

Trust, Faith, and Betrayal: Insights from Management for the Wise Believer

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ABSTRACT. Trust within a secular or organizational context is much like the concept of faith within a religious framework. The purpose of this article is to identify parallels between trust and faith, particularly from the individual perspective of the person who perceives a duty owed to him or her. Betrayal is often a subjectively derived construct based upon each individual's subjective mediating lens. We analyze the nature of trust and betrayal and offer insights that a wise believer might use in understanding his or her relationship with the divine. We suggest that the parallels between trust and faith involve a willingness to relinquish one's power or control in the expectant hope that our needs will be met. Betrayal, however, is often profoundly misunderstood.

KEY WORDS: trust, betrayal, trustworthiness, faith

Scholars and practitioners who write about trust have emphasized its compelling moral role in relationships – whether in business, politics, marriage, or religion (Covey and Merrill, 2006; Small and Dickie, 1999; Solomon and Flores, 2001). Like trust, religious faith also requires the relinquishing of individual power if faith is perceived to be authentic and congruent (cf. Solomon and Flores, 2001). Those asked to trust or to demonstrate faith may struggle to maintain their commitment due to their need to protect themselves from the risk of potential betrayal (Reina and Reina, 2006). Consistent with the growing management trend to study issues associated with spirituality in the workplace, (Hart and Brady, 2005; Marques et al., 2005), this article examines both trust and faith as related constructs, comparing and contrasting how betrayal applies to both concepts.

We begin this article by defining trust, faith, and betrayal and identify the role of perceived trustworthiness and the mediating lens related to both

trust and faith. We identify seven commonalities that affect both trust and faith. We then offer insights about how secular trust is similar to religious faith – both with regard to how one views perceived betrayal, and in terms of how trust and faith facilitate achieving a fulfilling and productive life.

Definition of trust

The definition of trust has varied widely in the management literature for many years (Hosmer, 1995), and continues to be a source of debate among scholars (Powell and Owen, 2006; Ramo, 2004) and practitioners (Covey and Merrill, 2006; Reina and Reina, 2006) despite the hundreds of articles and books that have been written about trust and related topics. Trust and trustworthiness have frequently been considered synonymous and have been interchanged without distinction in the writings and discussions of many scholars and practitioners – although it is generally and universally agreed that Party A trusts Party B because Party B is perceived as trustworthy (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003).

In their frequently cited paper, Mayer et al. (1995) described trust as a *propensity* or *attitude* reflecting a *willingness* to take a risk and explained that trustworthiness was the antecedent to trust. Others have viewed trust as a *belief*. Kramer (1999, p. 570) described trust as consisting of “several interrelated cognitive processes and orientations” but noted that trust is also affective in nature (cf. McAllister, 1995). Other scholars view trust in terms of a trusting *intention* (McKnight et al., 2004) that reflects the “subjective probability” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 12) that a person will perform a specific behavior. Other scholars describe trust as

a *disposition* to trust (Gill et al., 2005) or a “*psychological state*” that is critical to the process of personal and organizational change (Lines et al., 2005). We argue that trust incorporates each of these characteristics, but ultimately must rise to the level of a *behavior* that demonstrates the degree to which each individual is personally willing to relinquish control to the party being trusted (cf. Caldwell and Clapham, 2003).

Our model of trust which indicates the interrelated ties among beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors is clarified in Figure 1 and incorporates the Theory of Reasoned Action which was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975).

In explaining their Theory of Reasoned Action, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 12) described beliefs as constructs that “represent the information” about an object at the cognitive level. Fishbein and Ajzen explained that attitudes are the emotional responses that interrelate constantly with cognitive beliefs. Intentions reflect the articulated or unarticulated personal likelihood that an individual will carry out behavior consistent with the logical outcomes of their beliefs and attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, pp. 14–17). Scholars have found a significant relationship between trust beliefs and trust intentions within individuals (McKnight et al., 1998). Nonetheless intentions do not equate perfectly with exhibited behaviors, although they are a useful predictor of the likelihood to act (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, pp. 14–17). The diagram of the Theory of Reasoned Action in Figure 1 shows the interrelatedness of beliefs, atti-

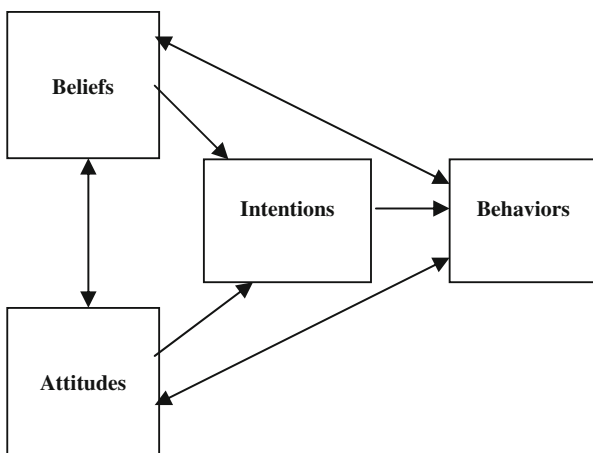


Figure 1. Beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors.

tudes, intentions, and behaviors. This diagram also offers insight into the complexity of the “conceptual calculus” (Creed and Miles, 1996, p. 17) described as the key to sense-making associated with the trust decision.

Consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action, we argue that ultimately trust involves behaviors and actions (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) explain that those behaviors and actions are dependent upon the cognitive, affective, and conative processes that reflect the complexities of each person’s choices. We suggest that the decision to trust ultimately is manifest by one’s actions, and that one’s behaviors reflect the depth of their core beliefs and assumptions (Schein, 2004) and the degree of their personal commitment (Senge, 1990). Thus trust is ultimately the relinquishing of one’s personal choice or power in the expectant hope that another party will honor the elements of the social contract between the parties.

Definition of faith

Similarly, we define faith as the behaviors and actions of an individual to relinquish one’s personal choices and power to God in the expectant hope that those actions will demonstrate that individual’s willingness to comply with God’s will for that individual. This faith is based upon each person’s individualized knowledge and interpretation of God’s laws and teachings which gives that person a vision of life’s meaning and that provides clarity about what one believes that God expects from him or her (Alford and Naughton, 2001, pp. 216–217). Because people of various religions interpret God’s laws and teachings differently (Alford and Naughton, 2001, pp. 26–27), each person’s perceptions about what God expects reflects that individual’s interpretation of divine laws, scriptures, and other sources of personal religious direction.

Smith (1991) has explained that faith has closely related meanings across religions and cultures. The Hindu term for faith, *sraddha*, means to set one’s heart on something – suggesting that one has either seen or sees the point of that to which one has faith (Smith, 1998, p. 61). The Latin term, *credo*, is a compound of *cor* meaning the heart and *do* meaning to put, place, set, or give. The primary meaning has

been interpreted as “to entrust, to rely on,” but the extended meaning suggested literally “I set my heart on” or “I give my heart to” (Smith, 1998, p. 76). The modern German usage of *belieben* means “to cherish” or “to hold dear” (Smith, 1998, pp. 105–106). For the ancient Jew or Christian, the concept of affirming that God existed “was taken for granted and was not an issue” (Fowler, 1995, p. 12). At the same time, the traditional Judeo-Christian perspective about faith has been that faith is a belief based upon information that has not been proven (Fowler, 1995).

Fowler (1995, p. 14) described faith as “a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief.” He suggested that faith involves “an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart” in accordance with how each person interprets reality (Fowler, 1995, p. 14). Within a Buddhist perspective, Salzberg (2002) describes faith as a verb that means envisioning our potential for happiness by opening one’s heart to achieving life’s unknown potential. Religious faith requires an understanding of one’s relationship with God and a sense of what God expects us to do in our lives to honor our divine potential, our relationships with others, and our roles and responsibilities as citizens of a broader society (cf. Manwaring and Ober, 2003).

Honoring the opportunities and responsibilities of our potential becomes the action of our faith. Fowler (1995, p. 16) describes this faith as the integration between truth and our fundamental identity, and declares that “faith is a verb; it is an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life.” We suggest that the Theory of Reasoned Action with its integration of beliefs, actions, intentions, and behaviors, applies to faith as a complex behavior in the same way that this theory applies to trust. Faith is best viewed in behavioral terms and reflects the integration of all that one believes into one’s life (Fowler, 1995).

Trustworthiness and its relationship to trust and faith

Trustworthiness is a subjectively determined value judgment of the behaviors of another party seeking to

be trusted (Bews and Roussouw, 2002; Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Glaeser et al., 2000). The notion of trustworthiness, while having an acknowledged relationship to trust within the management literature (Mayer et al., 1995), also applies to the individually determined perceptions about our relationship with God.

At the interpersonal level, the relationship between leader behavior and the trust decision is fraught with individual perceptual issues as followers interpret the implicit and explicit elements of the social and psychological contract and the underlying values that these contracts incorporate (Masters et al., 2004; Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau and Rivero, 2003). Trustworthiness is frequently described by academic scholars to be an assessment of the *ability*, *benevolence*, and *integrity* of the party to be trusted (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Mayer et al., 1995; Serva et al., 2005).

Ability is a reflection of the competence and managerial skill of an individual or organization and has been defined as “that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain” (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 717). The *benevolence* of trustworthiness has been defined as “the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive” (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 718). Benevolence also reflects the loyalty to the interests and well being of another individual (Butler and Cantrell, 1984). This benevolence of trustworthiness has also been closely linked to “interactional justice,” which demonstrates both a concern for others’ welfare, courtesy, and respect (Caldwell et al., 2003). In trustworthiness *integrity* was explained to be “the trustor’s perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable” (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 719). Other scholars emphasize the importance of integrity in establishing the foundation for trustworthiness. For example, Covey (2004a) suggested that character and trustworthiness were entirely integrated concepts for organizational leaders. University of Michigan ethics scholar, LaRue Hosmer (1995) has emphasized that trustworthiness is inherently ethically based and identified ten separate ethical perspectives for assessing trustworthy behavior and the honoring of duties owed by those who seek to be trusted. Integrity is the underlying foundation of

effective leadership (Kouzes and Posner, 2003), and to building trust in organizations and with individuals (Cloud, 2006).

The trust decision is evaluated based upon one's assessment of the behaviors of another party through what Caldwell and Clapham described as a "mediating lens," or complex filter through which each person views the world. Figure 2 provides a representation of this relationship and offers clarity regarding the process involved in the decision to trust.

As provided in this model, the leadership behaviors of an individual are viewed through one's individual lens and evaluated based upon how each person evaluates factors associated with trustworthiness (Lewicki and Stevenson, 1997). The decision to trust is a complex decision based upon one's cognitive and affective conclusions about the likelihood that the party being trusted will honor the ethical duties inherent in the social contract that exists between the parties (Mayer et al., 1995). This mediating lens consists of seven characteristics:

- 1) *Based upon a Six Beliefs Model* – Six beliefs form the foundation for one's individual value system and interpretation of reality including beliefs about self, others, the nature of the divine, the past, current reality, and the future (cf. Caldwell et al., 2002).
- 2) *Both Cognitive and Affective* – Perceptions include both cognitive and affective elements that are closely related (Mackie and Hamilton, 1993).
- 3) *Contextually Interdependent* – The decision to trust is acknowledged to be contextually based (Mayer et al., 1995) and profoundly complex (Weick, 1979).

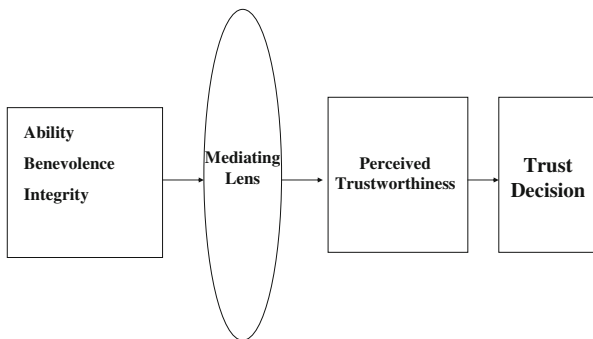


Figure 2. Trust and the mediating lens.

- 4) *Ethically Founded* – Trust within the organizational context involves a continuous set of ethically-based social and psychological contracts. The subtle nature of the assumptions that make up those contracts is often tacit and implicit (Rousseau, 1995).
- 5) *Goal Directed* – The purposes of perception are both instrumental and normative as people seek to achieve goals individually, with others, and in organizations (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1999).
- 6) *Behaviorally Attributive* – The common phenomenon of assigning attributive causation to others' behaviors applies to the lens. When behaviors are observed as negative, a common tendency is to infer malevolent intent to motivations by the observer (Rousseau, 2005).
- 7) *Systemically Dynamic* – The iterative process of information processing is acknowledged to be a complete and dynamic system with outputs, analysis, inputs, assessment, and feedback (Carver and Scheier, 1998). The mediating lens is systemically dynamic and feedback impacts beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and behaviors on a continuous basis.

These seven characteristics of the mediating lens confirm that individual decisions are numbingly complex, and that the calculus of trust involves evaluating a multitude of at the subconscious and unconscious levels in the process of interpreting those who seek to be trusted (Weick, 1993). As the lens is a unique and subjective mechanism, the behavior of an individual may be interpreted individually by each member of a group in making the decision to trust.

In our decision to exercise faith, the same framework suggested in Figure 2 also applies. With faith we project onto God our expectations about how the world ought to be from the perspective of our limited understanding of the world (cf. Cessario, 2002; Kushner, 2001). Imposing upon God these expectations, we frame the argument in our minds and hearts that "if God is trustworthy, He will do that which we perceive is virtuous, good, or needed in our lives." Thus, within a religious framework our faith in God can be somewhat attributional and

conditional, based upon whether our world view of what ought to be ultimately happens (cf. Kushner, 1981).

Understanding betrayal

Betrayal has been defined in terms of a breach in honoring an expected behavior or norm associated with trust (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998, p. 548; Reina and Reina, 2006, p. 108). Hogan and Hogan (1994, p. 94) have suggested betrayal and the pursuit of self-interest are the greatest dangers facing the modern organization. Elangovan and Shapiro (1998, p. 550) suggest that workplace betrayal contains five characteristics:

- 1) It is *voluntary* or volitional and those who are to be trusted either lack the desire to conform to expectations of the trustor or choose to violate those expectations;
- 2) It involves a *violation of pivotal expectations* that are significant to the nature of the relationship between the parties;
- 3) Both parties must be *mutually aware* of but need not accept the expectations of the trustor so that there is no uncertainty about the intent of the person being relied upon;
- 4) Betrayal behavior involves a *violation* of personal expectations; and
- 5) The betrayal has the *potential to harm the well-being* of the trustor.

Based upon these five elements Elangovan and Shapiro (1998, p. 548) defined betrayal as the “voluntary violation of mutual expectations of the trustor by the trusted party (trustee), which has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trustor.”

Reina and Reina (2006, p. 108) described betrayal as “an intentional or unintentional breach of trust or the perception of a breach of trust.” They distinguished intentional betrayal and unintentional betrayal, based upon the degree to which there is conscious intent of an individual to perform “a self-serving action that results in people’s being hurt, damaged, or harmed” and may occur “on a continuum from major intentional betrayal to unintentional minor betrayal” (Reina and Reina, 2006, pp. 108, 110).

Betrayal occurs when people perceive that their expectations are not met, when they feel taken

advantage of, when they feel inappropriately excluded from decisions that significantly affect their lives, or when their creativity is suppressed under circumstances when the right to be creative is due to them (Reina and Reina, 2006). Betrayal assumes that a vital and meaningful social or psychological contract between two parties has been violated (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998). The party feeling betrayed has perceived a special relationship between the parties (Hevda, 2001).

The sorrow, frustration, and pain produced by a perceived betrayal reflect the disappointed party’s subjective perceptions of the relationship between the parties and can be devastating to the party feeling betrayed (Greer, 1997; Hedva, 2001). Those feelings of betrayal apply to both the business context (Reina and Reina, 2006) and to our questioning of God when our perceptions about the world are disappointed (Kushner 1981, 2001).

Commonalities between trust and faith

We offer seven commonalities between secular trust and religious faith that offer insights and instruction for those seeking to understand these concepts more clearly. Understanding the nature of faith may become clearer, and the commitment or willingness to exercise faith by relinquishing personal control may become easier when these seven commonalities between trust and faith are understood.

- 1) *Identifying Expectations and Ground Rules* – Being clear about the nature of the relationship – whether those perceptions be about the nature of the social or psychological contract with man or our understanding of divine rules – is critical to both trust and faith. Rousseau (1995, 2005) and Rousseau and Rivero (2003) have identified the importance of clarifying the nature of the relationship between the parties in a trust relationship, while emphasizing that the mutuality of the understanding between the person trusting and the person being trusted may markedly differ. Attribution error, projection, and a host of other communication problems may distort perception among individuals and may severely impair “mutual knowledge” about perceptions (Cramton, 2001, p. 346).

Similarly, persons professing a faith in God may create within their minds elements of a perceived implied contract that imposes obligations onto God to reward them or to bless their lives or the lives of their loved ones (cf. Kushner, 1981).

- 2) *Recognizing the Time Frame of Relational Outcomes* – Elements of social and psychological contracts may be inferred by the trusting party as involving expected outcomes perceived to occur faster than may actually be possible (Rousseau, 1995). Lawler (2001) has suggested that, consistent with social exchange theory, relational ties and feelings of positive affect are dependent upon the ability of leaders to deliver desirable outcomes known as “exchange tasks” consistent with the expectations of individuals dependent upon them. Morrison and Robinson (1997) explained that betrayal feelings occur when the perceived psychological contract is violated with an accompanying decrease in trust and the undermining of personal commitment. Comparing those same feelings with perceptions about time frames and an individual’s expectations about God’s intervening in one’s life within a desired time table, the tendency to project upon the divine an obligation to produce a sought after outcome is a perception consistent with models of expectancy theory (Barry and Crant, 2000), but may not be aligned with God’s time table for that individual (Kushner, 2001).
- 3) *Accepting Individual Shortcomings* – Although individuals may want leaders to be as close to perfect as possible to inspire their confidence and trust (Bernard, 1988), building trust within an organizational context is difficult and those who work for leaders may often hold unrealistic expectations about the ability of leaders to perform without making mistakes (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). The consequence of unrealistic expectations can be that our hopes for the future, our definition of the psychological contract, and our hopes for our relationship between the parties involved frequently lead to disappointment and distrust (Kushner, 2006; Morrison and Robinson, 1997). At the heart of this disappointment and distrust is often a per-

sonal hubris that what one perceives “should happen,” is correct, even when that perception is based upon limited or incomplete information (Rousseau, 1995). The perceived “shortcomings” that are inferred are imposed upon others despite the fact that these subjective perceptions are simply one’s individual appraisal of what ought to be in life (Kushner, 2006). The complex calculus of perception (Creed and Miles, 1996; Weick, 1979) that affects the decision to trust is often intuitive and emotional (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003), imposing upon others a psychological contract that is an unrealistic and a distorted view of reality (Rousseau, 1995, 2005). In our relationship with God and our decision to act with faith, our frame of reference also can impose upon God what we believe to be His duties to us. If those outcomes may not conform to our time table, we may feel that God has failed us and experience a profound loss of faith (Hedva, 2001, p. 154). This hubris may go so far that we decide in our heart that it is God that is somehow deficient while maintaining that our view of reality is “the correct one” (Kushner, 2001).

- 4) *Defining Reality* – The importance of properly defining reality has been described as a critical role of organizational leaders (DePree, 1989), and is critical for leaders in creating organizational trust (Caldwell et al., 2002; Caldwell and Clapham, 2003). Creed and Miles (1996) acknowledge that the interpretation of trustworthiness behaviors is a complex calculus that is subjectively perceived and those who “define reality” need to be sensitive to the reality of their subjective lens (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003). Worden (2003) has observed that a leader’s integrity is measured by the subjective perceptions of those who perceive to define reality, and emphasizes that integrity is a subjectively perceived trait of leaders. Similarly, our ability to define reality within a faith-based context assumes that our spiritual perceptual skills are honed and refined (Fowler, 1995). In a world where reality is not always black and white and where perceptual skills are also often gray

and uncertain (cf. Caldwell et al., 2002), the assumption that we are exact and precise in our ability to define reality may be a form of personal conceit and self-serving bias (Fox et al., 1994). Whether in a secular context in assessing trust, or in a context involving spiritual or faith-based issues, demonstrating humility regarding our individual ability to assess reality and being willing to acknowledge that we might sometimes be in error are wise problem-framing strategies (cf. Jun, 2005).

- 5) *Assessing External Factors* – Block (1996) has noted that even leaders who govern as highly ethical stewards must acknowledge the impact of external factors on organizational outcomes. To be perceived as honorable and trustworthy, these leaders must also share best available information with employees and other stakeholders about external environmental factors that may impact the achievement of organizational outcomes (Block, 1996). Stead et al. (1990, p. 233) identified the “pervasive and complex” nature of a “myriad of individual and situational factors” that impact individuals who must make ethical decisions and be perceived as trustworthy. Acknowledging the importance of context confirms the subjective nature of the mediating lens but also affirms the significance of relational factors that frame the trust decision (Welch, 2002). Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) have noted that the ability to control external factors was a key factor that made it easier for trust to exist in organizational relationships. Within a framework of faith, the ability to acknowledge that external factor – and particularly the agency of other individuals has an important impact upon desired outcomes (cf. Nash, 1988). To impose upon God responsibility for all outcomes that occur in life is to invert the relationship between man and God and to suggest that because we claim to be believers we somehow have the right to determine how life’s events shall be carried out (cf. Crook, 1943).
- 6) *Examining Lessons Learned* – To trust others is to invest in the fundamental belief that we live in an interdependent world that ulti-

mately is founded on the need to cooperate (Solomon and Flores, 2001). As the foundation of social capital upon which the world bases relationship, demonstrating trust is essential for society to flourish – even when we acknowledge that transaction costs may need to be established under conditions of high risk and uncertainty (Fukuyama, 1996). To trust is to affirmatively invest one’s actions in the belief that another person or party is essentially good, and assumes a world view that votes for optimism and hope within a world that has not always merited that confidence (cf. Hedva, 2001). Like trust, faith relies upon unconfirmed or incomplete knowledge, requiring the person who acts to make a commitment and take a risk based upon a subjective feeling about a desired outcome (Fowler, 1995). Believing that God’s ultimate purpose is to do good provides profound context to the disappointments and sorrows of life, and is fundamental to maintaining faith at times when events do not go as we might hope (Tabb, 2003). Cameron and colleagues (2004) have noted that people who are optimistic and positive are healthier, heal faster and more completely, learn faster, and remember longer than people who are negative and pessimistic. A virtue-based and hopeful perspective on life helps to “buffer us from the verities of a world in which harm, damage, violations of principles, selfishness, and greed are ubiquitous” despite the presence of negative factors in the world (Cameron, 2006). Learning from the lessons of life reinforces the fact that, while there may be problems and challenges that face us all, our lives are enhanced when we build upon what is right rather than on the negative side of life (Seligman, 2000).

- 7) *Realizing that Value Comes After the Investment* – The hoped for benefits sought after in the creation of trust-based social contracts require a commitment and investment on the part of the persons being asked to trust (Mayer et al., 1995). The decision to trust requires a willingness to take a risk in the relinquishing of one’s personal control, and this investment

in the perceived social contract is a condition precedent to obtaining the hoped for outcome (Nugent and Abolafia, 2006). From a religious perspective, faith also requires that we obey with an expectant hope that God will bless our lives even if we feel exhausted by our efforts and uncertain about our ability to maintain our faith (Kostyu, 1960). Similarly, Lewis (1962, p. 37) reminds us that faith is driven by more than fear, but by a hopeful assurance that “God is good” and will ultimately bless our efforts. The prospect that God would betray man, Lewis (1962) reminds us, is inconsistent with God’s very nature.

These seven insights about trust provide clarity and wisdom for those who seek to more fully understand the construct of faith. In a world filled with complexity and uncertainty, our ability to persist consistently and optimistically impacts the likelihood of a favorable outcome (Cameron, 2006).

Why trust and faith matter

Ultimately, trust and faith are vital in our lives because our very natures seek for congruence, alignment, and clarity in our lives – whether within a work context or regarding the vital priorities that include our relationship with God (Briskin, 1998). Unfortunately, our tendency is to project upon the world – those with whom we work and the God we create in our minds – a set of duties, roles, and ground rules (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). The “violation” of those conditions of the relationships we establish are rarely fully communicated to the other party and often inconsistent with external realities, but their violation nonetheless makes us feel betrayed (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998).

As Harold Kushner has observed about the distorted perspective of faith evidenced by many, “We claimed to believe in God, but too often we tended to use God rather than to serve God (by that faith). We assumed that, if we knew the right words and performed the right deeds, we could control God for our purposes much as we had learned to control fire, electricity, nuclear energy and other awesomely powerful forces” (Kushner, 2001, p. 162). Like

Briskin, Kushner (2001, p. 162) concludes that our hopes and dreams for the world are, unfortunately, “beyond our power to guarantee.” Such is the nature of many of the uncertainties of life – whether within a work context or in matters that are more personal and intimate.

Although perceived betrayals may occur in organizations, both the individual who feels betrayed and the organization itself are transformed when that individual makes the personal commitment to let go of justified anger or hurt (Pargament and Rye, 1998; Cameron and Caza, 2002). This healing process of letting go provides a vehicle to refocus one’s identity, restore a sense of personal order and congruence, and redefine reality in a complex world (Kushner, 2001; Fowler, 1995). Although feelings of betrayal and abandonment may be poignant and powerful, they need not dominate one’s life. However, the key to overcoming the lasting feelings of disappointment that come with betrayal is a personal willingness to let go of the cause of the perceived wrong and to recommit oneself to a life of renewal (Greer and Rosen, 1997; Hedva, 2001).

Fowler (1995) suggests that this willingness to redefine one’s view of the world in the journey of faith is the key to both a healthy personal identity and a clear view of reality. Relating the ability to forgive and to restore trust to the organizational context, Cameron and Caza (2002) have suggested that the commitment to take the high ground of virtuous behavior and to forgiveness enhances and enriches the individual and the entire organization. Rose (2003) cautions that to give away one’s power is among the most self-destructive of human behaviors, and those who fester in the resentment and hurt of perceived betrayal do damage to themselves and to those around them (Greer and Rosen, 1997).

Taking the high ground organizationally avoids the toxic and destructive behaviors that are generated from resentment, criticism, and hostility (Cameron and Caza, 2002), and contributes to restoring cooperative and collaborative attitudes. Quinn (2002) affirmed that organizations are enhanced when organization members respond virtuously rather than negatively to organizational outcomes. Pava (2003) similarly noted that those who seek the high ground despite the vicissitudes of life’s fortunes strengthen themselves and create clearer meaning for their organizations.

From the perspective of faith, being able to let go and accept the trials and hardships of life is an act of profound character (Fowler, 1995) that demonstrates an acknowledgement that God has more to teach us in the process of self-renewal and growth (Kushner, 2006). Speaking to managers as well as in providing spiritual counsel, Stephen R. Covey has counseled, “Don’t let the labor pains of personal growth cause you to abort the rebirth process.” Covey (2004b) suggests that this wise advice applies to those seeking to enhance their personal character and faith, as much as it applies to leading others in organizations. Quoting French scholar and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Covey (2004a, p. 319) has reminded us that as we see the world through our individual lenses we must remember “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.” Despite the complexities of life and the clouded nature of the lens through which we see the world, Covey (2004b) has encouraged us to maintain a sense of context, clarity, commitment, and character as we deal with all aspects of life.

Harvard scholar and ethicist, Lynn Sharp Paine (2003) has observed that both individual and organizational greatness demands that we follow a compass for decision-making that integrates ideals that are both instrumentally effective and normatively sound. The insights that secular trust offers in understanding the nature of spiritual faith provides this same integration of outcome-based priorities with values-based needs. Despite the fact that we might initially perceive others as untrustworthy, we profit by realizing that it is in our interest to look past betrayals and renew our commitments to people and to organizations (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). In this same way, our willingness and ability to reframe our views about the trials of life enables us to recognize that the experiences we have can ultimately teach us great lessons, enrich us, and build our characters (Fowler, 1995). Faith, like trust, requires a letting go and a relinquishing of control. Perceived betrayals, when viewed through a clearer lens than that available in the short term, may strengthen our ability to understand our true identities and prepare us to bless the lives of others for good along our journey in life (Kushner, 1981, 2001, 2006).

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