Trust Is Fast

Idea In Short

Trust is the economic engine of professional services. Build it through character and competence, then compound it by listening, delivering results and confronting fear. Long-term games with long-term people pay the largest rewards.

Trust Is Not a New Topic

Many books have been written about trust, and you could argue the Bible and other tomes were also about the human journey and trust. Without getting too metaphysical, we live in a not-so-trusting world. Think of scams, hacks, cheating, scandals and all manner of vagaries. The world has become a leery, suspicious place. We are all too guarded, overly self-confident, cloistered and frankly lonely. At work, with clients, with family and with friends, it is all about trust. Trust that you have my best interests in mind. Trust that my judgment is not too biased or wobbly. Trust that you remember your commitments. Trust that authorities, regulators and bosses know what they are doing.

Speed of Trust by Stephen Covey

When revisiting Stephen Covey's 2006 book, his simplification stands out. Trust is a feeling, subjective and squishy. People trained in business need proof, so the question becomes how trust can be earned and maintained. All of professional services rests on this question of who we trust and why. As Naval Ravikant says, play long-term games with long-term people. Bankers sell trust, consultants sell trust, teachers sell trust, attorneys sell trust, spouses sell trust and partners sell trust. Covey wrote a formula: credibility equals character plus competence. 1

Character

You may be smart and ambitious, but without integrity you would be, as Naval Ravikant

might note, an unstoppable super-thief. Are you a trustworthy person? Are you consistent, easy to understand, transparent and accountable? Would I want to work with you? Do you pass the airport test, meaning I would gladly spend a delayed flight in your company? Do you have your client's best interests in mind? As David Maister said, if you do not like the work, do not take the money. Are you doing the work for the right reasons, and are you a professional? 2

Competence

You may have character, but are you any good? When I pass the football to you in the Premier League, do you kick the ball into the goal? When I refer business to you, do you honor me by doing a good job? Are you the professional who tells the client bad news when it is needed? Are you the professional who will be even better in two years? Leaders have followers, and the question is whether I should follow you. Character earns the first chance, and competence earns the repeat business.

Trust Is a Superpower

There is no real debate on this. In the world of generative Artificial Intelligence [AI], we need to double down on things only humans can do. Building rapport and cementing trust is one of those skills. When teaching undergraduates, we fill their heads with useful formulas and frameworks, but more importantly we want them to be trustworthy individuals, teammates and leaders. Individuals solve small problems. You can do a lot, add value, get a client, save money and invest smartly. Teams solve big problems. Whether parenting, launching a company or making a client successful, you have limits on your own. Trust is what lets teams form, divide work and outperform any individual.

Covey Lists 13 Ways to Build Trust

Covey lists 13 behaviors that build trust. No one is a 13 out of 13. We are all spotty. Many of us have 360-degree feedback from bosses, peers, suppliers and partners. Many of us have executive coaches, and many of us see the same patterns on our performance reviews year after year. The task is to pick the behaviors you want to improve. 3

Listen More

I enjoy talking, and as a teacher I have things to share. How much of that is wanting to look smart? With all the tools available, there are many ways to share what I think, so I need to listen more. As Satya Nadella said, listen more, talk less and be decisive when the time comes. A Greek proverb notes it is easier to talk than to hold one's tongue. Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that the louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons. Listening builds trust because it signals that the other person's view matters.

Deliver Results

Delivering results is where competence meets commitment. There is a flywheel of teaching, coaching, books and courses, and we are at a transformative time in generative AI. The keys to this tool are available to everyone, and we can multiply our output many times over. This is the moment to put on the cleats and get on the pitch. As Nadella said, the people who are successful are those who can learn, unlearn and relearn. As Stephen Curry said, success is not an accident but a choice. Results convert trust from a feeling into evidence.

Confront the Fear

This is Tim Ferriss territory. If we want to improve, and we believe we are typically what holds us back, then we should dance with the fear. If we have enough economic, psychological, relational and societal safety to take risks, and we want to live a rich, thick life, we should acknowledge the fear and act anyway. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. As Tim Ferriss noted, fear is your friend and an indicator that you are doing something worthwhile. Trust grows when you act despite fear, because action produces the evidence that others need to believe in you.

Keep Building Trust

We can only control ourselves. Trust compounds over long horizons, so the daily choices to listen, deliver and confront fear accumulate into a reputation that no marketing campaign can match. Pick your behaviors, work them this year and let the long game do the rest.

- 1The Speed Of Trust Argues Trust Is A Hard-Edged Economic Driver, Not A Soft Virtue, And That It Can Be Learned And Measured
- 2Naval Ravikant Argues All Benefits In Life Come From Compound Interest, And Long-Term Games With Long-Term, Ethical People Are How Trust Compounds

- 3The 13 Behaviors Of High-Trust Leaders Flow From Character And Competence, And The First Five Stem From Character, The Next Five From Competence And The Last Three From Both

Summary

Trust is a superpower in a world of generative Artificial Intelligence. Individuals solve small problems and teams solve big ones, but only trust scales both. Pick a behavior to improve this year, deliver results and dance with the fear. We can only control ourselves.