

Are You Worthy of Trust?

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2004, published in *Houston Home Journal* on Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2004

Effective leaders are trustworthy people. If folks don't trust you, it's tough to influence them.

In last week's column, I wrote about what people expect in their leaders. The number one item that individuals report they want is honesty. We want our leaders to be worthy of our trust—truthful, ethical, principled, and of high integrity.

We usually don't think about why we trust somebody—it's a conclusion we tend to draw emotionally and even subconsciously. For a moment, however, let's think about why some people are considered trustworthy and others are not.

I've worked on resolving "trust issues" for over thirty years, and I think I understand why we tend to trust some people and not trust others. I'd like you to test these thoughts, so please think of someone you deeply trust. Also, please think of someone you don't trust. After I share the model, I'll ask you to test it using your relationships with these two individuals.

The first element that has to be in place for trust to exist is "**competence**". The question is, "Do I believe that this person is capable of doing whatever he or she claims to do?" For example, you might not trust your automobile mechanic to conduct surgery if your appendix bursts, but you sure do want the mechanic to replace a drive belt that is cracked and brittle!

The second element that has to be in place is "**honorable motive**". The question is, "Do I believe that this person offering help is doing so from a genuine desire to serve, or is there some intent there that is more selfish?" We often make judgments about why people do what they do—and we're often wrong. Still, it's our perception of their motives and intentions that determines whether we trust or not.

The final element that has to be in place is "**reliability**". The question is, "Do I believe that this person will do whatever it takes to keep his or her promise, even if the going gets rough?" Sometimes people have good intentions, but they fail to follow-through. They don't have to let us down very often for us to conclude that we're not able to trust in what they tell us.

Are you ready to test the model? Think about the person you trust. I'll bet he or she rates highly in all three areas. And for the person you don't trust, I guarantee that he or she rates poorly in at least one of these three areas!

If you have responsibility for developing future leaders in your organization, it's very helpful to use this model in providing feedback for their growth. A person can improve the first characteristic, competence, by seeking additional training, experience, and practice. The second and third criteria can be improved if people receive genuine and loving feedback and make different choices about their behavior in the future.

The best way to apply these three criteria is to your own behaviors. Do you claim competence only in areas where you really have it? Are you careful that your motives are pure, genuinely desiring to serve those you influence? And do you make promises sparingly, making sure to follow up on every one that you make?

As leaders, our behaviors are being watched all the time, and people are making judgments about our trustworthiness based on what they observe. I encourage you to continually build your competencies through personal growth, to think through why and how you are contributing your services, and to follow-through on every commitment you make!