

How to Be Trustworthy

by [Mike Hawkins](#)



Trust is one of those words that people use frequently without much thought to what it means. Perhaps because the [definition of trust](#) is simply having assurance that someone will or won't do something. But what is required to place assurance in someone? What causes us to be confident that someone's words and behaviors will happen as expected?

Another aspect of trust we might not give much thought to is whether trust is binary? In other words, is trust something people have or don't have? Or is trust part of a continuum with degrees of trust between the extremes of "trustworthy" and "not trustworthy?" For example, what if people do something most of the time, but not all time? Are they then to

be partially trusted? Is there such a thing as *partial trust*?

Maybe the best question to ask about trust is "what breaks trust?" What causes a leader, spouse, child, parent, or friend to become untrustworthy? The obvious answer may be "they don't do what they say," but that implies that trust is simply based on honesty and integrity. Is that really all that breaks trust? What about when someone unintentionally does something wrong or simply lacks the ability to do something? Would you trust someone to catch you leaping from a trapeze in midair who had no skill in doing that? Of course not, but that doesn't make them dishonest.

Trust is multidimensional for sure. It is based on many factors which makes it easy to break and hard to gain. While most people can be trusted in some way, many are quick to label others as untrustworthy. That begs the question, are people's expectations of trust too high? Maybe for some, but trust is up to the individual. Perhaps the best way to summarize trust is that it is a choice for both—the person's words and behaviors being trusted and the person doing the trusting.

What is clear is that whether expecting, establishing, or rebuilding trust, there are many elements to consider. Listed below is a list. Use it as a checklist in your relationships to gauge the extent to which trust is present. If appropriate, use it as a joint assessment with others. The more attributes you possess, the more you will be trusted and respected.

| ✓ | I'm most trustworthy and respected when I am: | Assessment 1-10 |
|---|---|--------------------|
| | 1. Responsible. I take responsibility for what I do, contribute to, or cause. I apologize for any negative impact I've had. | |
| | 2. Loyal. I'm dedicated to the relevant cause, organization, principle, or people. I commit my support and adherence. | |
| | 3. Dependable. I am responsive to requests. I do what I say. I meet the expectations I set and to which I agree. | |
| | 4. Openminded. I have my own ideas, methods, and opinions, but am open to others'. I thoughtfully consider others' perspectives. | |
| | 5. Consistent. I don't often change my mind once expressed. I don't say or do that which is at odds with what has been agreed. | |
| | 6. Caring. I am compassionate and kind. I am concerned about people and their wellbeing. I am tender with others. | |

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| 7. | Empathetic. I read people well. I express to them how I relate to their circumstances, thoughts, and feelings. | |
| 8. | Authentic. I am appropriately transparent with my thoughts and feelings. I know and express the true me. | |
| 9. | Competent. My confidence is based on genuine knowledge and skill. I have extensive experience and ability in my domains. | |
| 10. | Unselfish. I care as much about others as myself. When in a position of leadership, I put others' interests ahead of mine. | |
| 11. | Humble. I don't consider myself better than others. I believe any success I have includes the contributions of many others. | |
| 12. | Likable. I'm not overly serious, negative, or chronically stressed. I'm appropriately light-hearted, calm, and positive. | |
| 13. | Supportive. I advocate for people. I help others and set them up for success to the extent reasonably possible. | |
| 14. | Complimentary. I look for and recognize people's efforts. I encourage and build up people. I give them credit for their contributions. | |
| 15. | Relational. I like knowing people's activities, interests, and aspirations. I place a high priority on having good relationships. | |
| 16. | Respectful. I honor differences. I have my own perspectives, but regard others' opinions, values, cultures, and personalities. | |
| 17. | Informative. I keep people appropriately informed. I strive to minimize confusion and fear due to a lack of certainty and clarity. | |
| 18. | Available. I'm reasonably accessible. I spend time with people. When with them, I give them my undistracted attention. | |
| 19. | Listening. I ask questions and listen with the intent to understand. I make people feel heard, consulted, and valued. | |
| 20. | Empowering. I avoid controlling others. I don't ask questions that make people feel micromanaged or judged. | |
| 21. | Honorable. I am honest. I have nothing to hide. I set an example that others respect and aspire to follow. | |

This is a long list. You can't do it all perfectly. No one can. But the more you strive to be and do these, the more respected and trusted you will be.

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