

Trust: The Hidden Accelerator

Idea In Short

Trust shapes how quickly people and teams move. Drawing on frameworks from Stephen Covey and David Maister, this piece examines what trust is made of and how to strengthen it deliberately.

Trust is not a new idea — people have been writing and thinking about trust for thousands of years. From ancient texts to modern management books, it's the same human theme: trust defines how we live and work together. But today, we live in a cautious world. Scams, hacks, cheating, and endless scandals have made everyone wary. We're guarded, skeptical, and more isolated than ever.

Yet, in every arena — work, family, leadership, or partnership — it all comes back to one thing: trust. Trust that others have your best interests at heart. Trust that commitments will be kept. Trust that judgment is sound. Without it, nothing moves quickly — progress stalls.

Stephen Covey's "The Speed of Trust" captures this with simple clarity. Trust isn't just a nice-to-have feeling; it's measurable. Covey even gives us an equation:

$$\text{Credibility} = \text{Character} + \text{Competence}$$

Character is your integrity, honesty, and consistency — how predictable and accountable you are. Competence is your ability — can you deliver results, handle pressure, and continue learning and improving? Both matter.

You could be brilliant but deceitful, or kind but ineffective; neither builds trust. Real trust is the fusion of good intent and reliable performance. When you pass the ball, does the other person score? When you hand off a project, does it shine? That's what trust looks like in motion.

Covey outlines thirteen behaviors that build trust:

1. Talk straight - clear words, no jargon
2. Show respect - even in small things
3. Create transparency - be yourself
4. Right wrongs - own mistakes quickly
5. Show loyalty - give away credit
6. Listen first - understand first, then respond
7. Keep commitments - do what you say
8. Extend trust - give people a chance
9. Deliver results - who doesn't like winning?
10. Get better - ask for feedback, skill up
11. Confront reality - run towards the fear
12. Clarify expectations - reduce drama
13. Practice accountability - to yourself, others

David Maister, author of *The Trusted Advisor*, takes this thinking even further with his Trust Equation:

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In plain terms:

- Credibility is what you say — the words you use and the expertise you communicate
- Reliability is what you do — the follow-through on your promises
- Intimacy is how safe others feel sharing with you — emotional honesty and empathy
- Self-Orientation is the kicker — it measures who you're really doing it for. The less self-centered your actions, the higher your trust quotient

Put Covey and Maister together, and the message is clear: trust combines character, competence, and connection — expressed with consistency and without ego.

Think of it like this: when you pass the ball, does your teammate score? When you recommend someone for a role, do they deliver? When you lead a team, do people feel seen

and safe enough to tell you the truth? That's trust at work — invisible yet unmistakable.

And in our GenAI-driven world, trust might be humanity's greatest superpower. Machines can process data, but they can't build rapport or keep promises. Individuals solve small problems; trusted teams solve big ones. The speed of our collective success depends on how much we're willing to trust — and how worthy we are of it.

None of us are a perfect 13 out of 13. But each day is a chance to strengthen a few of those trust muscles. Focus on three behaviors you want to improve and consciously work on those.

In the end, you can't fake trust, but you build it, one action at a time.

So ask yourself: how strong is your trust equation — and how fast does your trust move?

Summary

Trust is built through repeated, consistent actions rather than declarations. Identify two or three behaviors from Covey's list that need work and focus there. Small, reliable improvements compound into a stronger trust foundation over time.