MOVE WITH THE *SPEED OF TRUST*® BY STEPHEN M. R. COVEY

In the following series of white papers, our expert thought leaders will share four critical imperatives to achieving results during unpredictable times.

The day after the stock market's worst day in over three decades, I met with a client who runs a technology consulting company in New York City. This CEO told me, "It's interesting to me, when something like this happens you see people invest in all sorts of different competencies they think are vital to solving the problem at hand, but you know what? If I'm going to invest in anything, it's going to be in trust. Trust is the baseline of humanity, and we need humanity to solve the problem. If we get better at trust, that will help us get better at everything else."

In this time of change, crisis, and all-around uncertainty, the greatest asset and security any leader has is their credibility. The greatest currency they have is the trust people have in them. The greatest power they have lies in how they choose to extend their trust to others.

While that's always true, during enormous disruption, the critical currency of trust carries an even greater premium. Trust is the one thing that changes everything. We still have to do other things—collaborate, be adaptive, and stay responsive to changing conditions—but what this CEO was affirming as he navigated this crisis for his business is that we can do all those things better if we start with trust. He's right. And if we lose it, our ability to do any of those other things is crippled.
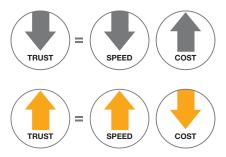
If we do what it takes to build a high-trust culture, even in the midst of a crisis—and I would emphasize especially in the midst of a crisis—we'll be far more agile, creative, innovative, and collaborative.

TRUST IS AN ACCELERATOR, ESPECIALLY DURING CRISES

When we say "trust," many people think of a soft, nice-to-have social virtue, and it is that—but it's so much more. Trust is a pragmatic, hard-edged, economic, and actionable asset we can create through specific behaviors. It affects the speed at

FranklinCovey®
THE ULTIMATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

which we can move and the cost of everything.

When there's low trust in any team, culture, organization, society, or relationship, speed goes down and cost goes up. It's a tax. Think about a leader you don't trust: They can communicate all they want, but you'll discount what they say, or you simply won't believe it, much less act on it. You'll have to verify and draw your own conclusions. Low-trust organizations are ensnared in bureaucracy and over-aggressive controls. Low-trust team members miscommunicate, have meetings after the meetings, and play politics. Everything takes longer.

Thankfully, the converse is also true: When trust is high, speed goes up and cost comes down. When credible leaders share information or announce a plan, their teams get to work. Communication and collaboration are seamless. Teams feel safe to innovate and take smart risks. High trust earns a dividend, it's a performance multiplier. Teams and organizations that operate with high trust significantly outperform teams and organizations with low trust — this has been proven in dozens of studies, across a multitude of industries and sectors. The How Report study conducted by consulting firm LRN, for example, found that people who work in high-trust cultures are "six times more likely to achieve higher levels of performance compared with others in their industry." Tapping into this level of performance during a crisis is vital.

FOUR KEY BEHAVIORS THAT BUILD HIGH-TRUST IMMEDIATELY

The advice for most crises is to communicate, communicate, communicate. I agree. But how you do what you do makes all the difference. If you stand up and communicate without being credible or having trust, you're going to dig a deeper hole.

Think about it: If we're not credible when we communicate, people won't believe what we're saying. They may not care or take stock in our advice. They doubt our motives. We must focus first on building credibility through both our character and competence, and then earning trust through a few key behaviors.

The behaviors we need to emphasize during the times of crisis are the same behaviors we need during times of non-crisis. They just become even more important, and the degree of difficulty goes up. We need to be intentional and deliberate about those behaviors.

There are 13 behaviors common to every high-trust, highly engaged culture, and 13 opposite and counterfeit behaviors are found in every low-trust, toxic, dysfunctional culture. Unfortunately, we don't have time to build trust over months and years; we've been thrown into a new environment. There are four of the 13 behaviors that are disproportionately leveraged during a crisis, and I'll cover them in the following sections:

- Confront Reality
- Create Transparency
- Talk Straight
- Extend Trust

We'll spend extra time in "Extend Trust" covering its specific application to remote work.

Interestingly, during major disruptions, leaders tend to drift not to the opposite of a high-trust behavior—but to the counterfeit. I'll cover those in detail below.

CONFRONT REALITY

High-trust leaders take things head-on, even the tough things. Confronting reality means discussing the undiscussable and calling out the elephant in the room.

The opposite of confronting reality is to ignore it, act as though it doesn't exist, and hope it will go away in time. The counterfeit is to act like we're confronting reality when we're actually evading it. We might focus on busywork or ancillary issues, instead of tackling the tough, root causes of the challenges at hand. We kick the can down the road. We skirt the reality or give lip service to it, versus facing the hard news that it's bad now and it may get worse. Talking about or acknowledging the elephant in the room is very different from taking it on.

We can't solve a problem we don't understand. We need the bad news. We have to confront and work through it, not around it. If team members, peers, or experts share difficult information, we don't hide from it. We take it on.

CREATE TRANSPARENCY

Harvard Business School professor Amy C. Edmondson said, "Transparency is job one during a crisis." We must be open and authentic and real. Transparency is drawn from the principle of light: It cleanses, dissipates the shadows, and enables people to see. It gives them a sense of comfort and confidence. They know nothing is hidden.

The opposite of creating transparency is to hide or cover up. It includes hoarding, withholding information, keeping secrets, or having hidden agendas. It's darkness. The counterfeit of creating transparency is being

open…to a point. It's illusion, revealing some things and covering up others, worrying that too much information might make people fearful. It's when we share information in a way, or to a degree, while still trying to control people's response to it. But that causes more destruction and harm.

If we try to hide the bad news, we will lose credibility and trust with our audiences, our constituents, and our people—they'll likely find out at some point anyway. The best way to handle this is to be upfront about the information we have. When we know things, we share what we know. When we don't know things, we say what we don't know and what we're doing to learn those things and how we're trying to respond. If we know things we can't share, or it wouldn't be appropriate or responsible to share, we tell people we can't share, and why. We should be transparent about why we might not be able to be transparent. We model the transparency. We tell the truth in a way people can verify.

TALK STRAIGHT

Now more than ever, we have to tell the truth, even difficult truths. We have to call things what they are.

The opposite of talking straight is lying or deceiving, but I especially want to contrast talking straight to the counterfeit, which is when we spin, position, posture, and manipulate. During a time like today, it's very understandable to think, "I don't want to panic people." So the temptation is to soft-pedal the news. We might feel like we're going to be less alarming and frightening if we downplay things, but if we do that, then every time we speak, people will wonder, Are they sugarcoating again? Is this real? Can I trust this? At the same time, some will swing the pendulum all the way to the other side. We're not trying to become alarmist and paint the absolute worst-case scenario, which can cause an emotional contagion that's extraordinarily distressing. But we also

don't want to go to the extreme of saying everything is fine, there are no problems, and nothing is going to change — when everyone can look around and see everything is changing in front of their eyes. We have to find the sweet spot.

Get a reputation for being clear and upfront about bad news. People might not always like what they hear, but they'll learn they can trust it. With that, our ability to communicate will go up. Our ability to connect with our people and instill confidence in them will go up. One of the most potent ways to talk straight is to start our meetings, discussions, and communications by declaring our intent. We should give not only the "what," but the "why" behind the information we're sharing or the direction we're asking teams to take.

EXTEND TRUST

During crisis and disruption, the tendency for even high-trust leaders is to backtrack and revert to more of a "command and control" style of leadership.

Think of a person who's moved to another country and spoken the language fluently for years. When they stub their toe, they aren't going to swear in the foreign language — they'll go back to their native tongue. Extending trust is like an acquired language; it's not necessarily instinctive and natural for people, especially under stress. And during crisis, or disruption, our tendency is to go back to what we know, what we were trained in, scripted in, maybe we're good at. For many, that means going back to "command and control" versus what I refer to as "trust and inspire."

So often the reason is fear: fear of the unknown, of the risk of it going wrong, that people aren't ready, that they'll take advantage of it, that they aren't capable, that they aren't motivated, that they won't deliver.

When we lead in a way that shows distrust to our people it doesn't inspire any of the kind of performance we need from them, in fact, just the opposite. Not only do we show them we don't believe they can "rise to the occasion," but we deny them the opportunity to even try. Distrust is reciprocal, and the main reason employees in most organizations don't trust managers is simply because managers don't trust their employees. Thankfully, the reciprocity of trust goes both ways. Trust creates more trust. It brings out the best in people. In fact, I would say that being trusted is the most inspiring form of human motivation.

The neuroscience is strong on this: High-trust cultures are more energized, more engaged, less stressed out, less burnt out. In the *Harvard Business Review*, researcher Paul J. Zak reported on more than a decade of research, and his data showed that: "Compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report:

- 74% less stress
- 106% more energy at work
- 50% higher productivity
- 13% fewer sick days
- 76% more engagement
- 40% less burnout
- 41% greater sense of accomplishment

The more trust someone has in their leader and their company, the less fear they're going to have. Our definition for trust is confidence. And in many ways, confidence is the opposite of fear.

We must both say and demonstrate that we trust our people. The strength of this behavior is that when we extend trust to them, they tend to extend trust back to us. If we don't trust them, they tend to not trust us. Distrust is contagious, but so is trust. It is a virtuous upward spiral where trust and confidence create more trust and confidence, and everyone feels inspired by it.

So trust your people. If someone says they're sick, believe them. (I've read of organizations requiring a doctor's note if employees call out sick — during a pandemic. Talk about a lack of trust!) Trust your teams, and it will come back to you.

Nearly all organizations are currently facing this in the context of telecommuting. Many organizations haven't allowed remote work for some or all of their employees. And to be fair, in some cases that doesn't work — it would be hard to frame a building from your home — but in many cases it does. So often, leaders have justified this by saying, "We have to be together to collaborate." That might be true, but in many situations, the dominant mindset of leaders is really, "We have to be together because I have to keep my eye on everyone. If they were on their own, in their homes, they'd be goofing off." Remote work is a trust issue in many respects, even though some leaders would never acknowledge it.

If we implement remote work with a surfeit of rules, we're allowing fear to overcome trust — and people can sense it. As a result we'll sub-optimize performance dramatically, send the wrong message, and lose a huge opportunity to extend (and receive) trust.

The opposite of extending trust in this context would be saying, "I flat-out don't trust you, and I'm telling you I don't trust you." The counterfeit of extending trust in this case is saying we're going to trust people to telecommute from home, then loading them up with rules, regulations, policies, and procedures. Our words might say we trust them, but as we then micromanage them through systems, our actions say very clearly that we don't. We dictate methods and procedures and processes. We're basically communicating, "I don't really trust you; I just have no choice now."

Leaders are used to being in control. They're fearful that people could take advantage of remote work. The fact is that some will, but

we can't let the 5% of people we can't trust dictate our behavior with the 95% of people we can and should trust. Both leaders and team members want to make sure the job gets done and want to succeed. If we set clear expectations, agree upon a process for accountability, and build it upfront into an agreement, we can extend smart trust.

Make sure everyone is clear on the expectations of what we're trying to accomplish:

- What results are we after?
- Are there any guidelines we need to be aware of? (Guidelines might be the closest thing to rules, but guidelines should be broader. The moment leaders start to prescribe methods, they're responsible. We want to give the team member responsibility.)
- What resources do we have to work with?

Then shift accountability to the team member — they will report back on how they're doing against the agreement. Leaders still build in control, but it's a self-control. It's coming from the team member. It's not a micromanagement control coming from a hovering supervisor. It feels and looks different. In fact, there's actually more control in a high-trust culture than a rules-based culture. The reality is that you can't come up with enough rules to work effectively with people you don't trust. So learn to trust them.

A LEADER'S FIRST PRIORITY SHOULD BE THEIR OWN CREDIBILITY

An important note: These four behaviors will give you a clear path in the coming months. But if we do the behaviors without the foundation of our own personal credibility, the behaviors could become manipulative or a "technique," and they will backfire.

Think about the term "con man": it's short for "confidence man." Confidence is trust; so a con man is someone who earns your trust

now, with the intention of hurting or deceiving you later. They perform the behaviors to earn trust, but their credibility is lacking. They don't have integrity; their intent is self-serving. The behaviors absent the foundation of credibility ultimately don't work. They're counterproductive and could even exacerbate problems.

The behaviors do accelerate trust when they're based on the foundation of credibility. I define credibility as competence and character:

- **Character** is our integrity and intent. Integrity is more than honesty; it's being congruent, inside and out. It's aligning our actions with our values. Intent is our motives and agenda. Trust grows when our intentions are straightforward and based on mutual benefit. Essentially it's, "Yes I care about my win, but I care about yours as much as I do my own."

- **Competence** derives from our capabilities and our results. Are our capabilities current? Are they relevant? In the pandemic situation we're facing, we need to borrow strength from experts in public health, because most leaders don't have capability in this area. We can't act like we know something we don't know. We can't be an expert in an area we're not an expert in. We need to bring in their strength so we stay capable and relevant.

    Our competence secondly derives from results, our performance. Does our track record give people confidence that we deliver, that we do what we say we're going to do? Are we modeling what we want to see in others?

Before we implement any high-trust behavior, the onus is on each leader to first look in the mirror and assess their credibility. Then with that in place, these behaviors are great accelerators and vital dimensions to building trust during disruption.

THE ONE THING THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Almost without exception, trust overall will go down during change, transition, or crisis—if we're not intentional about cultivating it. And most leaders are not deliberate because they're caught up in reacting and responding to the emergencies that are arising.

But if we're intentional about building trust through our behaviors, we can actually increase trust in a time of trauma. It's not easy, but it is possible—by confronting reality, creating transparency, talking straight, and proactively extending smart trust, all from a foundation of personal credibility.

We can communicate and innovate and collaborate and solve the challenges we're facing. We can be agile, adaptive, responsive, and creative. We can survive these challenges and come out even stronger—but only if we trust each other first.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen M. R. Covey
Global Leader, *Speed of Trust* Practice

Stephen M. R. Covey is a *New York Times* and #1 *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*. He is the former CEO of Covey Leadership Center, which, under his stewardship, became the largest leadership development company in the world. Stephen personally led the strategy that propelled his father's book, Dr. Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, to become one of the two most influential business books of the 20th Century, according to *CEO Magazine*.

We're here to help.
If you find that you or your organization could use assistance in these uncertain times, please reach out. Contact us at 1-888-868-1776 or email us at info@franklincovey.com.

FranklinCovey®
THE ULTIMATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE