

Charles H. Green, Sandra Styer and Bob Bowers

## Think More Expertise Will Make You More Trusted? Think Again.

### What Makes Us Trustworthy?

The Trust Quotient (TQ) score is a measure of how respondents rate themselves on the four variables of trustworthiness: credibility, reliability, intimacy, and self-orientation.

- ▶ **Credibility** – The words we say, the skills and credentials we bring, and the way in which people experience our expertise make people trust us.
- ▶ **Reliability** – The actions we take, our predictability, and the ways in which people find us dependable make people trust us.
- ▶ **Intimacy** – The extent to which people feel they can confide in us and perceive us as discreet, empathetic and safe all make people trust us.
- ▶ **(Low) self-orientation** – The more people feel we are focused on them, rather than on ourselves, the more they trust us.

The TQ score is calculated from these four variables and is a numeric score based on the Trust Equation, first formulated in the book *The Trusted Advisor*, by Maister, Green, and Galford.

$$T = \frac{C + R + I}{S}$$

### THE TRUST EQUATION:

Using this equation, the TQ calculation yields a possible range of scores from 0.6 to 15. As of our most recent analysis, the average TQ across all respondents is 7.1.

However, for comparative purposes in this paper we discuss

While reliability is the most commonly reported strength, it's not the most effective.

the four components as equals by “inverting” the “S” factor – Self-orientation scores – and assigning each of the four variables 5 – 25

points, giving a total point range of from 20 to 100 points. By these terms, the average score was 82.9.

The most commonly-reported strength for participants is reliability. For 41% of respondents, this is the highest-scoring variable score.

By contrast, intimacy and favorable (or low) self-orientation are the least often reported strengths; only 18% of respondents lead with intimacy, and only 18% with favorable self-orientation. We show later that the “hard” variables of reliability (and credibility), notwithstanding frequency of emphasis, are not the strongest drivers for developing trust; rather it's the soft skills. These are not innate, unchanging characteristics; all can be improved.

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### Going against conventional wisdom:

Trustworthiness can be learned

Are you better off fixing your weaknesses or leading with your strengths? Some business leaders make the case that to improve performance, it's best to focus on leveraging strengths.

This makes a great deal of sense in many areas. But when it comes to trust-building, the opposite is demonstrably true. Improving weaknesses, which has the effect of lowering the standard deviation among CRIS scores, raises perceived overall trustworthiness. Even minor improvements can have a major impact.

When it comes to trust-building,  
improving weaknesses raises perceived  
overall trustworthiness.

How can you *use the data* to improve your business?

Companies can use these findings to have a rapid impact on employees' trustworthiness; the data offer insights into the steps that will produce the greatest return:

- ▶ **Move the emphasis off credibility.** Credibility (credentials, expertise, qualifications), on which most companies place a premium, is the least helpful in building trust. An emphasis on soft skills is more effective at building trust-based relationships.
- ▶ **Work to improve intimacy and self-orientation.** The soft skills can be learned, and offer a clear path forward for an organization to have a real and sustained impact on the trustworthiness of their people. The ability to make others feel safe, to demonstrate understanding, and to show empathy and personal vulnerability are keys to building trust.  
  
Most companies don't do enough to develop these kinds of skills. Our findings suggest this is a missed opportunity.
- ▶ **Build a culture** that helps individuals lower their self-orientation – one that values long-term orientation, collaborative work, transparency, and personal connection. This kind of organizational focus makes it possible to reap the benefits of stronger external relationships and greater trust among team members.