

TRUST – Literature Review

Trust is the foundation of all human connections, which makes it one of the most important aspects of romantic relationships – it's the glue which holds them together and encourages intimacy. Breakdown in trust is thereby a lot more painful than a breakup of a relationship. But whether or not we are able to trust someone doesn't start the moment the relationship does, or for that matter the moment a betrayal is discovered. Trust has a history behind it. So it's very important that we explore our own history.

Think back on all the major people that have impacted your life, from your childhood until now. Ask yourself if you've fully appreciated what each person brought to your history of trust – for better or for worse. When it was for worse, did you actually deal with it, or are their past hurts and mistrusts that are still unresolved? To access the connection, think of all the feelings a current betrayal has roused in you (assuming that's why your trust issues have resurfaced again). Did you feel any of those feelings before at any other point in your life? If so, what you're feeling in your current situation could be anchored by the weight of all past broken trusts, especially if they haven't been dealt with. Ultimately, trust happens in the present, but it connects past experience with future probability.

Healthy installation of trust early in life makes us able to discern who is trustworthy and who is not. If we couldn't trust our parents, we can become untrusting, cynical and pessimistic, and draw the conclusion that people are consistently untrustworthy. The flip-side: If our parents were consistently trustworthy, we may be easily fooled into thinking that so are others. Beyond that, part of our ability to trust can be hormonal. A fetus can sense maternal stress and its' receptors for stress hormones like cortisol will become more fully developed than its receptors for the more calming, bonding, trusting hormone, oxytocin. Once we're born, healthy loving touch can nurture the trusting circuitry and touch-starvation can stifle it. As an adult, a touch-starved individual may use sex as a substitute for touch because they didn't develop an appropriate system. As such, their genitals start to do what their hearts are supposed to do. But since the genitals weren't meant to carry out that task, they fail miserably. What makes it worse is, an infant who didn't experience non-verbal attachment gestures will be impacted in the part of their brain responsible for emotional regulation, impulse control, and reward systems, thereby predisposing them to addictions and/or wrong decision making.

Trust thrives in an environment with 5 As: attention, acceptance, appreciation, affection and allowing – as in, allowing one to show their feelings without being interrupted, punished, or ridiculed; giving one the permission and encouragement to live in accord with their deepest values and healthy needs; and protecting and supporting one’s healthy dreams. As you ensure that those ingredients are present in your relationship, trust will grow. It’s nearly impossible for someone to express those five elements, and genuinely be there for us, if their attention is elsewhere. So if you can trust your partner to be there for you, to have your back, to support you in your endeavors, and to express the 5 As, it’s highly likely that you can trust their overall loyalty and commitment to you. Dr. Gottman explains this concept beautifully.

So how can trust be rebuilt?

In small, defining moments, as Dr. Gottman puts it. Trust involves surrender. The irony with addicts: they say they want their freedom so have a hard time surrendering, yet they give up their freedom entirely, to the potion that controls them, in significantly worse ways than anything that can ever happen in a loving relationship.

The self-absorption which keeps one from surrendering to a relationship converts the 5 As to egotistical equivalents in the following ways:

Attention to a partner is replaced by **Self-Absorption**.

Acceptance of a partner is replaced with **Judgment & Criticism**.

Appreciation for a partner is replaced by **Indifference or Blame**.

Affection for a partner is replaced by **Distancing**.

Allowing a partner to pursue their values and dreams is replaced by **Controlling**.

Depending upon where your partner is at, can give you a good sense of their commitment. Beyond that, you can also know that you can trust your partner if they exhibit the following six factors consistently:

1. Sincere work on letting go of ego for the success of the relationship.
2. A continual giving of the 5 As, shown by attunement to our feelings.
3. The abiding sense that the relationship offers a secure base from which each partner can explore, and a safe haven to which each can return.
4. A series of kept agreements.
5. Mutuality in decision making.
6. A willingness to work problems out with each other by addressing, processing, resolving them together, including a willingness to declare our pain about what’s missing in the relationship and our appreciation of what’s fulfilling.

At the end of the day, trust is the same as letting go of fear – which is best accomplished as a team.

Both parties can free themselves from fear by taking actions such as these:

1. Let go of trying to control what others do or what happens to you.
2. Do something each day which enacts and reflects your own deepest needs, values and wishes.
3. Show your feelings as they happen.
4. Speak up for yourself.
5. Ask for what you want.
6. Take responsibility for your behavior.
7. Don't put up with abuse of any kind.
8. State and maintain your boundaries.
9. Give up designing your behavior with the motivation to be liked.
10. Release your intuitive and instinctive nature rather than having to be totally rational and in control at all times. This means acting spontaneous, unguarded and natural.

If we refuse to trust, we end up suffering. There are two kinds of suffering:

1. What someone else does to us.
2. What we do to ourselves – by refusing to accept reality, and trying to control what's out of our control. As such, we go from being another's victim to being our own victim. But if we let go of our obsessions and become more mindful of what's happening and how we can take care of ourselves despite it, then we can at least trust ourselves – which is where it begins.

Many people think that broken trust has a finality to it. But trust doesn't have to end the way a bear dies – impossible to resuscitate. It can end the way a bear hibernates – able to be reanimated, given the right conditions and a suitable lapse of time.

Using another animal metaphor, while removing our hand from the proverbial hot stove makes sense, what doesn't make sense is how cats react to hot stoves – once they've been burned, you'll never find them atop a stove, even a cold one. Many partners take that approach and miss out on a better alternative.

Rebuilding Trust requires:

- T**ruthfulness: Committing to telling the truth at all times.
- R**ealization: Realizing what broken trust has done to partner& relationship.
- U**nderstanding: Gaining an understanding into why it happened so it doesn't happen again.
- S**trategy: Coming up with a plan of action – i.e. a relapse prevention plan.
- T**racking: Monitoring a plan to ensure that it's being fulfilled.

As you can see, both parties have roles to play. Beyond that, both parties can commit to the following profile of psychological health, which fosters trust. (Adapted from David Richo's book, *Daring to Trust* – a must read!)

- We have a sense of autonomy and act responsibly.
- We perceive reality as it is rather than through fantasies, projections, and transferences.
- We are not directed by our past but live in the present with an intention geared toward a future of appropriate goals.
- We have a support system and are part of others support systems.
- We give and receive the 5 As, to ourselves and each other.
- In times of stress, we have the ability to self-soothe and look for strength within rather than escape into self-destructive behavior or inappropriate dependency on others.
- We are not overwhelmed by changes in our intimate relationship, nor scared off by an opportunity for intimacy to deepen.
- We can adjust to comings and goings without being overwhelmed by a sense of engulfment, abandonment, or fear.
- We come to terms with fear and guilt so that they neither hamper nor drive our behavior and choices.
- We face disappointment and frustration without becoming destabilized.
- We can set reasonable boundaries on how much we will give, or on how far others can go in their demands upon us. (Ideally we shouldn't expect our partner to meet more than 25% of our needs.)
- We have the ability to put off immediate gratification when necessary.
- We act with integrity and live in accord with life-affirming values,

such as generosity, truthfulness, and respect toward everyone, regardless of their status or attitude toward us.

- We work on our ego so that we are not compelled by fear of not looking good, attachment to being right, arrogance, control, or entitlement.
- We realize that we have a shadow side and are willing to explore it, especially when it shows up in our behavior. Entitlement is the shadow side of trust.
- We see our lives as having a purpose and meaning, and we are committed to making our unprecedented contribution in accord with our unique gifts and talents.
- We are no longer compelled to act on our thoughts and feelings – and that includes, not obsessing over meaning, origin, judgment, blame, comparison, shame, and other aspects of victimization.

Finally, for an official check, complete the following audit for your partner – adapted from the best book on trust – *Daring to Trust: Opening Ourselves to Real Love & Intimacy*, by David Richo.

MY PARTNER ...

- Shows integrity and lives in accord with standards of fairness and honesty in all his or her dealings. (There is a connection between integrity and trust in the Webster's Dictionary definition: "Trust is the assured reliance on another's integrity.")
- May operate on the basis of self-interest but never at my expense or the expense of others.
- Will not retaliate, use the silent treatment, resort to violence, or hold a grudge.
- Predictably shows me the five A's.
- Supports me when I need him or her.
- Keeps agreements.
- Remains faithful.
- Does not lie or have a secret life.
- Genuinely cares about me.
- Stands by me and up for me.
- Is what he or she appears to be; wants to appear just as he or she is, no matter if at times that is unflattering.

- Respects my boundaries-for instance, when I say no, he will back off. Tries to work things out by addressing, processing, and resolving issues as they arise. This means that his or her presence in my life has become reliable. In the face of difficulties and conflicts, it is not “ Get me outta here, as the Cowardly Lion would say, but “I will stay with thee”, as Romeo would.
- Does not jump to finding a solution when I tell him or her of a problem in my life but rather looks for ways to deepen his or her feelings about the problem and care→ fully inquire into what I really need in that moment.
- Can listen without judgment (without a fixed or moralistic belief). I do not find myself saying or thinking, "He/she doesn't hear me." I notice that my partner is listening attentively to my words, my feelings, and my body language too. The ability to hear someone is really about trust, not simply about communication. A trust issue always lurks beneath a communication difficulty.
- Does not give up on me or on anyone. My partner continues to believe in the inherent goodness and potential for enlightenment in everyone and believes that problems between himself or herself and others are workable. When others refuse that option and demand that my partner stay away, however, he or she gets themes→ sage and pulls back.
- Is more committed to being honest about his or her mistakes and apologizing when necessary than in defending his or her ego. A partner who can't admit he was wrong but instead loudly insists he was justified in his unkind behavior is not a good candidate for intimacy. Imagine that same kind of ego in a doctor-or a president. (I recall an interview in which Henry Kissinger said that Richard Nixon did not end the war in Vietnam early on in his terms because "he did not want to be remembered as the president who lost a war." Imagine having a son in the army with that attitude in the White House.)

Our life begins with a need for reliability so we can learn to trust.

Our life matures when we learn to live with uncertainty.

To live between these bookends makes our journey marvelously intriguing.