

Paper Folding About Trust

From, *A Foundation of Trust: Effective Models and Activities for Leaders, Trainers and Facilitators Engaging in the Issues of Trust and Trustworthiness*, by Sam Sikes.

Objective:

Demonstrate (using 'object lesson' methodology) what happens to someone who loses trust and whose trust is restored.

Face-to-Face and Virtual Applications:

The process described can be done face-to-face and virtually as long as everyone can see the presenter and the presenter has access to chat or voice responses.

Props:

1 sheet of 8.5 x 11 copy paper (or any thin paper about the same size). You, as the presenter, can have the only sheet of paper or you could distribute a sheet to small groups of 2 to 4 people (they can pass off the paper after each fold to get people more engaged). In a virtual setting, you can encourage participants to get their own piece of paper and fold (and unfold) along with you during the experience.

History:

Sam was listening to a radio program on his way to facilitate a team building session and the host was saying that a sheet of paper could not be folded in half more than seven times. Thinking this through in his head, the visual struck Sam as a great way to explain the consequences of losing trust.

Instructions:

Take some time to discuss what trust is and what it means to the participants (some discussion information can be found in the book) - get a general understanding of trust among the group. Then, hold up a sheet of plain paper and ask the group to imagine the paper represents a person.

Ask the people in the group to describe this person/piece of paper (e.g., flat, no marks, smooth, perfect, regular, etc.)

Then, ask group members to give examples of things that break or decrease trust (e.g., saying harsh words, being mean, pushing, lying, sharing secrets, etc.) After each example shared, fold the paper in half. You will likely have to stop folding after the sixth example because the paper will be too small and difficult to fold.

Ask the people in the group to describe this 'person' now that all these trust breakers have happened (e.g., they are closed, damaged, rigid, not the same as they were, small).

Then, challenge the group to describe what they would need to do to develop or regain trust with this person (e.g., apologize, ask what they can do to help mend the situation, spend time together, listen to the person). After each example of a trust builder, unfold the paper once. Continue asking for examples until the paper is completely unfolded. Congratulate the group for restoring the 'person's' trust (once the paper is completely unfolded), and then ask them to describe this person now (e.g., open but wrinkled, damaged, not quite the same, softer).

How is this paper's experience like a real person's relationship with others?

At this point, you can emphasize another truth about people and trust relationships by asking what would happen if this 'person's' trust was broken again. At this point you can fold the paper back to its smallest size (even with one hand) to make the point that it is much easier now for this 'person' to return to a closed position, much the same way that some people have a predisposition not to trust certain types of people or situations. They have already been 'bent' that way.

Facilitators Notes:

This is a quick and easy demonstration activity (object lesson). Some groups seem to have an easier time thinking of various ways to destroy trust than to increase or restore trust. Sam usually points out that there is a lesson in there to consider. (And, maybe even an opportunity to discuss more ways to increase trust within the group.)

If you plan to refold the paper during the demonstration, practice a few times before you present it in a group setting. By the looks on some people's faces (in Sam's experiences), it makes a strong point if you can quickly fold it back to its smallest size with one hand.

Variations:

- Ask small groups to write their negative 'lost trust' examples on their paper as they fold it (write, then fold). Then, write positive 'trust enhancing' examples as they unfold it (write on the blank sides that become available as you unfold).
- Using a flip chart size sheet of paper can get you one or two more folds. Use this large 'document' throughout the day to remind the group about trust related behaviors and add to it when appropriate - the positive and the negative.

Potential Discussion Questions:

- What are ways you can create and keep open and honest relationships?
- What are some examples of the ways people can 'fold' you? 'Unfold' you?
- If you were a piece of paper, how would you look today?
- Share a story in your life that contributed to your folding or unfolding.

[Documented with slight edits by Chris Cavert - with permission, April 2020.]