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## **The Trust Matrix**

By Chip Hartman, Editor-in-Chief, December 11, 2007

Each of us has a personal story to tell about why we decided to join the ETP Network and learn its fresh new approach for building trusted relationships with others. For some, it's the excitement of keeping apace with social networking and its impact on business and technology. For others, it's the dismal failures and disappointments associated with the "black hole" network where we learned that countless hopes and dreams can vanish into the void with a simple click of the SEND button. For some, it's a subtle combination of the two.

But regardless of the reason for joining, there are still certain aspects of membership that occasionally need to be reexamined so that we can all benefit from the inherent value each person brings to the group. It's time for us to remind ourselves that the heart and soul of networking is the building of connections, and that truly meaningful connections – relationships – are always built on trust.

From an ETP Network perspective, the definitive word on the topic of trust is provided by Stephen M. R. Covey in his book The Speed of Trust (Free Press, © 2006), in which he presents trust as a kind of Rubik's Cube that correlates the dimensions of character, competence, credibility, capabilities, integrity, and respect. For those who are serious about incorporating the ETP Network's core values and principles into their daily lives, there is perhaps no more important book to read while spending some quality time with your favorite highlighter.

This article deals with what might be considered a spinoff concept called the Trust Matrix. The Trust Matrix is a way of thinking about the role each of us plays within the ETP Network and how our daily actions either help to build trust (creating trust equity) or wear it away (creating trust deficits).

### **Some Basic Assumptions**

To understand how the Trust Matrix works, let's begin by laying out some fundamental assumptions about ourselves as a collection of individuals:

- ▶ We all have different wants, needs, and desires (W/N/D).
- ▶ We are all at different stages in our personal career management or career transition journeys.
- ▶ We all have different personalities and therefore probably gravitate to different styles of networking.
- ▶ We all have different expectations for what the ETP Network can or will do for us.

### **Why We Become Members**

With those assumptions in place, let's now examine what draws us to the ETP Network in the first place. There are probably just as many reasons as there are members, but for most of us, these three top the list:

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- ▶ For those of us in transition, we're tired of the "black hole" network's failure to produce any remotely meaningful results.
  - ▶ We like the prospect of building relationships and recognize both the short and long-term value of developing connections built on reciprocity as opposed to the outmoded methods built on flimsy, disposable, dead-end acquaintances.
  - ▶ We like the idea of having a social safety net as we venture out into our individual career management adventures.

Fundamentally, we are drawn to the ETP Network because it offers a new way to approach networking, a way based on the gradual but persistent building of trust. We learn early on that the bond of trust between any two individuals is the glue that forms the basis of a relationship, and that the relationship, if it's meant to last, requires constant nourishment so that the day-to-day exchange of trust transactions between members is always honored, preserved, and revered as one of the highest ideals of membership.

### **An Individual Experience and a Shared Experience**

As we start to embrace the notion of being a valued cog in a giant wheel of friends and associates, we begin to realize that it's no longer accurate to view our niche in the network as just a solitary, individual experience. Although we never lose our individual identities, we are now, by definition, interconnected – and, for better or worse, interdependent too.

Despite our individual differences, we now find ourselves pooled together in a Warm/Trusted Network made up of a large and diverse group of members. As such, we have some new responsibilities, both to ourselves and to each other.

- ▶ As a shared experience with obligations to both ourselves and to others, we conduct our networking activities with an implicit agreement that we will make the best possible attempt to adopt the new networking and career transition methods as outlined on Rod Colon's numerous conference calls and in the organization's core documents so that we can make them work and produce meaningful results not only for ourselves but for those to whom we build connections.
- ▶ Since the ETP Network's core values are built on the establishment of trust, we now have an obligation to build, with every available opportunity, good solid "trust equity" in our everyday dealings with each other. There is no room for overt selfish behavior since most of us find that to be one of the highest, most brazen forms of disrespect and a full 180 degrees out of phase with the ETP Network Mission statement. Our attention needs to be balanced between a healthy, normal regard for our own needs and a new emphasis on how our specific talents, abilities, skills, and assets can contribute to meeting the needs of others and the well-being of the group.

### **How Do You Build Trust Equity?**

It's important to understand that once you join the ETP Network, your actions and behaviors carry a significant level of consequences simply because you are gradually becoming more and more involved in the lives of others. It's very much like leaving a trail of trust transactions behind you wherever you go that's visible not only to those with whom you interact directly but those who learn of your reputation by association. Without ever intending to do it, your

interactions with others leave a kind of trust fingerprint that's visible across the network so that others gradually learn how to measure your integrity, reliability, and willingness to reciprocate. Based on their assessments, they decide if you are worthy of their cooperation, respect – and, of course, trust.

How do we build up trust equity within the network? The biggest single act of trust-building one can ever perform comes directly out of The Speed of Trust: Determine a value-added reason to make a commitment to someone and simply keep the commitment. Then do it again. After that, do it again. Then do it yet again. And keep doing it, constantly. Using this "Make-Keep-Repeat" <sup>1</sup> cycle practically guarantees a sharp increase in your trust equity.

Let's remember that as you keep commitments, especially the tough ones requiring an often inconvenient expenditure of time and energy, word of your trustworthiness gets passed along the communication pathways of the network. Your trust profile can easily start to take on characteristics of world-class dimensions when you expend energy to help others and you do it consistently, reliably, and with unquestionable integrity. Beyond that, if you really want to ratchet up the trust accolades, do all of those things but be sure to do them with genuine humility. Recipients of such extraordinary treatment will probably line up at your doorstep – not to ask for favors, but to present opportunities.

### How Do You Lose Trust?

It's far easier to lose trust than to acquire it, but the truly bad news is that, while losing it occurs as a fleeting effortless moment, recapturing it – at least back to its original levels – can seem like climbing Mt. Everest with a backpack full of bowling balls.

Let's examine some broken trust scenarios to see how a few ill-considered actions cause substantial damage to an ETP Network member's trust profile. As you read these items, try to keep the full irony of the situation in proper perspective: As members of a social network, the bond of group responsibility pulls on all of us with equal force, yet in a moment of weakness, loss of composure, or a sudden and overpowering urge for the quick fix, we can suddenly lose sight of our niche within the community and do severe damage to our trust equity, equity that may have taken months to build. We're then forced to expend an inordinate amount of time and energy to recapture it, if that's even possible.

#### **1. Magic Bullet**

It's terribly easy in today's age of information overload to fall victim to the allure of the magic bullet. This typically happens when someone, usually under great stress and perhaps otherwise well-intentioned, caves in to the pressure of finding the easy way out of a particular networking challenge. It usually takes the form of a careless phone call or e-mail message in which members clearly step out of bounds with regard to the ETP Network's core values of integrity, respect, responsibility, and compassion and can make them appear smug, aloof, brazen, presumptuous, self-absorbed – even imperious and condescending.

Magic Bullet people have trouble accepting the fact that the ETP Network has processes in place for establishing good, solid connections. They become agitated, abrupt, and occasionally flat-out rude when they discover that these processes will not be circumvented just to fit their specific timetable.

They also tend to forget that there's another ETP member on the receiving end of the hostilities, and that the recipient will be completely justified in viewing the offensive behavior as a breach of trust, especially if the use of procedural shortcuts seems to be part of a new and disturbing pattern.

Worse, there are no internal rules preventing victims from sharing the unpleasant incident with other members, so gaining a reputation as a Magic Bullet person is tantamount to committing networking suicide.

## **2. Entitlement Mentality**

This method of trust degradation occurs when someone chooses to remain stuck in the old, traditional "employee" mind set instead of gradually migrating to the new paradigm of being the CEO of his or her own business. Those who remain predisposed to wearing an "employee's hat" have a strong tendency to feel entitled to receive a certain type of treatment, usually related to the preservation of stature they once held within a company's organizational structure and having little to do with actual accomplishment or proven competence.

True CEOs do not allow themselves to be perceived in this manner since a dependence on entitlements reveals weakness and an inability to take care of one's own affairs. Those who abuse trust by indulging in the Entitlement Mentality often do so by making absurdly self-centered requests of others that, tragically for them, tend to have the effect of broadcasting their audacity – and their insecurities – all in the same breath.

## **3. Reciprocity Failure**

There are people out there who have a tough time with reciprocity. They just don't get it. Although it's not a complex principle and although it's highly unlikely they don't grasp it, they nevertheless have a great deal of trouble practicing it.

Unfortunately, within the operational framework of the ETP Network, reciprocity is the transactional currency that members exchange in order to build trust and develop relationships. As relationships develop, we can't use cash, credit cards, or PayPal to ensure their continued success. Networking currency is built on the trust standard, not the gold standard.

Those who fail Reciprocity 101, especially in a team environment where the natural rhythm of give-and-take has already been adopted as the norm, quickly lose the respect and trust of others. They allow themselves to be branded as an unreliable, bankrupt link in the chain.

## **4. Deception or Hidden Agendas**

Deception and hidden agendas represent a special type of poison for relationships that have managed to build up moderate levels of trust equity over time. This behavior mechanism is particularly insidious because those who become victimized justifiably feel a sense of betrayal once the deception is exposed. The response can range from bitter disappointment to undiluted outrage.

Willful deception is not a minor offense. In all of the ways in which trust can be damaged, this is one that almost always provides the most difficult path back to restoration since it is rooted in a willful disregard for the rights and feelings of others.

Of course there are people who just have a difficult time expressing their intentions well, and they can certainly be forgiven and coaxed to improve their communications skills. Some just misstate an occasional fact or two, so no real harm is done. But for others, sorry to say, duplicity and deceit are hardwired into their genetic makeup and couldn't be removed with a fleet of bulldozers.

It's worth pointing out that hidden agendas have a nasty habit of exposing themselves in the most embarrassing and inopportune ways. Those who deal in deception very often find themselves publicly humiliated when the truth eventually illuminates their dark side. Bottom line: Garbage in, garbage out.

## **5. Withholding Information, Communication Failure, Gossip**

Being a reliable conduit of good, dependable information is the mark of an esteemed ETP Network member. The flip side of this is willfully engaging in the spreading of misinformation or information that is known to be suspect or questionable.

The behavior of regularly dealing in the spread of questionable information is gossip, and gossip plays fast and loose with the bonds of trust. Some researchers actually believe gossip in the workplace is a form of violence, an actual form of attack. This is because offenders often feel they must emote frequently, aggressively, and with no regard for diligent fact-checking. Workplace e-mail is one of their favorite weapons; ironically, it's also one of their biggest trapdoors since more and more companies are adopting a zero-tolerance policy on using e-mail indiscriminately and irresponsibly.

## **6. Closed-Mindedness**

Although all of these trust-busting scenarios weaken or destroy bonds of trust between members, some are notable for their ability to cause genuine hurt and pain. Closed-Mindedness is not one of them.

Closed-Mindedness is practiced by those who are totally and completely inflexible about certain matters and could not be encouraged to examine an opposing viewpoint if they were offered weekly shipments of gold bullion direct from Fort Knox. Their single-minded 'exclusionist' view precludes them from even considering alternatives and options.

As a link in the ETP Network chain, those who practice closed-mindedness cause a great deal of frustration and anger on the part of those who've just received the latest tirade of inflexibility. What makes this an anger event instead of a pain event is that no one ever believes there can actually be people out there who are so rigid in their beliefs and averse to giving even minimal consideration to other points of view.

The questions that trigger the anger response go something like this:

- ▶ How can this person ever believe he/she will ever be taken seriously - about anything?
- ▶ With that level of inflexibility, how is it possible to conduct even the simplest business with them?
- ▶ If there is an unwillingness to budge from one's point of view, ever, about anything, then why would I want to invest any trust in such a person?

The answers, of course, should be quite obvious.

### Conclusion

Trust is one of the most important things that keeps people bonded to each other in meaningful relationships. It is earned in small but continuous fragments, often over very long periods of time. Once built, it becomes the defining characteristic of almost all human relationships. Once lost, it can be extraordinarily difficult, though not impossible, to win back. A wise approach to networking must always involve paying careful attention to the hard work we must perform to earn the trust of others and the countless ways in which it can be squandered.

<sup>1</sup> The Speed of Trust, Covey, Stephen M. R., Free Press, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney; page 288

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