



Some misconceptions about **trust**

The stakes

Trust is a fundamental component of human relations. Without it, we would have to draft a contract for every interaction and systematically explain what we mean. When trust exists, we are more efficient and at ease. We can communicate without having to make every detail explicit, take initiative based on anticipated expectations of our counterparts, and exchange viewpoints without interpreting every disagreement as a personal attack. However, trust is difficult to build and always remains fragile.

A few common misconceptions

A great deal of frustration concerning trust is caused by misconceptions about what trust is.

Trust is a state:
"I feel trustful."

FALSE Trust is first and foremost a **decision**, which must be made carefully and deliberately. Indeed, good relationships and shared values are not sufficient to prove that someone will be reliable in a given domain. The awareness that granting trust is a deliberate choice helps in making wiser decisions about when to do so.
e.g.: "Regardless of whom I'm dealing with, I force myself to stop and think, "Am I right to trust this person?" This executive is not a skeptic; he is aware that according trust is his own responsibility.

Trust is linked to the person:
"He/she is trustworthy."

FALSE Trust is granted **in a given situation for a specific action**. Trust must be reevaluated case by case, in light of the importance of the stakes, the other person's motives and his or her mastery of the required skills. Otherwise, disappointment may follow. By the same token, it is possible occasionally to trust people despite past problems.
e.g.: "Philip is a trustworthy employee. Still, I'd never entrust him with a delicate negotiation; that's not his strong suit."

Trust confers a sense of security:
"I feel reassured."

FALSE Trusting others means taking risks. You must accept being **vulnerable** when you trust someone else to make a decision or do something for you. Indeed, if that person lets you down, you may suffer the consequences. It is consequently natural to worry when you give someone your trust.
e.g.: "Although I really trust Peter, I am always a bit worried when I give him an important project. In fact, trusting someone is actually rather stressful!"

Trust grows with time:
"The longer you know someone, the more you can trust him/her."

FALSE Trust is fragile and **must never be taken for granted**. While people get to know one another better over time, they also discover both each other's strengths and weaknesses. Occasional disappointment is natural. Rather than reinforcing trust, time should clarify in which situations you decide to grant your trust.
e.g.: "Sophie and I know one another well. Overall, I'd say we trust each other completely, to the point where we dare to discuss on which things we will trust one another or not!"

➡ Trust is the result of a deliberate decision that must be regularly reassessed.