



The Trust Times

ISSUE NO. 1



Earning It

IN THIS ISSUE

1. Why We Trust Each Other
2. The One Trait That Makes or Breaks Trust in a Negotiation
3. Why Both the Boss and the New Hire Trust Each Other Less

Current, peer-reviewed studies on the science of building trust.

YOU KNOW TRUST IS THE BEDROCK OF YOUR business. Every trust moment with a client builds loyalty, connection, and eventually revenue. But how does trust get built, and how does it break?

That's what *The Trust Times* is for. We dug into hundreds of scientific studies on trust. Here are the first three.

Study one asks what makes a client trust you. The answer is good news: it has less to do with their wariness and more with what they see in you: common ground, openness about fees and methods, a shared goal, obvious command of your craft. The biggest levers are yours to pull.

Study two sharpens that: competence opens the deal, but care closes it. Clients already assume you're capable, and that's why they're in the room. What they're deciding is whether you're on their side.

Study three names the quiet risk hiding in your expertise. The more it sets you apart, the more it can make a client wonder whose side you're really on. The fix: stand shoulder to shoulder against a shared challenge, whether the market, the tax code, or the years ahead, instead of facing each other across the table.

Show what you share. Prove you care. Stand on the same side. That's how low trust becomes high trust.

Three more studies next week.

Warmly,



Marshall Kirkpatrick

Editor, *The Trust Times*

STUDIES INCLUDED IN ISSUE 1

How trust is really built: what we look for, why care beats credentials, and how a power gap erodes it.

1. Why We Trust Each Other. Hancock et al.'s meta-analysis of 338 studies: shared identity and common ground outweigh personality.

Frontiers in Psychology.

2. The One Trait That Makes or Breaks Trust in a Negotiation.

Two experiments by Sondern & Hertel: benevolence is the gatekeeper; competence and integrity only amplify it. *Journal of Trust Research.*

3. Why Both the Boss and the New Hire Trust Each Other Less.

du Plessis et al., 10,000+ people: a lopsided power gap erodes trust both ways, and a shared goal restores it. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Three peer-reviewed studies on how trust is built, retold in plain language. The "for your practice" notes are our editorial application, not claims made by the researchers.

Why We Trust Each Other

What 50 Years of Research Reveals

PICTURE A NEW COWORKER WALKING INTO YOUR office for the first time. Within seconds, you're already deciding how much of yourself to risk around them. Will they cover for you? Talk behind your back? Drop the ball on a shared project? You don't know yet, but you're betting on it anyway.

That bet is trust. And according to the largest study of its kind, it's more predictable than it feels.

A team of researchers led by psychologist P.A. Hancock combed through more than 5,000 studies on human trust, going all the way back to 1974. Ruthless filtering left them with 338 rigorous studies and over 2,000 data points, the most complete picture of human trust ever assembled. Their question: what actually makes one person trust another?

What they see in you beats who they are by nature.

HOW STRONGLY EACH TRACKS WITH TRUST



THE TRUST TIMES · STUDY 1

THE THREE INGREDIENTS OF TRUST

Trust isn't one thing. It's built from three ingredients, stirred together in real time.

Who's doing the trusting. Your personality and mood matter less than you'd think. Being a trusting type barely predicts whether you'll trust the specific person in front of you.

Who's being trusted. Their transparency and demonstrated expertise both move the needle, with reliability close behind.

The situation you're both in. Here sits the biggest lever of all: a shared sense of identity and common ground is the single strongest predictor in the data, with a shared goal and time spent together close behind. It's also the one you can engineer. You can't hand someone a trusting personality, but you can build the culture and rhythm that make trust easier to extend.

THE BOSS-EMPLOYEE WRINKLE

Trust doesn't run the same direction twice. Employees trust supervisors who are expert, reliable, transparent, and, as this study newly found, pleasant to be around. Supervisors trust employees who perform and follow through. Power changes the math.

REPUTATION: MINOR CORRELATE, REAL CAUSE

Those rankings come from correlation: what travels with trust across hundreds of studies, where shared identity leads and reputation is a bit player. But the researchers also ran tighter lab experiments that manipulated each factor directly. There, only two held up: a person's reputation and a sense of closeness. So reputation rarely tops the charts, yet it's a robust cause: change it, and trust moves.

THE TAKEAWAY

Trust isn't luck or a personality type. It's built moment by moment from common ground, transparency, reliability, and shared experience, and most of those levers are ones any relationship can pull. Even as we extend trust to algorithms and robots, the same rules largely apply: we size up machines the way we size up people.

FOR YOUR PRACTICE:

A prospect's natural wariness matters less than what you can control: find genuine common ground, open the hood on fees and method, agree out loud on the goal, and let competence show. Charm is not on the list.

A condensed, plain-language summary of Hancock, P. A., Kessler, T. T., Kaplan, A. D., et al. (2023). How and why humans trust: A meta-analysis and elaborated model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14:1081086. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1081086

The One Trait That Makes or Breaks Trust in a Negotiation

What two negotiation experiments reveal about trust.

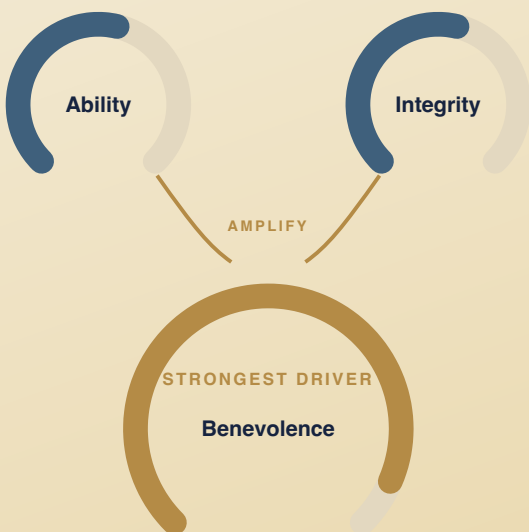
IMAGINE YOU'RE ABOUT TO NEGOTIATE A DEAL with a stranger. Someone hands you their bio beforehand: skilled, experienced, plays by the rules. Sounds trustworthy. It isn't the first thing that matters. New research says you're asking the wrong question first.

For nearly 30 years, trust researchers have leaned on a tidy formula: people trust others based on three things: Ability (are they competent?), Benevolence (do they actually care about me?), and Integrity (do they stick to their principles?). Add the three up, the thinking went, and you get trust. Psychologists call it the ABI model.

A new pair of studies out of the University of Münster says that math is too simple. One ingredient, it turns out, isn't just an equal partner. It's the gatekeeper for the other two.

Goodwill earns trust. Competence just amplifies it.

THREE THINGS WE WEIGH



THE DISCOVERY: CARING COMES FIRST

Researchers Dominik Sondern and Guido Hertel ran two experiments. People imagined negotiating to rent office space with a partner secretly dialed up or down on competence, warmth, and honesty; then real participants played a money-sharing game with a partner rigged the same way.

The pattern held: **benevolence drove trust more reliably than anything else**. If a counterpart seemed to genuinely care about your interests, you trusted them more. Skill and integrity, on their own, moved the needle far less.

But they weren't irrelevant. They acted as amplifiers. Competence and honesty only mattered once you'd decided someone was on your side. Pair warmth with skill or integrity and trust climbs; strip the warmth away, and a highly skilled, principled counterpart can read as more threatening, not more trustworthy.

Think of sizing up a stranger in a dark parking lot. If they seem kind, their strength is comforting. If they seem cold, their strength is the thing that scares you.

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND THE LAB

The stakes are practical. Negotiations, deals, and mediation (anywhere interests compete) are where this caring-first logic bites hardest. Yet many of us assume proving our competence is the fastest way to earn trust. The research says the opposite order works: show genuine concern for the other person's interests *first*, and your skills and reliability become assets instead of red flags.

THE TAKEAWAY

Trust isn't a checklist scored evenly across three boxes. It's a gate, and benevolence holds the key. Open it, and competence and integrity become trust-multipliers. Leave it closed, and being impressive can backfire. So heading into any high-stakes negotiation, lead with care, not your résumé. The credentials land better once the door is already open.

FOR YOUR PRACTICE:

A wealthy client already assumes you are competent, or they would not be in the room. The deciding question is whether you are on their side. Put their interest ahead of the product, and name any conflict before they spot it.

A condensed, plain-language summary of Sondern, D., & Hertel, G. (2024). Revisiting the classic ABI model of trustworthiness: interactive effects of trustworthiness components on trust in mixed-motive social exchange contexts. *Journal of Trust Research*, 14(2), 213–236. doi:[10.1080/21515581.2024.2388659](https://doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2024.2388659)

Why Both the Boss and the New Hire Trust Each Other Less

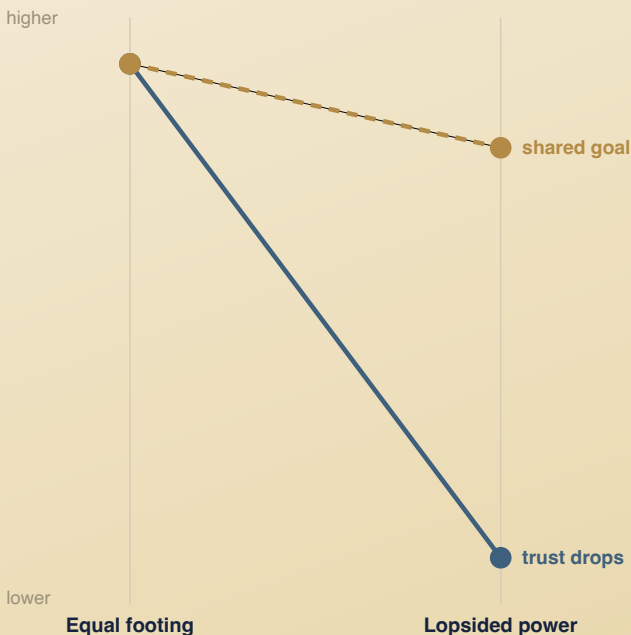
What eight experiments on power reveal about trust.

PICTURE TWO WORK RELATIONSHIPS: ONE WITH A peer, one with your boss or your direct report. Which do you trust more?

Most of us assume it depends on who holds the power. Powerful people are suspicious of being used; powerless people fear being exploited. A massive new study (eight experiments, 10,000+ people) says that story is wrong. It's not about *who* has power. It's about whether power is *equal* at all.

A power gap makes both sides suspect a conflict of interest.

TRUST BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE



THE TRUST TIMES · STUDY 3

THE REAL CULPRIT: LOPSIDED POWER, NOT LOW POWER

Researchers ran people through negotiations, money-sharing games, and workplace scenarios, randomly assigning them as boss, subordinate, or equal peer. The pattern held every time: **both the boss and the subordinate trusted each other less than two equals trusted one another.** It didn't matter which side of the gap you were on. Being unequal eroded trust for both people.

WHY IMBALANCE BREEDS SUSPICION

When power is uneven, both people start scanning for conflicts of interest, wondering if what's good for one of them must be bad for the other, even when it isn't. Equals don't trigger that radar; they're more likely to assume they're rowing in the same direction. In a real money-sharing game, people in unequal relationships were stingier than peers, leaving real cash on the table because the trust to risk it wasn't there.

THE FIX HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

When researchers gave unequal pairs a shared rival to compete against, the suspicion melted away. Once incentives pointed at the same external target, the power gap stopped mattering. Boss and subordinate trusted each other almost as much as two equals would.

THE TAKEAWAY

Hierarchy doesn't poison trust just by existing. It poisons trust when people are left to size each other up in isolation. Give a manager and an employee a real, shared goal (a common rival, deadline, or mission) and the power gap fades into the background.

FOR YOUR PRACTICE:

Your knowledge edge is a power gap, and gaps breed suspicion of conflict. Counter it: structure fees so you win when they win, frame the work as you-and-them against the market and the tax code, and keep decisions joint.

A condensed, plain-language summary of du Plessis, C., Nguyen, M. H. B., Foulk, T. A., & Schaerer, M. (2023). Relative power and interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 124(3), 567–592. [doi:10.1037/pspi0000401](https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000401)

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