

The Value of Trust: It's a Two Way Street

Dr. Byron L. Cherry

President and CEO, Succeed to Lead, LLC

As with any relationship, trust is an important factor. As we know or do not know relationships are built around trust. Whether it's a supervisor/employee, buyer/seller or just two friends establishing a personal bond, trust is the cornerstone of that foundation. In personal relationships, both parties trust that the other person will have their best interest in mind and will work to maintain a positive relationship. This is normally done by each other giving their word to carry out a certain act or promise. Trust determines how parties will carry out a relationship. The lack of trust can create very uncomfortable and destructive relationships.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2006), trust is an attitude that we have towards people whom we hope will be trustworthy, where trustworthiness is a property, not an attitude. Trust and trustworthiness are therefore distinct although, ideally, those whom we trust will be trustworthy, and those who are trustworthy will be trusted. For trust to be warranted (i.e. plausible) in a relationship, the parties to that relationship must have attitudes toward one another that are conducive to trusting one another. Moreover, for trust to be warranted (i.e. well-grounded), both parties ought to be trustworthy.ⁱ

The Value of Trust

The one who poses the question, "Who should I trust?" might be interested in knowing at what point do I put my faith in an individual or person. In other words, what value would it have? While the value it would have for a particular person depends on his or her situation or circumstances, the value it could have for any particular person depends on an answer to this next question: "Can I trust this person, generally speaking?" The short answer to this question is that trust can have an enormous outcome to a relationship. The main problem here is that man will always let you down. For whatever reason, this word "trust" is a two way street.

Trusting provides us with bonds beyond those that come with cooperation; but again, for these bonds to materialize, the trust has to be justified. Sometimes, trust involves little or no cooperation, so that the truster is completely dependent on the trustee, although the reverse is not true. Examples are the trust of young children in their parents and the trust of severely ill or disabled people in their care providers. Trust is particularly important for these people, because they tend to be powerless to exercise their rights or to enforce any kind of contract. Moreover, since the trust that the ill or disabled place in their care providers contributes to them being vulnerable, it is essential that they *can* trust these

people; in other words, it is important that their trust be justified. The goods at stake for them are all the goods involved in having a good or decent life.ⁱⁱ

The Bigger Problem

The bigger problem is reestablishing the trust after it has been broken or betrayed. In any situation or circumstance this is the most difficult of them all. It is very hard and difficult for anyone to give someone their full trust once they have been or feel betrayed. The question to be answered is how could ones trust be restored? While destroying trust is usually quick and almost always dirty, creating trust is often a slow and painful process (Uslaner 1999; Baier 1986).ⁱⁱⁱ The reasons why have to do with what kind of mental attitude trust is. It is not the sort of attitude that we can simply will ourselves to have, although we can cultivate it.

While the cultivation of any trust depends on what sort of mental attitude trust is, the cultivation of justified trust depends on how trust is justified (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2006).^{iv} Some philosophers, most notably Baier, deny that useful rules exist for when to trust so that one's trust will be justified. The process of trusting well is too complicated for that to be the case. Even so, giving some guidance on how to trust well is possible: for example, philosophers including Baier list factors that will at least improve our chances of trusting well, if we take them into account.^v

In closing, this article focused on trust and it being a two way street. As with any relationship, trust is an important factor and it is made up of bonds. But different answers to this question give rise to different philosophical puzzles. For example, in answering it, one might appeal to the nature of trust and trustworthiness, and consider whether the attitude of the proposed truster could support trust, and whether the qualities of the proposed trustee indicate trustworthiness.^{vi} This speaks volumes as this is true in many relationships, such as marriage. The bottom line here is to continue to build bonds and relationships on trust because they are the foundations of a good society.

ⁱ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Trust" First published, Monday, 20 February 2006. Retrieved on 7 February 2008, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trust/#NatTruTru>.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ Uslaner, E. M. 1999. "Democracy and Social Capital." In Warren ed. 1999.

Baier, A. C. 1986. "Trust and Antitrust," *Ethics* 96: 231-260.

^{iv} The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Trust" First published, Monday, 20 February 2006. Retrieved on 7 February 2008, from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trust/#NatTruTru>.

^v *ibid*

^{vi} *ibid*