

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL COUNSELING CENTER

Trust Me

Hey Everyone,

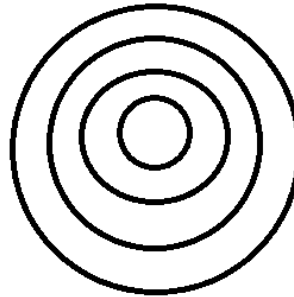
I hope this newsletter finds you well. My apologies that this was not sent out last Friday. I, like many other folks living on the west side of the state was hit pretty hard by that storm that came through. It knocked my power out and since I live in the country, I am not high on the priority list for Consumers Energy to come save. Four days later the power came back. I had to play catch up with all the missed work. Please don't hold it against me. In other news I will be going on vacation for a couple of weeks starting next week so if you don't see another newsletter for a little bit that is why. Be on the lookout for a potential guest writer and please have a fun safe 4th of July.

This week I wanted to wrap up our series on relationships. Relationships are such a broad topic that one could probably write about the topic exclusively (some people do) however I wanted to do a shorter series about the topic. I hope the first two letters were helpful touching on communication and Love Languages. I hope you may have taken some tips and tricks and applied them to your relationships in your life. Today I wanted to close the series with a discussion about trust.

Trust is a fickle thing. It can take a lifetime to build and one single event to destroy. It is fragile and needs to be nurtured by both parties in order to grow and strengthen. Trust also looks different from person to person. Some people may be very trusting and open with emotional vulnerability to anyone. Other people can be more cautious when it comes to trusting others taking deliberate time to build trust slowly. I don't think either side of the spectrum is wrong or right. They both have their draw backs and benefits. For people who trust quickly they run the chance of that trust being taken advantage of. I have worked with numerous clients that have been burned in relationships by people they thought they could trust. That work in therapy typically looks at how they can be more deliberate with trusting rather than jumping in with both feet. For those that have a hard time trusting others, they don't have to worry as much about being hurt by people they trust, but they can have a very hard time being open and letting others in. In therapy we work on developing steps that one can use to actively increase trust in others and feel comfortable doing so.

The degree to which you trust others in a relationship is likely based on several factors. How were you raised and how trust was modeled by your parents is probably the first lesson we all received growing up. Our experiences also dictate the degree to which we can trust friends or partners. Have you ever been cheated on? Or experience abuse at the hands of a friend? You likely have learned to be less trusting of others. Have friends modeled openness and vulnerability? Is there a culture of trust and respect in your social circle? This will likely influence your openness to trust others.

I like to use this organization model when working with clients to help them build trust. I have adapted it from a professor I had in graduate school who used the same idea and applied it to friendships. It helps conceptualize trusting others differently and create road maps on how they can work to be more trusting of their partner or pull back some and be a bit more cautious. Forgive me, typically I just draw this on a notepad, it's a little tougher on a computer:



It's a crude MS paint creation but just follow me on this one...

I use this model to help people create levels of trust in their lives. The inner most circle represents complete trust and full vulnerability. This is where we keep our biggest secrets and truest self. As we move out from that circle, we populate the levels with secrets and information that aren't as "deep" or serious. For example, lets say a person identifies as LGBTQ but is not out publicly. Their sexual orientation may be stored in that inner most circle because they can only trust a small amount of people with this information. The largest circle would have information such as personal interests or hobbies. Things a stranger wouldn't necessarily know, but more "surface" level information you could trust most people with. The first step in the exercise is to decide what information belongs where. What things do the people you trust most, know? What things would you feel comfortable letting your casual friends know? What information are you comfortable trusting peers with?

The second step is to decide how a person can move between levels. You are the gate keeper for your trust, and YOU get to decide what a person has to do to earn your trust. These could be things like a person shows you loyalty or does a favor for you so you know you can depend on them. Time could be another requirement to move between levels. Time spent together in friendship or dating is a totally valid requirement and for those of us that are more cautious, it may take time to really feel out if the other person is deserving of your trust. In this exercise you create the criteria for trusting another person.

The final step in the exercise is to place the people in your life as points in the circles. It is helpful to conceptualize the different people in your life and the level to which you trust them. This can help you create requirements for the different levels. If the person(s) you trust most in your life (center circle) is your partner, think about what had to happen to allow that person all the way to the center? What did your best friend show you to make you feel you could trust them completely? This will help you create a road map to build trust with others as well as establishing a set of guidelines as to what certain people in your life are allowed to know about you (how much you trust them).

One other important concept with this model is that these levels are not “one way”. A person can earn your trust and also break it. You are in control of deciding what a person can do to move up and down in levels of trust. It can be helpful for you to think through the kinds of things that a person may do that would show you, you can’t trust them and what role forgiveness plays in rebuilding trust. The other important piece of this model is that you don’t have to allow everyone into the center. For most people, that highest level of trust is reserved for only a select few. No one is entitled to your full trust; it is a privilege that is earned.

Some relevant resources: [Here](#) is a YouTube video about building and rebuilding trust through Authenticity, Logic, and Empathy. This is a YouTube video that gives you 6 practical steps to work through trust issues [Here](#). Here is an [article](#) from Psychology Today on 7 ways to build trust in a relationship. Positive Psychology has [10 Ways](#) to build trust in a relationship.

Trust is a complicated, multi-layered concept. It will look different based on the person, situation, and relationship. I hope this model is helpful when you think about your trust with others. Trust is a critical part of any healthy friendship and/or relationship. A lack of trust can cause feelings of insecurity and even resentment. For homework I encourage you to increase your insight into trust. Do you trust your partner? Why or why not? Is it hard for you to be open to trusting others? What steps do you take in your relationship to build trust as a foundation? Trust leads to better connection and an improved satisfaction in your friendships and intimate relationships, trust me.

Take Care of Yourself and Wash Your Hands,

Andy