

Trust at Work at Work

It is amazing how much our daily lives rely on trust. We drive on one side of the road trusting that other drivers will do the same. We stop on red and go on green trusting that others will also. We turn on the faucet and drink the water, trusting that it has been properly cleaned and prepared for drinking. We see doctors when sick, trusting that they will seek to heal us. We take prescription medicines, trusting that the pharmacist has given us the drugs that were ordered and that those drugs will be good for us. Our children trust that the food we provide is safe and good for them.

The cynic might say we can trust because we and others are afraid of being caught and punished for not doing what is expected. Yet even that cynical expectation (trust) is based on something more—the expectation or trust, if you will, that, at some level, good for ourselves and others directs people's actions.

The Faith-based value of trust is more like this latter expectation than one based on the fear of punishment. Faith-based trust is not just about faith in God but about WHAT we believe about that God. If we really believe in Divine Providence, in a loving and caring God, if we really trust in the Lord with all our heart, we will extend his trust in us to those who share our lives. With great trust, God in his love for us has extended to us freedom of will, the freedom to reject his love and friendship. He does not control us but trusts that we will not reject his love and, if we do, that we will regret it and seek his loving forgiveness.

Do we extend that love and trust into our daily lives? We do when we seek the good of the other person; when we let ourselves be open to rejection or loss so that the other person can grow. All of child rearing is about trust. We teach our children to walk, to talk, to make choices, to think, to drive, to do gainful work. All these actions are giving our children the wings they need to leave us. Yet even as we prepare them to leave us, we are trusting that they will not reject us. We trust that we and they will grow into new levels of relationship. Even when they may tell us that they hate us, we continue to trust and look for reunion and relationship, ready to forgive and welcome them back into friendship.

While the deep love that comes with parenthood and family may make trust an almost subconscious action, there is still a need for prudence in deciding how much responsibility and freedom to give and how to deal with failure and/or rejection. This is even more so in the workplace where parental love is not part of the picture. It is not that trust should not be extended but rather why and how much.

I remember the year I got my driver's license. I rarely was given the keys to my father's second hand car, but at my summer job I was given the keys to a brand new station wagon and trusted to drive into and around the city doing pick-ups for the camp I worked at. I remember later entrusting the camp tractor to a younger counselor and the trepidation and then joy he expressed at being trusted to handle the responsibility. Both experiences helped me to be open to giving responsibility and trust to others so that they could grow in their capabilities and self-assurance. It is very difficult to assign work to others knowing that you still retain responsibility for the work being done and done correctly. It takes caring for the good, the development of the other. We call that love. It takes judgment not to overwhelm or give responsibility or tasks beyond the other's capacity. We call that prudence. It takes confidence that the right thing will come about without my controlling it. We call that trust.

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1. What does applying the faith-based value of trust in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of trust in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How could you apply faith-based trust in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you actively applied the faith-based value of trust? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?