

Trust is an Act of Faith

Daniel J. Okuniewicz Jr.

Trust is the fundamental thing upon which society is built and flourishes. Without trust no community can form, no relationships can be established, and no exchanges can be made. But if you really think about it, and as I will attempt to pontificate, it is surprising to discover that *there is no logical reason to trust anybody*. So how can it be that we are alive if, by the very nature of trust, there is no such thing as a person who is trustworthy? How can it be that our relationships and communities manage to stay together? The answer is not because trust is a logical step, but because trust is a continual act of faith.

First things first I want to clarify that there are different kinds of trust and different levels of trust. These kinds and levels of trust aren't necessarily categorical, but they certainly exist on a wide spectrum. The clearest example I can give is friendship. People become friends only when they reach a certain level of trust with each other, but not every kind of trust can lead to friendship. For instance, to ride an aircraft requires complete and total trust in the pilot with your very life, but that pilot is not necessarily a friend of yours. Likewise you could be friends with someone who you wouldn't trust at all with money or secrets. People become friends when they trust that they can be vulnerable around each other and the level of vulnerability dictates the level of friendship. Only personal trust can lead to friendship. Impersonal trust, such as that placed in the pilot, can be made with logical reasoning, while personal trust, I argue, cannot be. Logical or not, though, the final decision is a continuous act of faith.

Next, as my first point, I want to talk about the consequences of trust. There are two pos-

sible consequences of trusting someone: the formation and fostering of a relationship, or betrayal. I will focus on the second consequence: betrayal. The very fact that betrayal is a possibility shows that trust is an act of faith. One puts their faith in someone that they will not betray them when they decide to trust them. There is no logical way to determine that someone won't betray you because there is no way to know for sure what someone else thinks. There is no way to know for sure what someone is planning. And secondly, betrayal does not need to be intentional. In fact, it often is not. For example, if a person asks their friend to mail an important letter for them and the friend promises they will—their intention is to mail it—and that friend forgets to do so. Although unintentional, the friend has betrayed that person, and it is probable that the friend will no longer be trusted to mail important letters.

The trait that allows us to trust is empathy (the rest of this article will be about personal trust because impersonal trust isn't interesting). Because we have no way of knowing what another person thinks, empathy is the only way to decide if they are worthy of our faith. I have another example to illustrate this point. An employer trusts that an employee won't suddenly quit their job. There are plenty of logical reasons to think so, but none of them hold up precisely because there is no way to know what the employee's plans are. For instance, one logical reason to trust the employee not to suddenly quit is that if they were to do so they would be out of work. There is a mutual need and benefit for both the employer and the employee. However the employer can't know whether their employee

has found a better job or is seeking a better job. And it works the other way, too. The employee knows that the employer probably won't fire them or lay them off because they would have to hire someone else and train them. But the employee doesn't have access to the accounting tables and doesn't know for sure if the employer can benefit from it. Thus the only way for them to trust each other is empathetically, not logically. In the end they have to place faith in each other.

Logic falls apart when there is uncertainty because, even if quantized and calculated, the uncertainty **requires** faith to be the final decision. Logic and reasoning are merely tools used to guide faith to where it is most effective. But they are not the only tools. Empathy and compassion are the other tools necessary for guiding faith. In regards to trust, it is not enough to attempt to calculate or quantify the trustworthiness of a person. In fact it is impossible to do so in the long-term. Trust is not only an act of faith, it is a **continual**

act of faith, meaning trust is not something that can be placed and forgotten about. Trust has to be continually given in each instance. In one instance a person is not the same as the previous instance. It is due to this fact that people change over time. And because people change over time, and we cannot know for sure how a person will change over time, we cannot use logic to determine if they will not betray us in a month, a year, or a decade from when we meet. We simply have to have faith that they won't.

It is imperative that people are able to trust each other, and so I believe it is also imperative that alongside logic and reasoning people absolutely need to be taught empathy and compassion. That is the practical use that art, philosophy, literature, and music serves. With empathy and compassion comes morality, justice, goodness, and trust. I urge parents, future parents, and schools to impart these qualities on the next generations because relationships are the essence of society.