

A CONCEIVIAN BRIEFING · III

# On *Trust*

The assessment everything is built on, how it is lost, and how it is rebuilt.

SAQIB RASOOL · JULY 9, 2025

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PREPARED FOR LEADERS, MISSION CAPTAINS, AND MOBILIZERS

**Conceivian**

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“Our word is our bond.”

J. L. AUSTIN

## ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

For the leader who can feel trust has fallen in their company without being able to point to the moment it happened. Read this if promises have started arriving hedged, escalations are multiplying, and your senior people carry a fatigue that no offsite has touched. You will learn to see trust as something you can build, with the precision of a craft, rather than a weather you wait to return.

Every leader knows the feeling of a company where nothing quite moves, where every handoff needs insurance and every promise arrives hedged. They call it many things. Almost none of them call it what it is. It is a failure of trust.

**T**rust is the most spoken-about and least understood condition in any enterprise. We treat it as a feeling, something that is either present or absent, something we hope to have more of. And because we treat it as a feeling, we have no idea what to do when it is missing. We wait for it to return, or we give speeches about it, or we run an offsite. And nothing changes, because a feeling is not something you can build.

So let us begin by saying plainly what trust actually is. Trust is an assessment. It is the judgment we make that another person is sincere and competent to take care of some world of action that matters to us. It is not a mood that descends on a team. It is a conclusion we are constantly forming, mostly without noticing, about whether the people around us will do what they say, mean what they say, and are able to do what they promise.

Once you see trust as an assessment rather than a feeling, everything changes. An assessment can be grounded. An assessment can be examined. An assessment can be wrong. And most importantly, an assessment can be shifted, through evidence, through action, through new commitments kept over time. Trust stops being weather and becomes something you can work on.

I

## The three dimensions of trust

When we say we do not trust someone, we are almost never precise about what we mean. And that imprecision is expensive, because trust fails along different dimensions, and each failure calls for a different repair. Confuse them, and you will try to fix the wrong thing.

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## Reliability

Do they do what they say they will do. This is the dimension we notice first. When someone misses a commitment, reliability is what we question. It is the most visible, and often the easiest to repair, because it is repaired in plain sight, one kept promise at a time.

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## Sincerity

Do their words align with their actual concerns. Do they mean what they say, or are they performing. Sincerity is harder to see and harder to repair, because it lives beneath the words, in whether someone is acting from genuine care or from something else they are not naming.

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## Competence

Can they actually deliver what they promise. A person can be entirely reliable and entirely sincere and still not have the skill to do the thing. We often read a competence failure as a character failure, and punish where we should instead develop.

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There is a fourth that runs beneath all three, and we name it because leaders feel it even when they cannot locate it. Care. Whether the other person holds your concerns as if they were their own. Without care, the other three are mechanical. With it, they become a partnership.

When you say you do not trust someone, ask which dimension you mean. The answer is the beginning of the repair.

## II

### How trust is actually lost

Trust is most obviously lost when someone fails to fulfill a promise. But this is only the surface. Underneath the broken promise is almost always a broken conversation, a request that was never clear, conditions of satisfaction that were never agreed, a promise that was never really made but only implied

and assumed.

This is the thing leaders miss. They experience a trust problem and look for an untrustworthy person. But far more often, what they are looking at is a missing conversation. No one made a clear request. No one made a real promise. There was never a moment where two people looked at each other and agreed exactly what would be delivered, by when, and to whose satisfaction. So when the thing did not arrive, it did not fall through a crack. There was never a floor.

Trust also erodes silently, through the conversations that are not had. The disappointment never spoken. The standard never named. The concern carried but never voiced. These unspoken assessments calcify into a background mood of mistrust that no one can point to, because nothing was ever said. The most corrosive thing in an enterprise is not the conflict that happens, but the conversation that does not.

### III

## How trust is rebuilt

Because trust is an assessment, it cannot be rebuilt by asking for it, demanding it, or declaring it. It is rebuilt only one way. The assessment shifts when new commitments are made and kept, visibly, consistently, over time, until the evidence accumulates and the judgment changes on its own.

This means the repair is specific to the dimension that failed. If reliability broke, the repair is a series of small, clear promises kept in plain view. If sincerity is in question, the repair is the harder work of naming concerns honestly and letting actions match words. If competence is the gap, the repair is development, not punishment, building the skill so the promise can actually be delivered next time.

And the first move, before any of this, is often simply to name the mood. To say out loud, with care, that trust has been damaged and along which dimension. Naming the mood is frequently the first act of repair, because it ends the silent accumulation and reopens the conversation that the breakdown closed.

Trust is not given and it is not demanded. It is built, in language, through commitments performed until the assessment moves.

## IV

# Why this matters for a company

An enterprise runs on coordination, and coordination runs on trust. When trust is high, people make bold commitments, ask for help without fear, raise problems early, and move at speed because they are not insuring every interaction against disappointment. When trust is low, the opposite happens, and you can watch it cost the company every day, in the meetings that swell for safety, the decisions that will not stick, the cross-functional work that feels like negotiation between rival nations.

This is why we say trust is the substrate. You can have the right strategy, the right people, and the right resources, and still watch the company fail to move, because the invisible layer underneath, the trust that lets coordination happen, has quietly collapsed. No tool, no reorganization, and no new strategy can compensate for a substrate that can no longer hold a promise.

The good news is the one we opened with. Trust is not weather. It is built in conversations, and conversations can be redesigned. A leader who understands this stops waiting for trust to return and starts building it, deliberately, in the only place it has ever lived, in the words people give each other and keep.

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This Briefing draws on the tradition of Fernando Flores, and the work of Heidegger, Maturana and Varela, Austin and Searle, and our teacher Chauncey Bell. We offer it in their debt.

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