
The 3 components of building trust

by Susan McPherson

Once you've ironed out your mission, business plan, or job search agenda—and you know what you want to achieve—you’ll want to start folding people into your mission. But how do you do that? In a best-case scenario, the people you need help from are already involved and invested. And if they aren’t yet—you need to make them aware of what you’re doing and then get them involved. Later you will ask them to take action. But first, build awareness, engagement, and trust. Trust is built slowly, one coffee, one Tweet, one conversation at a time. It takes a long time to develop but can disappear in an instant.

Research from PricewaterhouseCoopers reveals that trust in business comes down to three essential elements: *competence, experience, and values*. Before you get to the point of making an ask, your potential partner or client needs to trust you. They need to know that you do what you say you will, that you keep promises, and you believe in the same values. Small actions over time—mini deposits into each of these accounts—will build trust.

Just as differing cultures have different social norms on how they connect and build business relationships, cultural differences exist in norms around trust, too. For example, research conducted by *Harvard Business Review* found that participants they studied in North American and European cultures tended to have openness, meaning that they assume clients and

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1 [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/3-ways-to-build-trust-in-your-business-05866831-1d47-4d4f-8b16-88ad8e0b7e59/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/3-ways-to-build-trust-in-your-business-05866831-1d47-4d4f-8b16-88ad8e0b7e59/)
partners are reliable and trustworthy until proven otherwise.\textsuperscript{2} On average, people from those cultures tended to test for openness and value transparency as a signal of trust. That same study found that participants from East Asian cultures primarily valued competence. In business relationships, they tended to rely heavily on reputation and commonly tested for competence to gain trust. The study also found that participants from Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures indicated a preference for socializing before negotiating; they also placed a premium on assessing respect. The Latin American participants prioritized common values and also preferred socializing before negotiation. None of these findings are meant to suggest sweeping generalizations about how cultural differences influence business relationships. But the research is simply a mere peek into the different types of styles and approaches that you may find in business.

One action that will always endear trust: closing the loop. If someone made an introduction for you, say, for example, at a CMO of a Fortune 100 company in Chicago for a job interview—follow up and tell them what happened. Let them know how it went; Thank them with an email or a card. (You’d be surprised how many times this \textit{doesn’t} happen!) As you develop the art of connecting, you're also planting the seed for another reason to talk to that person. Each time you follow up and re-connect—they will notice. They will remember: This person is trustworthy, contentious. Your reputation is built over thousands of tiny little actions—showing up, small asks, offers, and loops closed—throughout your career.

\textsuperscript{2} https://hbr.org/2020/01/research-how-to-build-trust-with-business-partners-from-other-cultures
The 5-minute ask

When you’re starting a new business or organization, instead of waiting until everything’s ready to launch and then getting supporters—you want the reverse. You want supporters early on so that they can accrue a vested interest in it. The same is true of making connections in a job search process. Your greatest references for a dream job, customers for a new business, or supporters for a local campaign you care about will not necessarily be the ones who give you the most of anything, but the ones who are personally invested in your mission. Don’t wait until you need a “big ask” before bringing in help. Use what I call the 5-minute ask. There are a million different ways you could get specific help in a brief amount of time: What do you think of this business proposal? Could you retweet the details of this event? Could I get five minutes of your time to look over my resume? Could you recommend the best technology platform to host my virtual summit? Can you offer some tips into breaking into the industry?

In his work as Global Head of Community at Airbnb, Douglas Atkin often spoke about how and why people get incredibly passionate about certain brands and communities and not others. Why do some brands get a cult-like following, while others struggle to become a household name, or even to stay in business? Atkin is also the author of the book The Cult of Brands, and he says that when brands build a cult-like following, it’s because they’ve tapped into the human desire to belong. Humans want to belong to something. Atkins also touts the effective use of what’s called the Commitment Curve to engage customers, investors, or community members. The Commitment curve is a model that enables you to make “asks” of your community, volunteers, or potential customers over time. It illustrates how relationships deepen over time, with participants becoming increasingly committed to one another. The curve moves to the right,
on the horizontal axis measuring time, and up along the vertical axis measuring commitment. As many have noted, it’s like dating. You start with small, low-commitment asks: would you like to get a coffee? And slowly build to larger ones: would you like to marry me? And in between, there’s a careful dance of engagement. What’s fascinating is that Atkin and others who have used this model have found that the more someone does for your organization, the more invested they feel, the greater their sense of engagement and belonging. When you’re at the beginning of the relationship: small, 5-minute offers and asks are the way to begin.

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Currently, Susan invests in and advises women-led start-ups, including: iFundWomen, Inc., Messy.fm, Our Place, The Riveter, Park Place Payments, Hint Water, Apolitical, Arlo Skye, Giapenta and The Muse. She serves on the boards of USA for UNHCR, The 19th News, and the Lower Eastside Girls Club, and serves on the advisory boards of The List and Alltruists. Additionally, she is a member of the MIT Solve Women and Technology Leadership Group and serves as an adviser to several nonprofits, including Girls Who Code, She’s The First, and The OpEd Project. Susan is a Vital Voices global corporate ambassador. She resides in Brooklyn.