



Honesty & Trust – A System of Check & Balance

Honesty and Trust—two words that are used often, separately and independently, in conversation and in written form. Either of these words often appears when describing character attributes of a person, or characteristics of a relationship between two parties (or people). For example, we have all found ourselves or heard someone say, at one point in time, “Don’t you trust me?” or “Why can’t you be honest for a change?” or “I can’t work with you if I don’t trust you!”

There are also many cases where honesty or trust has been put forth as a part of the terms of a relationship or expectation of behavior. For example, in a work environment that defines and publishes workplace values you may find the word trust, or honesty, as part of a set of company values. Furthermore, in advocating support for a person pursuing a position of leadership or authority you may have an expectation of honesty or trustworthiness on the part of the person. These scenarios describe a variety of common context in which these words—honesty and trust—are often used, separately.

There is, however, a close relationship between these two words. A majority of people—I would argue—do not quite understand this linkage. I had the benefit of assessing the connection between honesty and trust while developing *The Critical Eight*, the top eight principle output of a value system, as presented in my book—*RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It*. *Honesty* made it as part of *The Critical Eight*, while *Trust* did not—this is not to say that *Trust* is not an important principle; it certainly is.

In most casual relationships there is often no need for an establishment of trust. However, in most close or interdependent relationships—such as a partnership or collaboration—there is almost always a need for a balance of trust; that is, a total reliance on the upright character or truth about each party to a relationship. In a relationship founded on trust, either party is relying on the other to be truthful to the terms and known expectations of the relationship. This is what is in play when one person, in a relationship, says to the other “I trust you.” *Honesty*, on the other hand, refers to a commitment not to lie or deceive—a value or principle that one holds firmly and practices continuously. It makes sense, therefore, that while *Trust* allows you to enter into an interdependent relationship, *Honesty* enables you to maintain it. *Honesty* is the check, or verification mechanism, that ensures a continued balance of trust in a relationship.

The Relationship

Honesty is the check (verification mechanism) that ensures a continued balance of Trust in any interdependent relationship.

In a relationship it is possible to have honesty without trust; however, over the long term, it is impossible to maintain trust without honesty.



In a relationship it is possible to have honesty without trust. For instance, you may have two neighbors, living on the same street, maintaining a casual friendship. Both neighbors may value honesty and it might show when they interact on and off and share their daily experiences. However, their relationship may not rise to the level where one neighbor would place his or her trust in the other, enough to leave a child in the temporary care of the other. The need for trust would have to be preceded by adequate knowledge—such as character traits, moral standing, observable standards, household conditions, and so on—about the other party.

The two neighbors, over time, might get to know each other better, visit each other's home, and engage in joint outdoor family activities from time to time. This degree of comfort, by virtue of knowledge and familiarity, may lead to an establishment of trust between both parties. This balance of trust, in turn, creates a condition where either neighbor relies on the well being of his or her child while the child visits with the neighbor.

If someday one neighbor notices a bruised elbow on her child, after a visit with her neighbor, and she strives to find out what may have occurred, she would be relying on the honesty of her neighbor to assess the true nature of her child's injury. Any strong sense or evidence of dishonesty, on the part of the neighbor (being probed), would instantly destroy the level of trust established between them. However, a complete demonstration of honesty would strengthen the level and balance of trust and sustain the relationship.

Applying this principle of checks and balances—honesty and trust—to various settings and relationships, we find varying circumstances and conditions. In a work environment there is an expectation of trust between you and your superiors, you and your peers (or business partners), and you and your subordinates. This expectation is often automatic when you begin in any new environment. This expectation of trust also assumes that everyone values and exhibits honesty—but this is not always the case. Respect—that is valuation—for a superior or coworker is often lost when honesty, the means for verifying continued trust, is deemed gone. This common reality underscores the need for organizations, in general, to articulate and constantly communicate the importance of honesty (not just as an organizational value etched on fancy posters or frames) at every level of the organization structure, beginning at the very top.

Moreover, in personal social relationships we often find ourselves in situations where we believe we've established a foundation and balance of trust, only to be disappointed, and perhaps severely hurt, in the aftermath of realizing there was never a mechanism for verifying (continued) trust—honesty. The strategy employed is often reversed—trust first and hope for honesty later! Other than workplaces and personal social settings, you would seek to correctly apply this same principle in the following types of relationships: family, including parent-child, spousal, and sibling; teacher-student as well as parent-teacher; doctor-patient, and many more.



To be trusted in any interpersonal or interdependent relationship you have to be honest and demonstrate honesty, as this is the only means to verify trust over the long term—*Honesty* is the audit mechanism for continued *Trust* and this is why honesty engenders respect. This basic principle is certainly worth teaching. (Reader views welcome: ektimis@ntaiwo.com)

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo