

SUSPICION, TRUST¹, AND NAÏVETÉ STORIES²

How to Use These Stories

Leadership begins when people exhibit virtues with excellence. Virtues are standards of moral behavior, such as courage, integrity, kindness, and humility. This document focuses on the virtue of trust. When we lead with exceptional trust, we feel deeper satisfaction over what we accomplish, we help and benefit others, and we improve the world around us.

Like all virtues, too much or too little of a virtue is a vice. Thus, when leaders are not trustful enough, people may become resentful of their leaders and become lose focus of their goals. When leaders are too trustful, people may take advantage of their leaders and become lazy.

Leading with exceptional trust is often difficult. It is difficult to find the optimal expression of trust between suspicion and naïveté. It is difficult because a trustful action in one situation is not a trustful action in another situation. It is difficult because the people who care about a situation often disagree about the best way to exhibit trust, and in many of these cases each person—including you—will be partially right and partially wrong, and we need to learn from each other and work through conflict to sort this out. Even when you figure out how to exhibit exceptional trust, it is also important to communicate what you are doing to others so that they will understand what you are doing.

This document contains stories of people being trustful and of failing to be trustful. (The titles next to people's names are their titles at the time the story occurred and may not be their title currently.) Discussing diverse situations in which people failed or succeeded to live up to their values often helps people to recognize and act on other opportunities when they arise. By discussing these stories in meetings, on teams, over internet or intranet forums, or in classrooms, groups can come up with ideas for leading with exceptional trust, learn each other's perspectives, work through disagreements, and generate ideas. For example, you might read and discuss one story at the beginning of a weekly meeting, post a story on a team forum and ask people to share their thoughts, begin a work shift by discussing a story, use a story in a town hall meeting, or use the stories as fodder for discussion in classroom settings. The following questions may be helpful in discussing the stories. Choose whichever questions are most helpful for your group.

¹ In addition to being used to foster discussions about the virtue of trust, these stories may also be used for discussions about faith and reliance.

² The stories in this document were written or told by the protagonists. Ryan Quinn edited them and added the reflection questions. The stories are to be used as the basis for class discussion, and not to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of a particular situation. Some protagonists agreed to use their real name, others asked for us to use a pseudonym. The goals of this document include becoming aware of issues, identifying the benefits and drawbacks of taking different approaches, assessing their impact on outcome(s), and learning ways of addressing situations you may encounter in the future.

1. What, if anything, did people do in this story that was trustful?
2. How could the people in this story have been more trustful? How could they have been exceptionally trustful?
3. How might some experiences from your own life be similar to this story?
4. What inspires or elevates you about this story?
5. What disappoints or angers you about this story?
6. What might you have done in this story to overcome your disappointment or anger and help the person who disappointed or angered you to do better?
7. What caused the people in this story to behave the way they did?
8. Who in this discussion disagrees with you? What could you do to understand this person's point of view?
9. How might your perspective on this story be wrong?
10. What ideas can you take from this story and discussion to apply in your own life?

Story #1: Troy Kenning, ROTC Cadre Instructor

Working in the military is all about trust. When your life is on the line, and your only chance of survival requires you to trust the person who is covering your back, you want to know that this person is trustworthy. Alternatively, you may be asked to transport millions of dollars in cash, and no one will ever know if you pocketed \$25,000 for yourself. On any given day at work, an officer could bring home thousands of dollars of equipment without anyone knowing. Because of situations such as these, integrity is critical. The United States government and their taxpayers need to know that a soldier can be trusted. When the military identifies integrity as a core value, it is not supposed to be words on a page. It is supposed to be real. This is why, when we train officers, we hold cadets to stringent standards. A cadet should not become an officer if he or she cannot be trusted. I take this value very seriously.

When I was serving in the academy, I was charged with interviewing a cadet who had been caught stealing a mattress from Walmart. I did not have the authority to expel the cadet from the academy. It was my responsibility to collect the facts and write the report. It was my boss' responsibility to decide whether to expel the cadet or give him another chance.

Prior to meeting with the cadet, I made sure that I had all the regulations up on my computer so that we could look at them together and I could let him know what the potential results for his action were. I let him know that this was not my personal decision, and also that I was being completely open and honest with him. I wanted him to fully understand the consequences, and I also wanted to give him the best advice possible about what he should include in his own written submission to the decision authority. I told him that he needed to admit that he made a mistake, explain why we should believe that he would not do this again, and write a detailed plan for how he would share his experience with others and prevent them from taking similar actions.

I attempted to make the cadet as comfortable as possible, given the circumstances. I played some background music so that no one outside of my office would be able to hear our conversation. I listened to his story. His family was poor. He was the first member of his family to ever go to college. He had worked hard in the academy and was in his final year. He was less than eight months away from graduating and, upon graduating, would have a guaranteed job with excellent benefits and above average pay. Becoming an officer was his way out of poverty and a way to help his family. He was completely exhausted, working extensive hours while going to school. Also, for some reason, he was apparently sleeping on the floor in a friend's room. Given his exhaustion and his sleeping on the floor, he succumbed to the temptation of going into Walmart and switching the price tag on the mattress so that he could pay a fraction of its real cost and have something to sleep on. His tag-switching was caught on the store cameras, he was identified by the police, and the police informed the academy. He was deeply sorry, explained the circumstances, and said he would never do something like that again. I let him know that whatever decision was made, he needed to make sure nothing like this ever happened again.

I felt bad for the cadet. However, in an organization in which we are responsible for professing arms, integrity is the only thing that matters. Therefore, in my report I recommended that we expel the cadet. I submitted the report to my boss, but my boss overruled my recommendation. I believe that he did it because of political reasons with which I did not agree. For example, we had a shortage of officers, and I think that my boss believed that his boss wanted him to get more officers into our ranks. My boss has always held technical positions, and has never had to be in the field, in battle, and I think this is why his priorities are different from mine.

My boss came into my office and told me his decision. He was upset. I just listened to him and let him know that I supported his decision (even though it is not the decision that I would have made). He said that he thought the cadet made a one-time mistake. He submitted the waiver request for retention. Although I disagreed, he was my superior officer, and I understood his position, so I completed the necessary steps to submit the waiver request before I left work. The cadet became an officer. The last time I heard about that cadet he was still employed in our branch of the military. I have had no further associations with him, and after my former boss and I took different positions, I have had no further interactions with him either.

Story #2: Paul Jones, Intern, then Clinician, then Manager

During graduate school, I was doing an internship in a community mental health center in their acute child psychiatric position. The children involved were actively suicidal or were about to be at risk of hospitalization. Each of them had social issues in the family with which to deal. In my job, we assisted the clinical workers; we did the dirty work.

In one particular case, there was a boy who was about 10 years old who was regularly truant from school. He refused to go, and his mother facing jail, or removal from the home, because of it. The boy had been suicidal at times, there had been a lot of domestic violence, and

the boy had become his mother's protector, but he could not articulate any of this. He was afraid that if he left during the day something might happen to his mother, and compared to that, school did not matter.

After a lot of work had been done with the family to uncover these things, helping the child to articulate some of what was going on, we picked a date on the calendar to be the day he would go to school. It was my job to get him there.

On the appointed day, I showed up to the home, and the boy said he would not go. I told him he had to go, but he refused. I used all my clinical skills, but he still refused. He got more and more agitated, so I called my supervisor. She told me to physically remove him from the house and take him to school.

At that time, I was about 350 pounds—very imposing. I was trained in physical management of people who had become a danger to themselves, but we were not supposed to use those techniques to get them to comply, only to protect them from themselves. This is what made my supervisor's direction unusual. In an attempt to follow her direction, I tried to take his hand to lead him. However, as I extended my hand, he lost control. Because of that, I had to contain him, therapeutically. His mother started screaming at me. I told her that she had to call the office because if I did, he would hurt himself.

The mother got my boss on the phone and told her what was going on. My boss said to calm the boy down and then call back. After several minutes, the boy calmed down and I relaxed, but when I relaxed the boy ran to the bathroom, where two family dogs had been locked in. When the boy opened the bathroom door, the dogs came charging at me. While I fight off two dogs, the boy makes a beeline towards the attic to hide. I fight the dogs off, go to the attic, and when I do, we both fall through the ceiling drywall into the laundry room. Neither one of us were hurt, just stunned. He looks at me. I look at him and tell him to go lay on the couch. He says, "Yes, sir." He did not go to school that day.

When I got back to the office, the whole ordeal was blamed on me. When we were questioned, my supervisor denied that I had called her the first time, when she told me to make the boy go. I was already mortified because of how the situation had turned out, now I was told it was my fault, and my boss was lying about it. I was shocked, I did not know how to respond, and so I did not say anything. I was so new to the field at the time that if you told me the sky was green, I would have said, "Okay, it does not look that way to me, but if you say so, I'll believe it." I did not know any better, so I was compliant. When I got blamed for my compliance and my boss lied about what had happened, I did not know how to react.

The lesson I took away from that experience is that people in power cannot be trusted, so do the best you can, but if you end up in a high-risk situation, cover your ass and do not take any chances. That was the wrong lesson, because a person who thinks that is true becomes a cynic, becomes less effective, and reduces his or her ability to make change. You just make worse decisions when you believe that. During the time I believed that my world became very small. I

would not take risks. If there was ever a chance something might go poorly, I would disengage. I refused to take on tough cases. People stopped thinking of me as a team player. I worried all the time about what people thought of me. I wanted to perform well, but I was not able to do so.

It took me years of processing, learning, and hearing stories of similar situations where people took risks and it went well before I was able to get over that. With more experience, I began to realize that there is a better way, and that just because other people cannot see it does not make me responsible for them. However, the new attitude I was developing was put to the test twenty years later. I went to work in a hospital, and the very same supervisor from my graduate school internship was assigned to be my clinical supervisor.

Well, I thought I changed, so I decided to see if she had as well. Surprisingly, we became great friends. In my interview, we talked about how she told me to do the wrong thing and lied about it. She owned it. I owned the fact that I was scared back then. I said that I should have said, “What the hell is your problem? Why are you lying?” We talked about the pressures that she faced in her life at the time, and how she needed to grow as a leader. She was an amazing woman. We worked together for seven years after that.

A few years ago, she died of cancer. Her partner called me and said, “We are having a celebration of life party for her. If there is any way you could come, we would like for you to come.” I flew in, bought her partner some flowers, and we danced together and celebrated her life and told stories. That room was full of people who had stories to tell of her life and they came from all walks of life. The room was full of devout Christians and Muslims mixing with gays and lesbians. There were Liberals and Conservatives, you name it. They had all intersected with her life and had wonderful stories to tell.

Story #3: Steef Luchtenberg, Business Analyst

One of my responsibilities as a business analyst was to act as the primary interface between my company’s project team and our client. Because of this, I am often an intermediary when issues arise between these two parties.

At one point, the clients raised an issue. They told us the software application we implemented for them was missing some functionality our team was contractually obligated to provide. Our team had interpreted the contractual language differently, and my manager did not want to concede on this issue because it would be costly to implement. Sometimes in the past, my manager has either given in or taken a strong, oppositional stance. When this happened, one side usually ended up feeling like they lost an argument, and the work environment became increasingly negative. This time my manager asked me to get more involved, so I scheduled a meeting with my counterpart on the client team.

I knew that both sides were feeling frustrated and angry. After some thought, I decided to ask my counterpart to allow me to observe what the client was currently doing, manually, in order to provide themselves with the functionality that they were requesting in the software.

At the meeting, my counterpart and I talked openly about the frustrations of both of our teams. When I asked her if I could observe her team's current process, she responded enthusiastically. She seemed to accept that I was being authentic in trying to understand her perspective. After we watched her team for a few minutes, our conversation quickly moved beyond which team had the more valid argument. Instead, we started talking about the most efficient way to provide the functionality. We found a viable, middle-ground solution to propose to our managers, and did so more quickly than I thought possible.

After this experience, my counterpart often came to me first when her team had questions or other issues. Because of how well this experience went, I continue to try to take this approach now, both with customers and with my own internal team.

Story #4: Zean Johnson, Director of Sales

In a short period of time, I was presented with a number of problems. First, my managers added customer service responsibilities such as pricing, deciding which of our factories will produce a given order, responding to customer inquiries, and other, related items to my already long list of management responsibilities. At the time, there were many problems in customer service that needed fixing, and it was unclear how to fix them, which ones to work on first, whether to tackle them one at a time or all at once, and how I should involve my team. With the recent reduction in headcount, we would not have a lot of time to devote to solving process-related problems, but it had to happen for us to operate more efficiently.

I decided to ask my team to help me define a finite set of problems that we could work together on fixing one at a time. When I did, I could see them get energized at the thought of being a part of the solution. I then came up with a list of six problems that need to be addressed this year. I asked my team to contribute their ideas, and they picked a couple to add to the list.

Around that same time, there was a conflict between two employees at my company, only one of whom reports to me. The one who reports to me came into my office in tears. She said that the other employee cursed at her over an email that was sent out that morning. She had sent that email on my recommendation. Initially, I felt anger towards the other employee and I felt sympathy for my direct report. I wanted to jump in and resolve the conflict. Instead, after the conversation with my employee, I thought through the situation more carefully. As I did, I could see why the other employee was so hostile. Three of the four people in her department were recently fired in a restructuring effort, leaving her in a precarious position. This did not excuse her treatment of my direct report, but it did help me figure out how to coach my employee on how to resolve the issue. I also figured out that my direct report was looking for a "white knight" to solve her problem for her.

I decided that I needed to discuss the situation with the other employee's manager, first to address the inappropriate language, and second, to decide how we should act. The other manager agreed that he would address the cursing with his employee directly. He also told me that there was an ongoing rift between the two employees that had developed over the past several months. We decided to tell our employees that they needed to work out their issues together. We would provide guidance, but we would not do it for them.

I sat down with my employee the next day and gave her some advice about how to mend the relationship. We discussed how the other employee may be feeling due to the recent restructuring, and that she should take that into account when dealing with her.

Also, around the same time, I had a problem of lack of oversight within my team. For example, one of my team members was located in Houston and I did not have a good feel for what he was doing on a daily basis. At the same time, I did not want to become a micromanager. I wanted to give my team the freedom to make their own decisions without having to come to me for every answer. I called the team member in Houston, told him what I wanted to do, and then we collaborated until we came up with a process that works for both of us. We made a spreadsheet that will be updated by the team member on a monthly basis. It listed all the major projects he is working on, along with successes, obstacles and action plans for each item.