

Building Up Trust

Trust is one of our most precious resources.

Read what Ulf D. Posé says about how to build it up – sequel 6:

If you want trust, you need the competence to judge.

Every economical crisis is also a confidence crisis. If expectations have not been met and dreams have not come true, this generates insecurity and lets trust dwindle. If trust has crumbled, it is extremely hard to restore. Because there are some requirements for trust to grow. It is based on reciprocity. On the other hand, that also means: every one of us can contribute to its growth – by behaving trustworthy and trusting others. Our series wants to show what matters.

Adequacy is not just a question of proportions, as discussed in the previous sequel, but also a question of justice. In my book the definition by Ulpian of 2,000 years ago is still valid: Justice is „the firm will to let everybody get his or her right“. You have to be especially careful about adequacy when sanctioning something. People make mistakes. Sanctioning them must happen through measures that match the mistakes. If someone stole 10 cent, you must not fine him 100 Euros.

I find it just as wrong how the mistakes of bank managers in the financial crisis is sanctioned with a damaged reputation. It seems to me that the medieval pillory was replaced by a media-pillory. Adequacy also takes into consideration that trust is a matter of dualism. Dualism basically means the opposite ends of an issue. With respect to knowledge, it means that there is a totally different aspect inherent in every thing. In order to know it, you have to be aware of it: up is defined by down, you cannot imagine right without left, and if I do not know backwards, I cannot say if I am actually running forward.

The same principle is true for trust. It holds a field of tension with caution – and not with distrust, as you probably thought. Distrust is an almost paranoid form of caution, just like blind confidence is an almost paranoid form of trust. We all need caution, because it is the necessary corrector protecting us against blind confidence. You can be sure that trust will always grow when we come to know someone better and do not get disappointed in the process.

People who treat us kindly, show an interest in our affairs and give us a friendly word once in a while often manage to make us tell them something about our lives that we would normally keep to ourselves. Of course, we do not trust everybody without limits. The fact that we check our luggage in when boarding a plane does not automatically mean that we would trust any stranger with our money or children and ask them to just keep a watchful eye on them. We do know that blind confidence invites abuse.

Our problem is that we sometimes use the word trust a little inflatedly. And we think too little about whether or not trust is adequate. As a consequence, we start thinking in either-or-terms: either you trust each other, or not. Either you refrain from all control, or you mistrust someone. What you forget here is that this black-and-white concept is only known if your trust is unconditional. Adequacy finds out when unconditional trust can be given and when not.

People who do not think about the adequacy of trust interpret the slightest idea of control as mistrust. If you think like this, you forget that there are different kinds of opposites, rather than just contradiction, which excludes all other views on an issue. For instance like in death and life. If you put all the emphasis on this kind of opposite, then you silently assume that trust and control, too, cannot exist side by side.

After all, we also have contrary opposites: not all that is not black has to be automatically white, and vice versa. The idea of unconditioned and absolute trust is something for romanticists. We all know: even if a private or business connection has functioned well over many years, it would still be rather blue-eyed, probably even careless or stupid, to put absolute and boundless trust in every one of our relationships. Even if past experience encourage us to trust someone without constraints, it is always possible that something happens to destroy this trust.

Let me point out this: personally, I do not object to unconditioned trust – I believe it is sometimes possible between humans and even necessary for a really happy life. However, I think that unconditioned trust in everything and everybody is usually bound to cause disappointment. Ask yourself about the amount of unconditioned and unlimited trust. Imagine yourself going rock climbing with a partner into a very high rock face. Even in moments of danger, you will be totally dependent on your partner whose rope you are hanging on. Who of your friends, acquaintances or family would you trust in this kind of situation?

As you will notice, unconditioned trust is only possible with special people. Subconsciously, we distinguish in a hierarchical order for trust and set requirements for when which trust is applied. I think it is very important that we do not think in terms of only black-and-white. Instead, we must build up the necessary trust in degrees of adequacy. After an initial advance trust, we want to see that the degree of trust we have invested can be increased step by step, so that in the end we have built up a maximum of trust.

Adequacy always aims at a higher degree of mutual trust, both in business life and private life, and it is well worth the effort to invest in this goal systematically. Unconditioned and absolute trust from the beginning, however, is a romantic illusion that might do more harm than good. It can nourish extensive expectations with the person who trusts and therefore cause countless disappointments and conflicts. If, on the other hand, you think in terms of adequacy and degrees of trust – that is, if you decide from instance to instance which requirements you set for trust – then adequacy becomes a corrective element. Applying it, you can prevent naïve blind confidence.

To sum it up, you can say that a person acts adequately if he has a clear concept of the effort and achievement of his activities and puts these into proportion with the possible damage - impartial with respect to the parties concerned. Consequently, you only act adequately if you consider the consequences for other parties concerned along with personal consequences. Apart from this, adequacy is also a question of proportionality. If your behaviour is adequate, you have given the right priority to effort and achievement. At the same time, you have made it possible to determine whether or not you can deliver what you have promised. After all, as soon as I know the expected effort, I can better decide if I can make this effort. This knowledge prevents me from airy promises I may or may not be able to fulfil.

Thus, trust is a question of reliability. We will discuss this aspect in the next sequel.