



THE FOUNDATION OF TRUST

The Relational Currency Behind
Healthy Leadership



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Purpose of This Session

Trust is one of the most important ingredients in every healthy relationship, but it is often misunderstood.

Trust is not simply being friendly, agreeable, or well-liked. Trust is the foundation that allows people to tell the truth, admit weakness, ask for help, engage conflict, keep commitments, and move forward together.

Without trust, relationships become guarded. Conversations become filtered. Decisions take longer. Assumptions grow. Issues go underground. People begin working around one another instead of directly with one another.

With trust, relationships move with greater clarity, honesty, speed, safety, and confidence.

This session invites us to consider:

Where is trust strengthening — or slowing — the relationships we lead and depend on?

Core Idea

Trust is the foundation that makes healthy relationships and healthy leadership possible.

When trust is present:

- people tell the truth sooner
- difficult conversations become more productive
- expectations are clearer
- accountability feels less personal
- people can move forward with greater confidence

When trust is absent:

- people protect themselves
- assumptions grow
- hard conversations are avoided
- motives are questioned
- momentum slows

Trust as the Foundation

In any meaningful relationship, trust sits underneath everything else.

Before people can engage honestly, commit clearly, challenge one another, or pursue shared outcomes, they must believe it is safe to be truthful.

That does not mean every conversation feels comfortable. In fact, high-trust relationships often have more candid conversations, not fewer.

Trust makes truth possible.

This applies in leadership teams, but it also applies in one-on-one relationships: between business partners, spouses, friends, employees, clients, vendors, and peers.

What Trust Requires

Trust grows through repeated, observable behavior.

Three simple markers of trust are:

Agreements are kept: People do what they said they would do.

Full disclosure: Important information is not withheld.

No hidden agendas: People believe motives are clear and honest.

When any of these are missing, trust begins to erode.

Reflection Questions:

- Which of these three is most important in a relationship you are navigating right now?
- Which one is most often missing when trust breaks down?
- Where might unclear expectations be creating unnecessary mistrust?

A Simple Trust Diagnostic

Brené Brown uses the acronym BRAVING to describe several elements that help build trust:

- **Boundaries** — clear expectations and appropriate limits
- **Reliability** — doing what you say you will do
- **Accountability** — owning mistakes and making things right
- **Vault** — honoring confidentiality
- **Integrity** — practicing your values, not just professing them
- **Non-Judgment** — creating safety to ask for help or tell the truth
- **Generosity** — assuming the best about others' intentions when possible

This gives us a practical way to diagnose where trust may be strong, fragile, or broken.

Reflection Questions:

- Which BRAVING element feels strongest in your relationships or leadership?
- Which one is most often missing when trust breaks down?
- Where would greater clarity in one of these areas strengthen an important relationship?

The Vulnerability Side of Trust

Trust requires vulnerability. People must be able to admit mistakes, acknowledge weaknesses, ask for help, and share concerns without fear that it will be used against them.

This is difficult because many leaders feel pressure to appear competent, confident, and in control.

But when no one admits weakness, relationships become less honest. And when relationships become less honest, they become less effective.

Reflection Questions:

- What makes vulnerability difficult in professional or personal relationships?
- Where have you seen a lack of vulnerability create distance or confusion?
- What behavior helps build trust quickly in a relationship?

The Candor Side of Trust

Trust is not only about kindness. It also requires candor.

Low-trust relationships often avoid hard conversations, but avoidance usually creates more conflict later. Issues do not disappear simply because no one names them.

High-trust relationships learn to say what needs to be said without making it personal. They challenge ideas without attacking people. They address issues directly rather than allowing frustration to become gossip, resentment, withdrawal, or side conversations.

Reflection Questions:

- What is the difference between productive conflict and personal conflict?
- What important things often do not get said in relationships or meetings?
- Where might avoidance be costing clarity, closeness, or momentum?

Trust and Accountability

Accountability works best when trust is present.

Without trust, accountability feels like criticism, control, or blame.

With trust, accountability can become a form of care, commitment, and shared responsibility.

Healthy relationships do not avoid accountability. They handle it with honesty, humility, and respect.

Reflection Questions:

- Why is accountability difficult in relationships where trust is fragile?
- What does it look like to challenge someone without shaming them?
- Which is harder for you: being held accountable or holding others accountable?

Personal Reflection

Take a few minutes to consider:

1. Where is trust strong in a relationship you lead or depend on?
2. Where is trust currently weak, unclear, or fragile?
3. Is the issue primarily about reliability, candor, accountability, confidentiality, expectations, intent, or follow-through?
4. What is one trust-building behavior you need to practice more intentionally?

Group Discussion

1. What does trust make possible in a relationship that would not be possible without it?
2. Where have you seen low trust create distance, delay, or dysfunction?
3. What damages trust faster: broken commitments, hidden agendas, unclear expectations, gossip, or avoidance of conflict?
4. What builds trust faster: vulnerability, consistency, candor, confidentiality, or follow-through?
5. Using the BRAVING lens, which element of trust tends to break down first in important relationships?
6. What does it look like to rebuild trust after it has been damaged?

Practical Application

Identify one relationship or leadership setting where trust matters right now.

Complete the following:

The trust issue I am noticing is: _____

The behavior affecting trust is: _____

The conversation or clarification needed is: _____

One trust-building action I can take this month is: _____

Closing Reflection

Trust is built slowly and damaged quickly.

It grows through kept agreements, honest motives, clear expectations, direct conversations, appropriate vulnerability, confidentiality, and consistent follow-through.

As you leave today, consider:

- Where do I need to become more trustworthy?
- Where do I need to extend trust wisely?
- Where do I need to rebuild trust intentionally?

Key Takeaways & Shared Insights

As each person shares what stood out most, consider:

- Where do we see shared challenges around trust?
- What trust-building behaviors seem most important in this season?
- How might greater trust improve clarity, accountability, connection, and results?