

The Surprising Character Trait that Destroys Trust

August 4, 2020

by Dan Solin



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No one quarrels with the importance of establishing trust. The issue is not whether it's critical, but how best to do it.

There's a fundamental misunderstanding about creating trust. Too often, we conflate an air of confidence with building trust with a prospect.

An alluring power

Some advisors confuse demonstrating their expertise with creating trust. Their websites are filled with articles about investing and related subjects, often supplemented with an extensive "resources" section.

Their videos reflect supreme confidence as they effortlessly expound on technical subjects.

In person, they project a similar air of the all-knowing guru, ready to dispense wisdom fluently.

There's some justification for the belief that exuding confidence has a positive impact on others.

One study found those who are overconfident tend to be overrated by others, while those who lack



confidence are judged to be “worse than they are.”

Other studies validate the view that “self-confidence is a beneficial trait for leaders.”

Is there a downside to high self-confidence?

Yes, and it’s a critical one.

The same study found, “*Overconfidence* can diminish trust from others,” in addition to having other negative ramifications (like being perceived as arrogant and taking unreasonable risks).

The missing trait

I have viewed hundreds of advisor videos posted on social media and YouTube. Almost universally, there’s one trait missing from these super confident presenters: vulnerability.

They seem so sure of their material. They have all the answers. There’s no hesitancy in their voice. They express no doubt about the merit of what they are saying.

A study done by authors affiliated with Yale and Cornell Universities should cause you to consider showing some vulnerability. The study compared the behavior of three human teammates collaborating with a robot programmed to make either neutral or vulnerable statements (like, “Sorry guys, I made a mistake this round. I know it may be hard to believe, but robots make mistakes too”), while playing a collaborative game.

Each participant (including the robot) made mistakes during the game that negatively impacted their team.

The finding was quite stunning: The teams with the robot that made vulnerable statements had a higher level of engagement with the robot. Those teams also demonstrated more “trust-related” behavior with their human teammates (like explaining a mistake, consoling other members and laughing together).

There are good reasons why showing vulnerability builds trust. We’re all fallible. We make mistakes. It’s difficult for us to relate to those who seem perfect.

The benefit of showing vulnerability transcends establishing trust in business relationships. According to Jane Collingwood, *a willingness to be vulnerable is a significant feature of lasting relationships – ones in which partners are allies and not foes.*

Leadership coach, Jean Hsu, believes showing vulnerability is *one of the most effective ways to start to build trust.*

Of course, you must have the necessary expertise to excel at your job. But in the advisory business, there are a lot of unknowns. Acknowledging you don’t have all the answers is the first step towards deepening your relationship with your clients.

For more information about marketing and branding opportunities with Dan’s upcoming book, Ask: How to Relate to Anyone, [click here.](#)