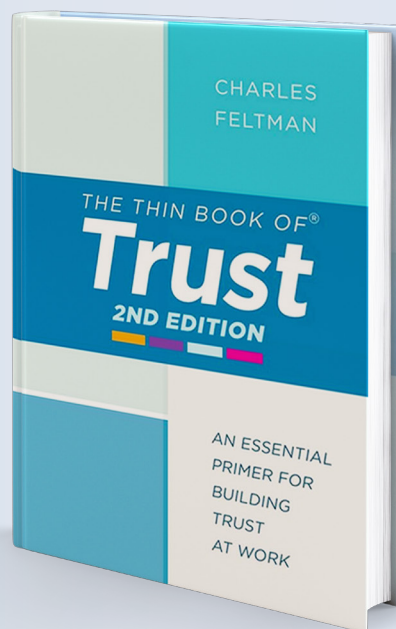


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Zooming In On Your Next Read



The Thin Book of Trust

An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work

By Charles Feltman

Charles Feltman is an executive coach, consultant and facilitator. He coaches executives and managers in developing the thinking, being and doing that constitute the most effective leadership in their organizations. He also coaches teams and workgroups around issues of trust, commitment, conflict, collaboration, and accountability. In addition to coaching and consulting for Fortune 500 companies since 1990, Charles has served as a community mediator and facilitator for the past 30 years. In all of his work he has helped people successfully confront and deal with issues of trust, betrayal and reconciliation in their work, community and personal lives.

The High Achievers' Guide to Happiness,

There has been so much written about trust, in the workplace and otherwise, that it's easy to forget just how vital it is for individuals, families, companies, communities, countries, and the world as a whole.

In Charles Feltman's *The Thin Book of Trust*, the essential nature of trust in the workplace is deconstructed, defined, and rebuilt in a truly compelling and innovative way. Feltman's brief book promises to help readers "learn how to build and maintain strong trusting relationships with others, and repair trust when it is broken, by being intentional and consistent in your language and actions."

He begins the book with an assessment that's worth recreating in its entirety here, as it frames just how intentional and effective Feltman is about making us all confront and improve the trust in our lives and careers:

How would you rate your own trustworthiness?

How would you rate the trustworthiness of your co-workers?

How would you rate your immediate supervisor?

What about your company's top management?

It turns out that on a scale of 1-10, people tend to rate themselves just below a 9, the people they work with around 7.5, their immediate supervisors a bit higher at 8.3, and their company's top management the lowest—just 6.53. These results indicate that we generally judge others to be less trustworthy than ourselves. If most of the people you work with are also like these survey respondents, they are making the same judgments. That means it is very likely some of the people you work with judge you to be less trustworthy than you consider yourself to be. Your first thought may be that they are mistaken.

Feltman's "Language of Trust"

One of the central tenets of Feltman's approach to building trust at work is what he calls "The Language of Trust." This language is broken up into four distinct categories—Care, Sincerity, Reliability, and Competence.

Says Feltman, “Trust is fundamental to our sense of safety, autonomy, and dignity as human beings. It’s also an integral part of every relationship we have. When we trust someone, we feel safe to share what is important to us including our thoughts, ideas, efforts, hopes, and concerns.”

He argues that the only way to build trust like this is to understand the terms we use when speaking about it, and to use those terms to inform our journey toward greater trust in the workplace.

This language of trust serves as the through-line for much of the first half of *The Thin Book of Trust*. Generally, it’s an effective foundation. Too many books on trust, in the workplace or elsewhere, dive into trust-building principles without ever taking the time to define those principles. Language is a powerful thing, and by placing proper emphasis on the way we talk about our relationships and cultivating those relationships, Feltman gets all readers on the same page with him as he explores trust on a deeper level.

With that in mind, it’s worthwhile addressing each of Feltman’s four tenets of trust and how he defines them within the book.

1. Care

According to Feltman, Care is the assessment that you have another person’s interests in mind as well as you brown when you make decisions and take action. He says that of the four assessments of trustworthiness (the others we’ll explore shortly), care could be considered the most important when it comes to building lasting trust.

Why? Because when someone believes that you’re only looking out for your own interests, they may trust your sincerity, reliability and competence but still limit their trust of you to specific situations and transactions.

But, he argues compellingly, people will extend their trust more broadly to you when they feel you hold their interests in mind at all times.

2. Sincerity

Sincerity is the assessment that “you are honest, that you say what you mean and mean what you say; you can be believed and taken seriously.” To Feltman, it also means expressing opinions that are valid, useful, and backed up by both sound rational thought and actual evidence.

Further, Feltman emphasizes the importance of ensuring that your actions always align with your words. When people around you sense a dissonance between what you say and what you do, they’ll recognize a lack of sincerity that can result in a deep cut to your credibility and trust.

3. Reliability

Reliability, in Feltman’s view, is defined quite simply— “the assessment that you meet the commitments you make, and

that you keep your promises.” The simplicity of this aspect of Feltman’s approach is quietly brilliant. So much of trust in the workplace is gained and lost around one simple premise— whether you do what you say you’re going to do or not.

In fact, it could be argued that reliability often serves as the foundation for the other areas of trust— care, sincerity, and reliability. Before many of your coworkers or others get to know you on a personal level, when you may be little more than an email address, they often get a sense for your reliability. “I haven’t met David in marketing yet, but boy he always gets back to me with an answer quickly anytime I ask him a question.”

If you can build a reputation for being reliable, Feltman convincingly writes, then other levels of trust will be raised as well.

4. Competence

Closely tied to reliability is competence, but here Feltman makes an important distinction. Reliability is doing what you say you’re going to do. Competence is what it is you’re capable of doing. It’s “the assessment that you have the ability to do what you are doing or propose to do. In the workplace, this usually means others believe you have the requisite capacity, skill, knowledge, and resources to do a particularly task or job.”

So what’s the fourth way to build trust at your job? By being good at that job. Simple? Absolutely. Easy? Never.

A Measured Approach

One of the most refreshing aspects of Feltman’s approach is that he doesn’t see trust in the workplace in black and white, oversimplified terms. “Trust is not all or nothing,” he says. His four assessment domains give us all a better, more nuanced way to talk about and repair broken trust.

Distrust in the Workplace

One of the elements that makes *The Thin Book of Trust* so effective is its willingness to take an unflinching look at the sources and causes of distrust.

As Feltman says, “Distrust is a choice to not make yourself vulnerable to another person’s actions. It is the general assessment that something I value is not safe with this person in this situation.”

He explains how distrust engages us in strategies to protect ourselves, which ultimately block our ability to get good work done and create something meaningful with the people around us.

Feltman suggests a checklist to help us determine whether we’re engaging in behavior and conversation that builds or erodes trust. He encourages us all to think of a person we do not trust, and ask these questions:

Is it blanket distrust, or can you identify specific things you value that you don’t trust them with?

Specifically, what do you value that you do not trust them with?



... finding a path back from betrayed trust is simple, even if it's not always easy. It requires us to acknowledge and apologize.”

What are you concerned they might do with what you value?

What does this person say and/or do that causes you to distrust them?

What do you do to avoid being harmed by this person's actions?

In the end, Feltman encourages us all to look inward in order to mend distrust in the workplace— even if we feel our distrust of someone else feels justified.

Regarding people who have broken our trust, Feltman says that “ultimately you will need to find a way to forgive him or her for the breach or betrayal of your trust. Forgiveness means withdrawing your attention from the past and focusing on what you are doing with him or her now and in the future.”

A Path Back from Betrayed Trust

Interestingly, Feltman doesn't stop there. He also looks at distrust in the workplace from the opposite perspective— when you are the one who has betrayed someone else's trust. Fortunately, Feltman believes that finding a path back from betrayed trust is simple, even if it's not always easy. It requires us to acknowledge and apologize.

To acknowledge the betrayal means recognizing what you did was wrong or damaging in the other person's eyes. Even if you didn't intend it, whatever you did harmed them in some way, and they want to know you realize this and take it seriously. To apologize is to take responsibility for what you've done, ask forgiveness, and declare your intention to redeem yourself. This, in turn, opens the possibility of a conversation about how you can make amends.

According to Feltman, redeeming yourself in the eyes of someone you have betrayed usually means making a commitment to not repeat the action that led to betrayal. It may also entail helping fix whatever problem your actions created.

A Deep Dive on the Psychology of Trust (and Distrust)

One of the elements that sets Feltman's work apart from the rest is his willingness and capability when it comes to diving deep on the psychological principles behind trust and distrust. In fact, he devotes an entire chapter to this exact subject. He shares the neurological and biological changes that undergo our brain when we either trust or distrust another person, and how we can change those responses.

“Building and maintaining trust,” he says, “involves activating the trust network and calming the distrust network, in ourselves and

others. With attention, intention and practice we can moderate the neurophysiologic distrust response enough to take a step back and objectively evaluate the situation. Intentionally using the distinctions of trust gives you a framework to use. Practicing good brain health will also support your ability to quell the distrust network and make a more objective assessment.”

A Practical Guide and a Call to Action

The Thin Book of Trust concludes with a chapter titled “Putting It Into Practice,” and it's here that Feltman sets himself apart from other writers on this subject. He recognizes that in the real world, high-minded discussions of trust and culture don't amount to much without the tools necessary to put them into action. It's in this section that Feltman shares some of his most actionable insights, such as a guide for how to begin building trust. The potential steps are simple— for example, “Start looking for the trust distinctions and their related behaviors in your interactions with co-workers.”

Conclusion

Overall, *The Thin Book of Trust* is an extremely effective guide that offers a framework for developing and sustaining others' trust in you by intentionally speaking and acting in ways that other people consider to be trustworthy, talking constructively with people about distrust when you need to, and restoring trust with others when it's been broken.

Meanwhile, it makes the case that building trust is a competency, a set of skills that can be learned and improved. This means no matter how good you are at it now you can get even better. You can find the ability, Feltman says, to consistently build and maintain trust which enhances everything else you do.

The Thin Book of Trust can serve as a primer for improving your ability to increase trust with your employees, colleagues, boss, customers, suppliers and other important stakeholders. What you take from this little book can even spill over into greater trust in your family and community life.

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