea or perspective from? Too often we criticize ourselves for our "imperfections". We live and think as if there is a good and bad side to everything. We believe in a reality which has everything defined as "true or false". We are frequently "conditioned" to think right from wrong and wrong from right.

So naturally, it can be a stretch to think that something hated or feared your entire life could actually be seen in a different, non-dualistic way. If we invert things we get the opposite. For example, the opposite of hatred is love. The opposite of fear is clarity. Within that hatred can we perceive love? How about loving more to break the hatred? If there is fear, can we define the fear so we can clearly reason it out?

The way to perceive perfection in life is to challenge ourselves to reach a new perspective. It is to allow ourselves the opportunity to think better, to see life as something potentially perfect. When we demand from ourselves to see perfection, we allow our vision to open up so we can get the results we aim for in life. Can we then, open up to the possibility that there is perfection in all of our perceived imperfections and all of the challenges that face us in our lives?

Ancient Greek tragedy had at its centre the “agon” which was the struggle or conflict that engaged the protagonist, the central figure of the story. But his or her struggle is meaningless without an antagonist, the one that challenges throws obstacles up and generally makes life miserable. Another way to see Perfection in our lives is to appreciate the Antagonist. Things would be pretty boring without the Antagonist.

Take a look at this list of circumstances which can potentially antagonize our lives:

- losing our job;
- failing an exam;
- breaking up a relationship;
- experiencing a loss in the family; or
- a negative work environment.

It is very easy to see these circumstances as bad things, wrong happenings or imperfections. This is a wonderful breeding ground for Doubt. Now, consider another perspective: all these situations are the Antagonists in our life. They are there to provoke us, move us, challenge us and keep life interesting. Contrary to appearances, the Antagonist is always the catalyst for change and further growth. Without our trusty Antagonists, and if everything was planned and happened as we wished, we would probably wonder what is wrong here since we are used to thinking in contrasts: black and white, wrong and right.

Why is it more empowering to face our challenges than let them remain? Help your clients see the Antagonist as an opportunity for growth. This changes the face of the Antagonist into something “perfect”, part of the whole picture that we are here to complete. When we are able to see everything as perfect we can feel confident, assured, clear. We can relax and trust in our purpose.

Building Self Trust

Before we build a trusting relationship with anyone else though, we need to be able to trust ourselves. Self Trust is the foundation we build our relationships on. In his book, *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen Covey Jr. describes a model called “The Five Waves of Trust”. At the centre of concentric waves moving outward, is Self Trust, which he says “enables us to establish and sustain trust at all levels”. The next wave is Relationship Trust, followed by Organizational Trust, Market Trust and finally Societal Trust. In order to build trust with others, we need to have a deep trust in who we are and what we are capable of bringing to the world.

If we have established high trust starting with ourselves at the very centre then we create a powerful platform for sustainable personal and professional growth. When you make a promise to people and they don't keep it, you lose their trust. The same thing happens when you promise yourself to complete that report by tomorrow, and you let it go. Or when you promise yourself to quit smoking, but you put it off for another time. Or promise yourself to save more money but instead, keep finding excuses for why you need to spend more. Every time you put off doing what you say you will or make excuses for not doing it, you are chipping away at the foundations of self-trust. It may seem unimportant at first, but like an invisible crack in a supporting wall, over time, it will expand until the structure collapses.

In the smallest everyday actions, by being accountable to ourselves and keeping our word, we build our self-trust.

The Key to Self-Trust: Accountability

Accountability is the key to self-trust. To demonstrate these let's look at the following situation.

Due to the promotion and new job demands, Sally hadn't been doing any regular exercise in a while, and eating on the run was taking its toll on her waistline. She was eating all the wrong kinds of food and had rationalized the weight gain by telling herself that as soon as she settled into her new job, she would look after herself properly.

As time passed though, she found excuses for not keeping her word to herself. Either there was just no time, the gym was too far from home, or it was just too complicated to make a salad instead of heating up a frozen pizza. The excuses piled up and had the cumulative effect of eroding trust and belief in her ability to get healthy again.

Working with a coach, the first thing they focused on was this crucial question of self-trust and accountability. Before creating any structures, such as a workout schedule or new diet, her coach asked her how she could build her trust. They explored the power of just simply keeping her word to herself, and reconstructed her self-trust. Soon, they created a structure of regular workouts and a change in eating habits. For two months, no matter what, rain or shine, she made a point of working out at the gym 3 times a week.

This created a virtuous cycle: she never “cheated” herself; she was as good as her word, and she knew she could count on herself to keep going. As she gained confidence, she started seeing the physical manifestation of this trust as she lost weight and ate healthier food. She created trust in herself by getting results as well as by keeping her word.

Self-trust is the belief we have in ourselves. If we move away from trusting ourselves then we rock the very foundations upon which we live. To trust ourselves we need to know what our beliefs are, our values and our purpose. To lose self-trust is to lose sight of these. When we are clear about who we are and know it to be right then we implicitly trust what we are doing and where we are heading. We feel energized and driven. We can begin to breathe. The whole world seems to have opened up and we see everything clearly. Before we can trust others we must trust ourselves.

Reflection

- How do you define self-trust?
- In what areas of your life does self-trust show up the most?
- What commitments have you made that haven't been followed up on? What was the result?
- What role does trust play in developing relationships?

Coaching Application

The first meaning of trust, according to Webster's Dictionary, is "Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. "It's this same trust that helps to establish a coaching partnership. With new clients, much of our initial work involves building trust. We want them to feel that they can trust us to listen without judgment, or that they can share their ideas and feelings with us in total confidence. At the same time, we return the trust by believing in them. Trust is the oxygen of our coaching practice.

When we find clients in doubt mode, it's important to find ways to shift their perspective into one of Trust. One way of doing this is to establish a "Trust Zone" for you and your clients. This is a place where you can suspend doubt, a safe space where right now your life is perfect. Invite your clients to experience that feeling of total trust and the freedom this creates. Help them understand that whatever it is they face – raising a difficult teenager, paying off debts, finding a new job – it's part of their ongoing development.

Explore with your client's ways in which they can create a perspective of trust.

Some questions to help shift into Trust might be:

- "What can you trust about this situation that is making you stronger/wiser/more open?"
- "What judgement are you making that might be creating doubt about yourself?"
- "What would it feel like to completely trust yourself right now?"
- "If we can suspend our disbelief for a second, what is it, right now, that is absolutely perfect?"

Reflection

- What role does trust play in coaching both for you as a coach as well as for your client?
- What structures can you put in place to strengthen self-trust for clients?

Resource

Covey, Stephen M. R., 2006, *The Speed of Trust*, Free Press, New York.