

**TRUST ME**

# TRUST TIME

discovering  
trust in a  
culture of  
distrust

Joseph R. Myers  
*with*  
Kevin Baird and Dr. Jesus Jara

ALSO BY JOSEPH MYERS

*The Search to Belong*  
*Organic Community*

ALSO BY KEVIN BAIRD

*Whole*

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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:**

*Gail Hamilton  
who exhibited healthy distrust and healthy trust*

## Praise for Trust Me:

*Diving right in with a story from his own life to illustrate the key concept that we can trust and distrust at the same time, Joseph Myers takes on a deep dive into one of the most important topics of our time. **Trust Me** is thoughtful, well-researched and readable as it explores how trust and distrust operate in our lives, and how to build, strengthen, and maintain it in the relationships that matter to us. I highly recommend **Trust Me** as a great addition to the growing list of must-read books on this subject.*

— Charles Feltman, author *The Thin Book of Trust* 2nd edition

***Trust Me** is an indispensable guide for anyone seeking to cultivate trust within teams. With his remarkable ability to translate cutting-edge brain science into actionable strategies, Myers presents a captivating and practical toolkit that has become my go-to resource. Whether you're looking to build trust from scratch or mend fractured relationships, this book equips you with the essential insights and techniques necessary for success.*

—Rex Miller, renowned expert in optimizing human and team performance, strategic foresight, and organizational transformation. Five-time, International award winning Wiley Author, author.

*“Trust is the essential base layer for all relationships, whether in the workplace or beyond. **Trust Me** is an essential, practical guide for understanding the nature of trust (and distrust), and more importantly how to build deep, trustworthy connections with others and yourself.”*

—Todd Henry, Author of *Herding Tigers*

*“Joseph Myers has a knack for turning a subject inside out like a sock, and then knocking our socks off with his original takes, aired-out perspectives and brilliant brainstorming. **Trust Me** takes arguably the #1 issue of our time, trust, and revolutionizes how we look at it and live by it.”*

—Leonard Sweet, best-selling author, professor, publisher, podcaster and chief contributor to [PreachTheStory.com](http://PreachTheStory.com)

*Trust Me takes on the timely topic of trust and turns our conventional thinking upside down. This book breaks down our personal role in developing individual and collective trust and explores the intricacies of the trust continuum. Taking a proactive and understanding approach, readers can apprehend the nuances of trust/distrust and ways to build a trusting culture and connection.*

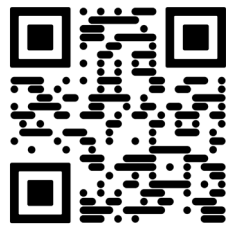
—LindaGail Walker, author of *Surviving the Storm: Leading through Post-Traumatic Growth*

*“I’ve been a part of and built teams for years – trust always comes up as the foundation of a strong team, and while everyone agrees with that, the actual steps to understand trust and distrust, measure, and continually build trust throughout the duration of the time together eludes even the highest performing teams – until now. **Trust Me** takes the complexities of trust and presents them in a way that can be understood and applied by all, truly making trust an intentional effort. From the flywheel to his practical way to measure trust to the relational stages, Joseph breaks the mystical nature of trust and gives team members a path to follow to truly understand, build, and reinforce trust.”*

—Kyle Majchrowski Founder, Ripple Intent

*Myers’ work has been shaping my thinking and work for decades, and the insights of **Trust Me** have already seeped into my coaching work, my speaking engagements, even conversations with my spouse. It’s not an exaggeration to write that I am discovering implications of these truths in every aspect of my life. Sure, educators will benefit from this work; but that’s mostly because they are human beings--and all humans, at least those who want to grow in self-knowledge and proactive trust-building, will benefit from these ideas.*

—Mark Oestreicher, author, founder/partner in The Youth Cartel



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## Thank You

A work that develops over decades has many contributors: those who knowingly and unknowingly found their way into the fabric of this book. It would be impossible to thank each one, yet each one brought insight, wisdom, artifacts, and the magic of Trust and Distrust.

We thank our families and friends who put up with the undying pursuit to collect the pieces of this puzzle. We thank our coworkers and colleagues for their patience and encouragement. We thank all the strangers who unknowingly allowed us to watch how they journeyed through Trust and Distrust. To all our most profound thanks!

To the extraordinary people who worked tirelessly to make this work into a book: Johnno, Ainsley, Jennifer, and Marko, we thank you for your amazing belief and labor. Bill and the Meteor family, thank you for your faith and for cheerleading this work forward.

## Preface

As a business owner serving the educational K-12 textbook and teacher resource market, trust has always been at the forefront of my mind. Trust is a fundamental aspect of any successful business, and building and maintaining trust is essential in the world of education. However, my journey has led me to question and challenge common assumptions about trust and distrust, particularly in the wake of a personal experience that shattered trust in my own life.

In this book, I share my observations and insights into the complex nature of trust and distrust. It all started with a realization that trust and distrust are not two sides of the same coin but rather separate entities that operate independently and react to different stimuli. I discovered that trust is processed in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, where complex decision-making occurs, while distrust is processed in the amygdala, the primitive part responsible for our fight-or-flight response. Simply, we decide to trust, and we feel distrust.

Through research and personal observations, I came to understand that trust and distrust have distinctive languages, motivators, and triggers. Factors such as gender, personality type, past trauma, and demographic backgrounds further shape our interpretations and responses to trust and distrust. It became clear that trust is a dynamic force, begetting trustworthiness and driving positive relationships, while the absence of

trust leads to apathy and erodes the foundations of interactions and transactions.

In today's world, characterized by rapid technological advancements and a shifting cultural landscape, the concept of trust is more crucial than ever. Trust in traditional institutions has been shaken, and we find ourselves grappling with a perceived "trust crisis." However, amidst the uncertainty and contradictions, trust remains a cornerstone for building healthy and productive relationships. Understanding the dynamics of trust and learning to navigate the complexities of trust and distrust interactions is vital.

Throughout this book, we will explore the multifaceted nature of trust and its far-reaching impact in various domains. From personal relationships to business success, trust plays a central role in achieving our goals. We will delve into the Trust Flywheel, a tool for intentionally building and maintaining trust, and examine the detrimental effects of a lack of trust. By redefining trust's relationship with distrust, we gain a fresh perspective on this powerful force and its potential to transform our lives and society.

This book aims to provide insights and practical guidance for individuals seeking to cultivate trust, both personally and professionally. By understanding the intricate workings of trust and learning how to navigate the complexities of trust and distrust, we can forge meaningful connections, foster growth, and thrive in a world that relies on trust more than ever before.

So, join me on this journey as we unravel the mysteries of trust and discover how it can shape our lives, relationships, and the world around us.

Joseph R. Myers



Kevin Baird and Dr. Jesus Jara kindly contributed their insights, wisdom, and experience throughout the book. In addition, at the end of each chapter you'll find the Guide Dog symbol indicating their direct writing.

CONTENTS	
PREFACE	vii
INTRO: TRUST ME: YOU CAN'T TRUST ME	
HOW THE BRAIN PROCESSES TRUST AND DISTRUST	1
1: TRUST ME: IT'S NOT JUST IN YOUR HEAD	
NO ONE TRUSTS ANY LONGER	15
2: TRUST ME: IT'S A DOGFIGHT	
THE PERSONALITIES OF DISTRUST	27
3: TRUST ME: SIZE MATTERS	
MEASURING TRUST	47
4: TRUST ME: IT'S ALL ABOUT MOMENTUM	
THE TRUST FLYWHEEL	63
5: TRUST ME: I LET YOU DOWN	
DEALING WITH BROKEN TRUST	85
6: TRUST ME: IT'S YOU	
DEVELOPING STRONG SELF-TRUST	109
7: TRUST ME: WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER	
BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST	121
APPENDIX	144
ENDNOTES	147

# Trust Me: You Can't Trust Me!

How the Brain Processes Trust and Distrust

Trust me, there have been seasons in my life where the last thing you'd want to do is trust me.

In the mid-1980s during heated conversations with my now ex-wife, she would exclaim, "How can I ever trust you again!?!... You've broken my trust...I can't trust you with anything!" The conversation would go on for several minutes and then end in tears. "How can I stay with someone I can't trust? It will take years, or maybe never, for me to trust you again."

She was right. I had severely broken her trust, and it would be "never" before she would trust me again. However, it was because of this "never" that what happened next confused and intrigued me:

In the midst of distrust's debilitating pain, my ex nonetheless handed me her most prized possession: a little girl clutching a pink, child-sized My Little Pony suitcase, *our daughter*.

How could she vow to never again believe anything I ever said and yet still have confidence in me with our daughter? Can high levels of trust and distrust exist at the same time?



These thoughts were counter to the way I'd learned that trust worked. Yet as I continued to watch and experience how this worked in real life, I couldn't help but question common "truths" of trust. Statements like, "It takes time to rebuild trust once broken" seemed unlikely when an action of trust would immediately follow. "I can't trust you with anything" was increasingly confusing as I witnessed a trust leap in the next encounter.

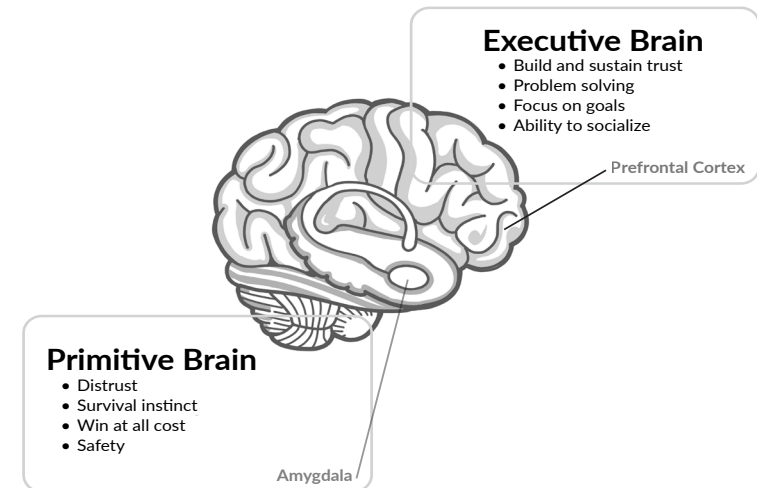
My tragic divorce altered my life's path in many significant ways. It changed the way I observed the world and those around me. I began gaining new insights into how people belong and build community, how organic systems are sometimes altered into fabricated institutional systems, and how observing people, with as little bias as possible, leads to unconventional understandings of the natural universe.<sup>1</sup> The system of trust and distrust is no different. Separating trust from distrust was the first disruptive observation and has (so far) taken the longest to develop and understand.

### **TRUST AND DISTRUST ARE SEPARATE ENTITIES**

At first, it seemed absurd to consider trust and distrust as two separate, unattached entities. I understood trust and distrust as opposite ends of one spectrum, or balancing on a scale. It seemed obvious that if you have more of one, you would have less of the other. But the more I let myself observe people's actions, free of mainstream presuppositions, the more it became clear: trust and distrust operate independently, react to different stimuli, and speak different languages.

However, beyond my personal observations, the existing research consistently married trust and distrust as two sides of the same coin. Until recently, there wasn't "hard evidence" that these two

concepts should be considered as detached and studied individually. The more I researched, the crazier I felt. I took long breaks from reading the experts to observe people in everyday situations. These anecdotal observations continued to confirm my theory that trust and distrust are experienced and implemented separately.



Over the last few years, significant discoveries have advanced the mainstream understanding about how the brain processes our emotions, decisions, and actions. Scientists have discovered the brain processes trust and distrust from two separate zones. Trust is processed in the prefrontal cortex, while distrust is processed in the amygdala.

Both of these areas have significantly different purposes. The prefrontal cortex is where the mind makes decisions based on complex logical thought. It's where we assemble the puzzle pieces of life into an order that generates a path or conclusion ending in a relationship. The amygdala, on the other hand, is the primitive, fight-flight-or-freeze response part of our brain. It processes feelings instinctively. It is the "Guard Dog" of our mind—more on that in Chapter 2.

These two regions of the brain process our reactions to the world differently. They are motivated to action by different incentives and have distinctive native languages. For example, the amygdala responds in nanoseconds to the facial features of an oncoming stranger to determine whether or not to distrust.

By contrast, the prefrontal cortex takes its time to engage, while it curates a list of reasons one might begin to trust. The prefrontal cortex responds to trust symbols like a uniform or a religious icon, while the amygdala “hears” warning signals, alerting us to what the amygdala views as high-risk traits, such as covering up with a hoodie in broad daylight or standing too close for comfort. We must point out, and will discuss further later, that sometimes our amygdala decides to warn us about something that is not actually a danger because of a previous unsafe or undesirable experience.

In addition to trust and distrust operating in different parts of the brain, gender, personality type, past trauma, generation, race, wealth status, and other demographic factors nuance how we interpret, feel, and respond. Men and women trust and distrust differently. Thus, when trust is broken and in need of repair, each gender looks for different iconography for restoration. Similarly, different personalities respond to triggers of trust and distrust according to their type. Someone who grew up in the city looks for different markers of trustworthiness than someone who grew up in a rural area, and on and on. We’ll talk more about those differences in Chapter 5.

### **A COMPLEX TRUST CRISIS?**

Maybe more than ever we are confronted with complex situations that require both trust and distrust. In conjunction with rapidly accelerating technologies, over the last hundred years in the West we have seen tectonic cultural shifts, blurring our trust

in traditionally trustworthy institutions. Headline-makers and their advertisers cultivate our feelings of distrust and make money off of the fear that accompanies it. News outlets, thought leaders, and researchers have crescendoed their diagnosis: we are living through a “trust crisis.” Over the decades, the U.S. has been shaken by national financial meltdowns and betrayed by representatives we elected, religious leaders who are corrupt or impotent in the face of crisis, and increasing misinformation and manipulation from the Fourth Estate.<sup>2</sup> As we observe trust and distrust interactions processed in the exploding digital world, we find ourselves cartographers armed with paper maps for a flat earth.

Who can we trust? When we believe we can only choose to trust or distrust, our fear is that we can trust no one. If trust and distrust are two ends of the same spectrum, then obviously we can only distrust our environment and the people around us in this time of crisis. This prospect is frightening and exhausting, especially because we instinctively want to trust and have trusting relationships we can rely on! When we trust a person or organization and they let us down, it makes us think we are a bad judge of character - which can make us feel unsafe with our own judgments. (Making space for our own healthy distrust, at the same time as we are choosing to build trust in a relationship, is an essential skill we’ll talk about in Chapter 6.)

At the core of all this we wonder, “Can it be fixed?” Can we ever trust a president again? Will the media regain the trusted “Cronkite” status they once enjoyed? Can we trust our financial future to banks and Wall Street? Can we ever rely on a spiritual leader or group to care for us and have the answers we need?

In spite of how you may be feeling after reading all that, the answer to these questions is a resounding “Yes!” Trust is stronger than

ever. As I observe individuals going about their daily lives, I witness an abundance of trust. We are trusting and trustworthy. We might distrust institutions and organizations more than our grandparents and great-grandparents, but we haven't given up on trusting individuals, even strangers, with life's everyday goings-on. The more we understand that our brains actually trust and distrust at the same time, the more we'll be able to navigate the current "trust crisis."

*"Why? Because without trust, and without an understanding of how it is built, managed, lost, and repaired, a society cannot survive, and it certainly cannot thrive. Trust is fundamental to almost every action, relationship and transaction. The emerging trust shift isn't simply the story of a dizzying upsurge in technology or the rise of new business models. It's a social and cultural revolution. It's about us. And it matters." <sup>3</sup>*

The more we learn about trust, the more we may become convinced it is a magical remedy that can heal everything from interpersonal relationships to world economies. In almost every field of study, trust is one of the key lubricants for success.

If you want to create a good family, raise great children, or get along with your in-laws, trust is the foundational element. It stands above love, compassion, safety, and provision. If you want to build a successful business, trust is the cornerstone you will need. Want an economic system with sustainable growth? You guessed it, trust is an essential component. Do you want to become a great leader? More than any other factor, obtaining people's trust will not only let you achieve your goal, but will allow you to remain their leader through thick and thin.

## TRUST IS DYNAMIC

As we will unravel later, trust begets trust, which begets trustworthiness. This equation is society's most valuable power plant. In Chapter 4, we will study the Trust Flywheel, a tool for intentionally engaging the process of developing trust in relationships. Trust momentum needs to be continually fed by this process, and that momentum helps in healing broken trust, and strengthening trust over time. A parent, political candidate, teacher, or leader who exhibits that they can trust will in turn be trusted, and that process brands them trustworthy. In every connection, from personal to institutional to societal, trust is the key indicator and predictor of health.

Conversely, the lack of trust is devastating. A deficiency in trust nourishes apathy. The lack of trust not only inhibits success, but an ever-increasing distrust erodes the underpinnings of transactions and interactions and leaves relationships void of "relations." Peer into any fragmented home, marriage, government, or world system and you'll find the absence of trust and an increasing presence of distrust.

Trust is a hot topic globally as historically reliable institutions of trust are increasingly not trustworthy.

*"Like the plot of some overblown soap opera or Jacobean tragedy, the episodes of unethical behaviour have come thick and fast, from the lurid, even criminal, to the just plain stupid and, sadly, routine. Each has chipped away at public confidence. The British MPs' expenses scandal; the false intelligence about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); Tesco's horsemeat outrage; price gouging by big pharma; the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill; the dishonours of FIFA's bribery; Volkswagen's 'dieseldate'; major data breaches from companies such as Sony, Yahoo! and Target;*

*the Panama Papers and widespread tax avoidance; the exchange - rate manipulation by the world's largest banks ; Brazil's Petrobras oil scandal ; the lack of an effective response to the refugee crises; and , last but not least , shocking revelations of widespread abuse by Catholic priests , other clergy and other ' care ' institutions . No wonder a thousand headlines lament that nobody trusts authority any more. Corruption, elitism, economic disparity-and the feeble responses to all of the above-have pummeled traditional trust in the old institutions as fiercely as a brutal wind lashing ancient oaks.”<sup>4</sup>*

We're seemingly surrounded by overwhelming evidence that the world and those in it cannot be trusted. A “trust crisis”? Quite possibly. Are trust behaviors and historic trust centers fluctuating? No question. And in the midst of all this uncertainty and contradiction, trust remains an essential building block for every relationship. Defining trust and distrust, then, becomes not only the goal of this book, but the goal for anyone pursuing healthy and productive relationships.

### **A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNKNOWN**

Until now, the tools available to us have made defining trust as challenging as walking through a minefield. Each “exploding” definition exposes only the part of the field it’s “protecting.” The good news: it’s all within a tiny field. Whether in sociology, economics, education, relationships, or any other field of study, more research has been conducted on the subject of trust than the examination of any other relational component. Confidence, reliability, contract of hoped guarantees, a conduit, a lubricant, and yearned expectations all are words (or concepts) that have made their way into definitions of trust.

Rachel Botsman’s simple definition is helpful and precise. *“Trust is a confident relationship with the unknown.”*<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, trust is a multifaceted notion. It doesn’t have a single definition that works for all situations. Much like love, trust is something people apparently “know when they see (experience) it.” It’s gooey. Yet, it has more substance and influence than any other relational component.

There are many good resources you can use to dive deeper into the definition of trust. While trust is one of the topics of this book, the relationship between trust and distrust is the distinguishing theme. So, what about distrust? What is the definition of distrust? We now know it’s not simply the opposite of trust.

So how should we define it?

Distrust is distinctly different from the “opposite of trust.” The opposite of trust is the lack or absence of trust. Trust’s opposite is low trust: the lack of confidence, reliability, contract of hoped guarantees... you get the idea, and that is not the same as distrust. You can lack confidence in someone without distrusting them. And you can distrust someone personally, but trust them to uphold a business contract. As we mentioned, trust and distrust are detached. They are not different sides of the same coin. The mind processes them from different areas of the brain. Therefore, they have different motivators, languages, triggers, and purposes. Therefore, we can experience both at the same time, toward the same person, scenario, or institution.

### **TRUST: REDEFINED**

As noted earlier, trust is processed in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for rational (and sometimes not so rational) calculated thoughts. The prefrontal cortex is the forward part of the frontal lobe. It’s behind your eyes and forehead. This brain region is occupied with planning complex

cognitive behavior, expressing personality, making decisions, and moderating social behavior. It is the great conductor of the orchestra of the mind. It takes what it receives from the rest of the brain and decides how to act, react, and differentiate between dissonant thoughts.

Distrust, on the other hand, is processed in the amygdala. This primitive area influences both left and right hemispheres of the brain, and responds to important, or seemingly important, environmental stimuli. For example, in dangerous situations, the amygdala kicks into action and encourages our fight-or-flight response. “If the amygdala perceives a correspondence between the record of experiences in the hippocampus and incoming information, and judges that the stimulus warrants a fight, flight, or freeze response, then it will trigger the hypothalamic—pituitary—adrenal (HPA) axis and ‘hijack’ the prefrontal cortex (PFC), partly in the form of blood flow being redirected from the PFC to the limbic system.”<sup>6</sup> The amygdala is the “first responder” of our brain and is in control of our “early warning system” when a quick protective reaction is needed.

What do we learn from this exploration of how the brain works?

### **SIMPLY, WE DECIDE TO TRUST, AND WE FEEL DISTRUST.**

One of the technologies that can help us understand and feel confident (and less confused!) about how we experience trust and distrust is a system for measuring. In Chapter 3, we dive into the three containers we use to measure trust. Identifying each and knowing why we measure with this framework reduces confusion and helps us identify how to develop trust in each container.

Trust and distrust, then, are not opposites. In fact, they can be allies: they can work in harmony to secure trustworthiness. They are very independent and sometimes fight. They can both be dominant and both be submissive. However, when working for the same healthy goal together, they are our best tools for secure, productive, fulfilling relationships. Thus, I will add to Rachel Botsman’s excellent definition:

*Trust is a confident relationship with the unknown, and a guiding distrust of the known.*

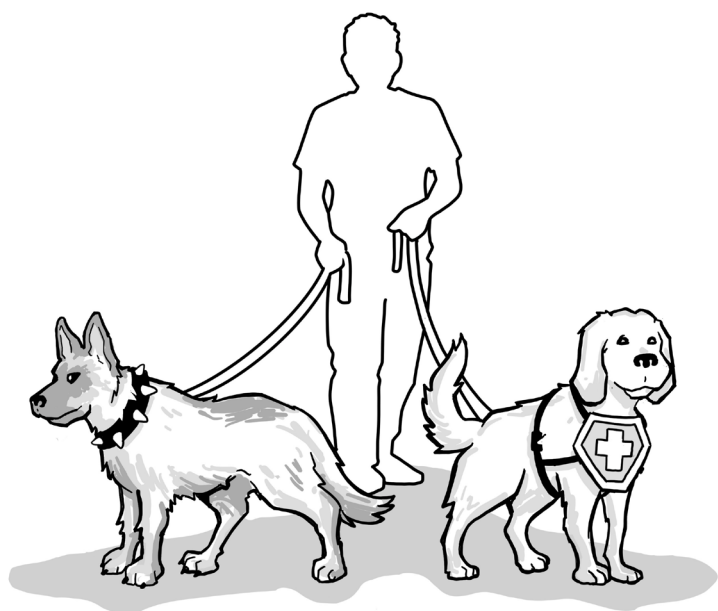
### **THE CURRENCY OF INTERACTIONS**

There’s nothing that compares with the destructive nature of broken trust within society, organizations, and relationships. Encouragingly, there’s nothing that equals the strength of the bonds between us when we do trust each other. Trust is our most fragile and most precious asset. The more we trust, the more empathetic we are with one another, and the more we trust, the more trustworthy we become to those around us. Trust is a powerful societal glue. It builds the roads to stronger societies, better organizations, and richer relationships. “Money may be the currency of transactions, but trust is the currency of interactions.”<sup>7</sup> There may be no better way to express our humanity than this.

However, we should not be naive when we decide to trust. How can we trust with confidence? The answer is found as we separate the roles of trust and distrust. Healthy distrust offers a safe starting point, and provides the Trust Flywheel with the friction needed to make a strong decision to trust. We must understand that distrust is a necessary ally to trust. We cannot safely trust without healthy distrust. The goal is not to eliminate all distrust. Instead, our goal is to move distrust from a reactive “Guard Dog” to a well-trained “Guide Dog.”

As we traverse the next seven chapters, we begin to reframe our language. “I don’t trust you!” doesn’t equal “I distrust you.” Likewise, “I trust you” doesn’t mean that I have little or no distrust in you. I’ve painstakingly tried to be precise and break the limiting chains of this kind of language. It is important to separate the two because doing so gives us the power to heal and repair relationships that have been severed by broken trust.

If our only option lies within a single spectrum of trust to distrust, we are held hostage by the emotions of our amygdala or the calculated process of the prefrontal cortex: one constantly pushing the other out to take dominance. Having the freedom to hold a high level of distrust while deciding to trust again gives us the



authority and control to heal and sustain trust relationships. Trust and distrust are not at war. They are allies. Together they take us by each hand and walk us into a healthy and hopeful culture of trust.

Trust and distrust are essential for every interaction, every connection, and every transaction. It’s crucial we develop a complete understanding of how trust and distrust are developed, repaired, and sustained. **Trust Me** re-imagines how trust and distrust collaborate to protect, enhance, and stabilize our lives...together.



*Our mission is to inspire a genuine shift in how educators perceive and engage with the educational environment. This book uncovers a vital but often overlooked aspect of this environment—one that remains hidden from plain sight. You may not witness it unfolding in real-time, yet its impact is undeniably real. It pulsates through the fabric of education, and that force is trust. Trust represents the result of intricate biological processes occurring within two regions of the brain: the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex.*

*Let’s face it: educators are incredibly busy. Heck, the whole world seems to be in a perpetual rush these days. When was the last time you actually had the time to read an entire book, cover to cover? It’s been a while, hasn’t it? We get it. That’s why this book takes a different approach. We want to make things easier for educators. You can quickly scan through and see if any eye-catching headers resonate with you. But we don’t stop there. We give you clear directions—this is what to do—and break down the implications—this is what it means—for your school. **Trust Me** is designed to be super easy to grasp, highly practical, and incredibly useful in your everyday teaching journey.*

# Trust Me: It's Not Just In Your Head

No One Trusts Any Longer

*"Distrust is defined as: what I shared with you, is not safe with you."*

*—Bren'e Brown<sup>8</sup>*

Trust me, your mom was right. You shouldn't trust strangers.

Or she was at least kind of right.

By the mid 1980s, the United States radiated power. The economic and political recovery from the late '70s made President Reagan a trusted American hero. His Hollywood cowboy demeanor instilled confidence and united much of the nation. He brought back the hostages and beat back the effects of high interest rates, and the U. S. was once again a superpower on the world stage. Even in a time when most people were in a high alert, high distrust state, Reagan found a way to end the Cold War. He mitigated distrust in order to build trust.

In the '80s the nation's greatest fears were nuclear. Our nemesis, Russia, spent years stockpiling hidden nuclear warheads and President Reagan made this threat his focus. We had been told we'd need treaties that limited nuclear weapons to bring peace to

the world. For a time, the arrogant posturing of two superpowers' attempts to meet in the middle provided kindling for headlines and late-night talk shows.

At a critical moment, President Reagan sought and received wise counsel. Suzanne Massie reminded the president that Russians like to talk in proverbs. She taught him the iconic Reaganism that is forever woven into American culture:

***Trust, but verify.***

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) was successfully signed by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan on December 8, 1987. It was a better answer to nuclear weapons. For the first time in history, the treaty eliminated an entire class of U.S. and Soviet missiles. "It's a good bargain. For every nuclear warhead of our own that we remove, they will give up four."<sup>9</sup>

"Trust, but verify" worked...The agreement felt like a "safer world." And Gorbachev wasn't the only one convinced by the short proverb. Reagan's genius was that he allowed the American public, and the world, to listen in on his conversation with Gorbachev. If the president proclaimed our nation should only trust our enemy, and not distrust, he would not have gained the significant support needed to make a treaty with Russia. Coming out of the intense, constant, frightening messaging of the Cold War, Reagan acknowledged that U.S. citizens had reasons to be distrustful. Rather than just expecting citizens to trust him when he went to negotiate with "the enemy," he kept the negotiations public and open to scrutiny. The invitation to distrust opened a pathway for citizens to begin to feel safe trusting Reagan's plan and Russia's agreements.

"Trust, but verify" is allowing distrust to guide the decision to trust. It is trust and distrust working as allies. This tactic lowered the anxiety of a nation. Giving Americans permission to distrust while trusting allowed them to see Reagan as a trustworthy president. It lowered the angst of deciding to trust, especially when the risks were high.

Most often the word distrust carries a negative overtone. However, distrust is an essential component of relational health. And lucky for us, we distrust a good number of things. It is a collaborator with trust and an essential part of the trust process.

Unfortunately for our Western obsession with progress, the U.S. hasn't become an increasingly healthy trust culture since Reagan's big win. We have experienced catastrophes in every area of life over the last 40 years that have amplified our distrust and encouraged horrible habits that erode our trust relationships. Don't worry: in the end, a brief study of the current trust landscape in the U.S. will support our efforts to nurture healthy distrust and healthy trust in ourselves and others. It's not a permanent state of things that:

**TRUST IS DEAD**

*"(W)e have to trust to survive. Paradoxically, we have to lie to survive as well."*<sup>10</sup>

"You can't trust anyone anymore" is the dramatic undertone of daily headlines.

It may be truer than we are willing to admit. "According to studies by several researchers, most of us encounter nearly two hundred lies a day. That means if you're lucky enough to get eight hours of sleep a night, you've likely been on the receiving end of about twelve lies an hour."<sup>11</sup> You would think this would make us more



skeptical of each other (and subconsciously it has), but ironically all this lying is focused on one outcome: more trust! How so?

We lie to urge others to trust us and we do it in a couple of different ways. Sometimes we lie to make ourselves look good. Other times we lie to make others feel good about us. Sometimes we appeal to the prefrontal cortex with discussion and reason, to encourage others to decide to trust. And sometimes we attempt to soothe the amygdala when lying by our mannerisms or tone, hoping others feel less distrust. We will nuance this significant difference more in Chapter 5; however, no matter the path, the motivation is the same. Humans crave, need, and expect others to trust, and we're often willing to lie to ensure they do.

### **MAYBE WE SHOULD REVISE MOM'S ADVICE: IT'S NOT JUST STRANGERS WHO POSE A THREAT...DON'T TRUST ANYONE!**

The grim statistics don't stop with our compulsive lying to family, friends, and neighbors. Year after year, the amount of trust U.S. citizens place in government, business, media, and other organizations falls. Fewer than 47% of Americans trust the media, which is understandable as the Fourth Estate has been proven time and again to be lying to us to please their advertisers. More than 62% of the U.S. population distrust their CEOs' messages and decisions.<sup>12</sup>

What about a historic staple of trust, the church? While the church and religious organizations are still among the most trusted institutions,<sup>13</sup> their leaders have taken a hard hit. Religious leaders don't fare much better than business CEOs. We used to trust the church and its leaders to take care of us from birth to death, but we've shifted that trust to alternatives. Furthermore, the way

religious leaders have mishandled (and been part of) scandals, made selfish financial decisions, provided simple answers to complex problems, and generally demonstrated a lack of integrity make us even more distrustful of them. In fact, most citizens trust the military and science significantly more than leaders in religious organizations.<sup>14</sup>

Over the last hundred years, we can observe U.S. public trust shifting from church and the traditional family unit to education and business. Unfortunately, capitalism has failed to reward younger generations as it previously rewarded people with degrees and long-term job commitments in the years following World War II. As the poverty and wealthy classes in the US expand and the middle class shrinks, we have become more polarized in our politics and more suspicious of our media. People have rallied around our supposedly representative government. However, we are gradually realizing our representatives and journalists are more likely to be loyal to their donors than to their constituents, and again, large buckets of public trust have shifted to one of the final reliable Western institutions: the medical and scientific community.

Sadly, in conjunction with being betrayed and manipulated by our news institutions over the last few decades, more and more evidence is emerging that our medical institutions lie to us as well. This lack of safety "at home" has led more and more U.S. citizens to lash out at other countries, as if they're the problem—leading to heightened trust in the military industrial complex to protect us. This reaction is similar to a child being abused at home and turning into a bully of his peers at school.

What's going on? It might be easy to conclude, given the evidence, that trust is dead in the United States. However, trust is very much alive and well—it's just showing up in new ways.

## TRUST IS (NOT!) DEAD, BUT ITS CENTERS ARE SHIFTING

Good news: trust is not dead! But the world has changed, and the objects of our trust, the centers we traditionally put our trust in, have changed, too. Dramatically.

You know how your parents trust your family doctor's word more than you do, and your grandparents trust the doctors even more? Are you likely to verify a diagnosis online even if you trust the doctor is giving you good advice? Generationally we have shifted the who and what that we trust. This is important. Trust hasn't gone anywhere... it's just moving around. We are moving away from the institutions and toward something else. You can think of it as a shift from vertical trust to horizontal trust.

### INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IS SHIFTING TO DISTRIBUTED TRUST

Consider these statistics from Rachel Botsman's study on technology:

*"(W)e can see that trust falls into distinct chapters. The first was local, when we lived within the boundaries of small local communities where everyone knew everyone else. The second was institutional, a kind of intermediated trust that ran through a variety of contracts, courts and corporate brands, freeing commerce from local exchanges and creating the foundation necessary for an organized industrial society. And the third, still very much in its infancy, is distributed. A trust shift need not mean the previous forms will be completely superseded; only that the new form will become more dominant...Trust that used to flow upwards to referees and regulators, to authorities and experts, to watchdogs and gatekeepers, is now flowing horizontally, in some instances to our fellow human beings and, in other cases, to (computer) programs and bots. Trust is being turned on its head. The old sources of power, expertise and authority no longer hold all the aces, or even the deck of cards. The consequences of that, good and bad, cannot be underestimated."<sup>15</sup>*

Examining our past trust systems provides insight into why our culture currently triggers our amygdala to distrust so readily. It also provides clues for moving forward, since humans have participated in something similar to distributed trust in the past, when we trusted based on who was in our local community.

Institutional trust orients around power centers, often authority figures, we are culturally predisposed to trust ("everyone around me trusts them..."). Our social and personal familiarity with power centers makes the trust process a lot faster than when we encounter an authority figure or seek help from an institution that we have no familiarity or cultural history with. For example, in the U.S. we generally expect to go out and find our own romantic partner, but in countries like Japan, Korea, China, the Netherlands, Russia, India, and Thailand, the role of matchmaker is a power center people trust to guide and even make their partnership decisions.<sup>16,17</sup> All over the world, different cultures rely on their own power centers to shorten the sometimes arduous process of trusting so their daily lives flow more easily.

For people who grew up experiencing and enjoying the benefits of the institutional trust style, risk emerges when a power center shifts suddenly and the Guard Dog Distrust (Chapter 2) is commanded into action. To many U.S. citizens, police officers are a culturally accepted and reliable center of institutional trust. Police, as an institution, are expected to uphold law and order, and by doing so, help keep society safe and fair. Police are a significant institutional trust power center—until they are not. This dissonance is part of the widespread tensions we are negotiating culturally right now. It is especially impactful when a formerly trusted person or institution is shown to be untrustworthy, because when we feel unexpectedly unsafe, we realize we were vulnerable, and when we feel vulnerable we tend to become defensively angry. The longer

an individual has experienced institutional trust as a reliable way of being, the more likely they are to feel destabilized, defensive, and distrusting of the rapidly evolving distributed trust behaviors.

Distributed trust is when trust in power centers is dissolved in favor of trust power nodes across entire networks webbing throughout society. Now that historic mainstream institutions are proving increasingly untrustworthy, and we have expansive access to communications and research technology, we are not always putting all our trust eggs in a few baskets! Instead, individuals and their various tribes decide who's trustworthy and who is not, and trust shifts quickly if the object proves untrustworthy.<sup>18</sup> In a real sense it's "Power to the People."

### **DISTRUST'S SOLE PURPOSE IS TO GUIDE US TO SAFETY. TRUST'S PRIMARY GOAL IS BUILDING RELATIONAL CAPITAL.**

As we keep discovering, we are in a time of rapid change and exponential evolution. It is important to bear in mind that, depending on age and other demographics, you, your loved ones, and your colleagues are all experiencing different imprints and priorities about how you prefer to trust. To those of us who are more comfortable with institutional trust, distributed trust feels gooey and foggy, like walking on quicksand. And this is prime real estate for distrust to germinate. We feel safer knowing there are just a few power centers in our environment, knowing who is in charge, and knowing who to blame when something goes wrong. Those of us who are aware that we've been betrayed by historic power centers of trust feel more comfortable with distributed trust. We feel safer knowing that if one power node of our trust network fails us, we are still supported by plenty of other trust nodes.

So trust is not dead—but it is in transition. The world's infrastructure has changed. Cultural, sociological, and financial "tectonic plates" have shifted, and we distrust the ground we walked on so firmly before the quake. Therefore:

Distrust is playing a more prominent role as we experience trust shifting. Maybe we should reword Reagan's proverb: Distrust, but verify!

#### **SO WHAT IS DISTRUST?**

Distrust is NOT the opposite of trust. Distrust is its own concept, and although connected to trust, it operates independently. Distrust is autonomous. Low trust or lack of trust are not the same as distrust. Distrust has its own purpose, language, goal, and process independent from trust. Distrust's sole purpose is to guide us to safety. Trust's primary goal is building relational capital. Healthy distrust builds a wall of safety and provides a sanctuary from which to make a strong decision to trust.

#### **RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCE: LOW TRUST vs DISTRUST**

When a low level of trust AND a low level of distrust are present, the outcome is apathy. Distrust never expresses, "I don't care!" Only low trust and low distrust together result in this type of apathetic response.

Protection, aggression, and guidance are not activated by low levels of trust. These reactions are only engaged when we experience distrust. If any active defensive emotion is experienced, it's a result of distrust. When we say, "I don't trust you," we're often saying, "I distrust you."

It's important to recognize when and at what level distrust is present.

Low trust, on the other hand, is characterized by a general lack of confidence. You don't distrust that person or organization, you don't feel afraid of them—you just don't know enough about them to begin trusting them for any reason. To help discern the difference between distrust and low trust, keep an eye out for defensive feelings or detached feelings. If you feel defensive or protective against some person or group, your amygdala is likely alerting you to a reason to distrust them. If you feel no sense of warning, but instead perhaps cautious curiosity wanting more information, you may be starting from a place of low trust. This is a great opportunity for that person to start demonstrating why you should trust them, to launch the trust momentum in your relationship.

Separate toolsets are required for cultivating trust and easing distrust. You can't improve a distrust situation by using the tools that increase trust. Many people expend great energy toward building or repairing trust by sharing reasons they are trustworthy. However, they are surprised when the feeling of distrust still remains in a protective and aggressive stance. You can't reason with someone's distrust. You must appeal to the amygdala. ***Remember, we decide to trust and we feel distrust.***

Our amygdala's job is to save us. Distrust is a superpower that protects us, but it's important to realize it can work to protect us from things we don't actually need protection from (someone from another country), or don't need protection from anymore (childhood trauma with swimming). Although distrust begins as a Guard Dog and dominates trust as it shuts down logical processing and replaces it with primal, instinctive reactions of fight, flight, or freeze,<sup>19</sup> its primary purpose is to keep us safe. When distrust dominates, trust does not necessarily dissipate or disappear. Instead, it is inaccessible until distrust's "all-clear" bark is sounded.

However, if the "all-clear" is rarely sounded, or if distrust is allowed to dominate for too long, the healthy relational tension between trust and distrust is overridden. Paranoia becomes our operating system and many times our Guard Dog becomes an attack dog. Cortisol floods our systems, draining our energy and straining our immune systems. Dichotomy governs our thinking. Civility is withheld, and we villainize anyone who is different. These are the signs of a hyperactive Guard Dog mentality.

The current social climate testifies to this fact. In the past decade, many people have become caught in a downward spiral of hyper Guard Dog Distrust. News cycles that foster binary thinking cause a vortex of bitter, protective anger. However, it's not just the news media; companies, institutions, and brands build entire relationships on lying to us, and it's become far too normal to find out someone is manipulating us. As we gingerly attempt to navigate shifting trust centers, we expend energy in hyper-fight, hyper-flight, or hyper-freeze behaviors. The power of the hyper Guard Dog may be at an all-time high, but trust is not dead. It is just somewhat overshadowed right now. The next question is: ***Who let the dogs out?***



Building and restoring relationships while addressing distrust is crucial not only for leaders but also for teachers among their peers. Within the organizational structure of schools, individuals aren't always provided the necessary support to showcase their best selves. Passive aggressiveness can become

pervasive, and various conflict management structures may exist within our school systems. However, it's important to recognize that conflict and distrust are fundamentally different. The same approaches used to manage conflict cannot effectively address trust or distrust. We must acknowledge their distinct nature.

While there are policies and procedures in place, such as grievance policies, it's essential to consider situations like a principal's evaluation of teacher effectiveness. How the principal enters that room can profoundly impact the level of trust or distrust experienced by the teacher. If the teacher becomes triggered, it doesn't automatically imply inappropriate behavior. It could simply indicate fear, apprehension about the outcome of their performance evaluation. If the principal lacks awareness of the tools required to manage conflict, mitigate distrust, or foster trust and triggers the teacher, the teacher's response should not be attributed solely to the teacher's shortcomings or issues with students. In reality, the principal has introduced distrust into the environment, and it would be unfair to hold it against the teacher. The teacher's reaction is a natural response, triggered by the release of cortisol in their body.

It all boils down to truly understanding the human dynamics at play. For example, you can trust me as an individual while simultaneously distrusting a particular process. Even if I, as a principal, have established a strong rapport with you, Teacher Smith, and have taken all the necessary steps to cultivate a positive relationship, the inherent distrust of the teacher towards the evaluation process can still lead to triggers. This should not be taken personally. As a principal, it is my responsibility to comprehend this dynamic, be mindful of the signs of distrust, and proactively mitigate its impact. This proactive approach to managing trust is key.

## Trust Me: It's a Dogfight

### The Personalities of Distrust

Distrust is almost always viewed as a negative or limiting emotion that should be turned off or ignored. Instead of paying attention to distrust or considering what it might have to tell us, we focus on developing relationships by building trust. Trust is often seen as the hero that has relational superpowers—and it does. However, this doesn't make distrust the villain. The distrust that our amygdala barks is also a superhero when its powers are trained and socialized for healthy reactions.

Distrust has two distinct personalities. Both have one goal: safety. Personality one is the Guard Dog. Personality two is the Guide Dog. ***Distrust can act as a guard to protect us in potentially dangerous situations, or as a guide to help us navigate difficult situations.*** Recognizing the different personalities of distrust and learning how to use them appropriately is crucial for building and maintaining trust in relationships. The ability to switch between the two can lead to more sustainable and healthy trust. It's essential to recognize that every relationship, whether that's with a friend, spouse, brand, company, or institution starts with risk and distrust, not reward and trust. Every relationship begins with the question, "Do I distrust you?" not "Do I trust you?"