

ON TRUST

by Joe Smerkers

Patrick went to school with Maggie today. Brian and I had a few minutes alone before he got on the bus. We talked briefly about his field trip today, and I asked him about some ideas I had for the layout of the book chapter that he was writing.

As he was getting his jacket on to catch the bus he said, "Just do what you think is best."

Interesting how good these words made me feel. How much trust were held in these words - just do what you think is best. I watched, and reflected, as he got on the bus.

When was the last time I uttered those words to anyone? Sure I have let go of things that were not important to me. But when was the last time I trusted someone with something that WAS important to me?

When was the last time I let go of my fear that "they, the others" would not do their part. It's been a long time. Even if I have delegated or empowered others recently, I in all candor did not do it with the same abandonment that my son did this morning. I probably did some upside/downside, strategic risk analysis, benefit analysis calculation, and decided that letting go was the best of the available alternatives. How much simpler it is to just say - just do what you think is best.

I've watched Brian grow and mature now for close to 11 years so it's not surprising to me that he might say such words. What startled me is not that he said them or how easily they came to him but how hard it is for me as a parent to same them to him, or his brother, or his mother - without the usually attached mental gymnastics and false pretenses.

Just do what you think is best. I keep reciting those words in my head.

Putting aside that every eleven year old doesn't say this to his dad or mom, what happens after 11 to so affect our thinking that we loose this most precious of values - trust?

Some might argue that it is naive to trust everyone. So it might be. But, could it not be more foolhardy to mistrust the many for the sins of the few?

I recall a company I worked with several years ago that set up their customer service system to catch thieves. No, this is not a typo. Customer Service was run by the head of security. They put loyal, honest customers through hell to try and catch the 3% that would try to rip them off.

Would it not have been better - financially and customer satisfaction wise - to turn this paradigm around? Not ignoring the losses to pilferage but not making loyal and honest customers pay for the misguided behavior of a few. Would it not have been better - albeit naive - to trust everyone and take care of the consequences of this approach?

Somewhere during our early years, as we grow up and mature we learn "the lessons of life." We learn not to trust everyone. I am sure that in part this is healthy and psychologically necessary for survival. But oh so sad.

On a daily basis we are exposed to the sins of the few. In our games we learn that one of our team doesn't hold up their end and a little bit of our reservoir of trust drains away.

We reach out to one in need only to be disappointed in their behavior and a little more of our reservoir of trust drains away.

We speak openly and honestly, and confidentially, to a friend only to find that everyone now knows our most inner thoughts. And a little more of our reservoir of trust drains away.

We share company secrets with a fellow worker only to find that they use what we say to their advantage. And a little more of our reservoir of trust drains away.

Everyday, year in and year out, we reach out and trust only to be disappointed. Then one day we find that our reservoir of trust is depleted, and we are left alone without sustenance in a dessert of mistrust.

Does it have to be so? Or can we rebuild that reservoir? Can we learn from the young? Can we somehow restore that hope and trust that we once had when we were eleven too?

I think so. But it is not easy nor without pain, and dare I say it - risk. For to rebuild what we once had we, no *I*, must take the first step. *I* must find the strength to trust again - completely and unconditionally. Just one person, one time *I* must find that last bit of elixir that's still within *me*.

The most interesting thing about this renewal is that we don't have to look for opportunities. They present themselves daily. We don't have to attend seminars on how to trust or conduct a risk analysis to choose which of the alternatives is the most likely to reward our trust.

For it's not what they do in return that matters - it's what we do - our actions of trust that begins to restore our reservoir. And the real miracle of it all is that trust begets trust. I trust you and you trust me and we trust others. And before you know it there exists a community of trusting people. One day a world of trusting people.

Thank you Brian. If your ambition, like mine, is to make a difference then be assured that nothing could have made a greater impact than those words you spoke so innocently this morning.

Just do what you think is best. Oh to have the wisdom of an 11 year old.