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A Letter about Trust

By Sam Vaknin

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The narcissistic condition emanates from a seismic breach of trust, a tectonic shift of what should have been a healthy relationship between the narcissist and his Primary Objects (parents or caregivers). Some of these bad feelings are the result of deeply entrenched misunderstandings regarding the nature of trust and the continuous act of trusting.

For millions of years nature embedded in us the notion that the past can teach us a lot about the future. This is very useful for survival. And it is also mostly true with inanimate objects. With humans the story is less straightforward: it is reasonable to project someone's future behaviour from his past conduct (even though this proves erroneous some of the time).

But it is mistaken to project someone's behaviour onto other people's. Actually, psychotherapy amounts to an attempt to disentangle past from present, to teach the patient that the past is no more and has no reign over him, unless the patient lets it.

Our natural tendency is to trust, because we trust our parents. It feels good to really trust. It is also an essential component of love and an important test thereof. Love without trust is dependence masquerading as love.

We must trust, it is almost biological. Most of the time, we do trust. We trust the universe to behave according to the laws of physics, soldiers not to go mad and shoot at us, our nearest and dearest not to betray us. When trust is broken, we feel as though a part of us dies, is hollowed out.

Not to trust is abnormal and is the outcome of bitter or even traumatic life experiences. Mistrust or distrust are induced not by our own thoughts, nor by some device or machination of ours - but by life's sad circumstances. To continue not to trust is to reward the people who wronged us and made us distrustful in the first place. Those people have long abandoned us and yet they still have a great, malignant, influence on our lives. This is the irony of the lack of trust.

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So, some of us prefer not to experience this sinking feeling of trust violated. They choose not to trust and not to be disappointed. This is both a fallacy and a folly. Trusting releases enormous amounts of mental energy, which is better invested elsewhere. But trust - like knives - can be dangerous to your health if used improperly.

You have to know WHO to trust, you have to learn HOW to trust and you have to know HOW to CONFIRM the existence of mutual, functional trust.

People often disappoint and are not worthy of trust. Some people act arbitrarily, treacherously and viciously, or, worse, offhandedly. You have to select the targets of your trust carefully. He who has the most common interests with you, who is invested in you for the long haul, who is incapable of breaching trust ("a good person"), who doesn't have much to gain from betraying you - is not likely to mislead you. These people you can trust.

You should not trust indiscriminately. No one is completely trustworthy in all fields. Most often our disappointments stem from our inability to separate one area of life from another. A person could be sexually loyal - but utterly dangerous when it comes to money (for instance, a gambler). Or a good, reliable father - but a womaniser.

You can trust someone to carry out some types of activities - but not others, because they are more complicated, more boring, or do not conform to his values. We should not trust with reservations - this is the kind of "trust" that is common in business and among criminals and its source is rational. Game Theory in mathematics deals with questions of calculated trust. We should trust wholeheartedly but know who to entrust with what. Then we will be rarely disappointed.

As opposed to popular opinion, trust must be put to the test, lest it goes stale and staid. We are all somewhat paranoid. The world around us is so complex, so inexplicable, so overwhelming - that we find refuge in the invention of superior forces. Some forces are benign (God) - some arbitrarily conspiratorial in nature. There must be an explanation, we feel, to all these amazing coincidences, to our existence, to events around us.

This tendency to introduce external powers and ulterior motives into our reality permeates human relations, as well. We gradually grow suspicious, inadvertently hunt for clues of infidelity or worse, masochistically relieved, even happy when we find some.

The more often we successfully test the trust we had established, the stronger our pattern-prone brain embraces it. Constantly in a precarious balance, our brain needs and devours reinforcements. Such testing should not be explicit but circumstantial.

Your husband could easily have had a mistress or your partner could easily have stolen your money - and, behold, they haven't. They passed the test. They resisted the temptation offered to them by circumstance.

Trust is based on the ability to predict the future. It is not so much the act of betrayal that we react to - as it is the feeling that the very foundations of our world are crumbling, that it is no longer safe because

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it is no longer predictable. We are in the throes of death of one theory - and the birth of another, as yet untested.

Here is another important lesson: whatever the act of betrayal (with the exception of grave criminal corporeal acts) - it is frequently limited, confined, and negligible. Naturally, we tend to exaggerate the importance of the event. This serves a double purpose: indirectly it aggrandises us. If we are "worthy" of such an unprecedented, unheard of, major betrayal - we must be worthwhile and unique. The magnitude of the betrayal reflects on us and re-establishes the fragile balance of powers between us and the universe.

The second purpose of exaggerating the act of perfidy is simply to gain sympathy and empathy - mainly from ourselves, but also from others. Catastrophes are a dozen a dime and in today's world it is difficult to provoke anyone to regard your personal disaster as anything exceptional.

Amplifying the event has, therefore, some very utilitarian purposes. But, finally, the emotional lie poisons the mental circulation of the liar. Putting the event in perspective goes a long way towards the commencement of a healing process. No betrayal stamps the world irreversibly or eliminates other possibilities, opportunities, chances and people. Time goes by, people meet and part, lovers quarrel

and make love, dear ones live and die. It is the very essence of time that it reduces us all to the finest dust. Our only weapon - however crude and naive - against this unstoppable process is to trust each other.

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The Most Valuable Letter

By Jeffrey Dobkin

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The Most Valuable Letter You Can Write.

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Simple: it's a thank-you letter. The first reason a thank-you letter is so valuable is obvious – it makes the recipient feel good. This elevates you from the silent majority who never expressed their appreciation in a letter.

A phone call just doesn't have the impact of a letter. In a day, whatever you said on the phone fades into the horizon like the sun. But not a letter. A letter has time to sink in. It can also sit on the recipient's desk as a lasting memento of your appreciation. A phone call just doesn't compare to the lasting

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goodwill generated by an appreciative letter.

The Most Valuable Letter

So, the most valuable letter is to thank someone; and the time you ALWAYS write it is when you receive a business referral. "Thank you for the opportunity and the privilege to be of service to your colleagues." A business referral is not to be taken lightly or casually, it's the utmost show of trust a client or friend can display in you. It's the leap of faith that you'll perform exceptionally well. "Thank you so much for your referral and your trust." The person who recommends you puts their own name and reputation on the line for you. Does it deserve a letter? You bet. This letter is the least costly AND most effective piece of advertising you can write, bar none. Least costly? AND most effective? Hummm...

Did you notice how casually the "Thanks for your kind referral" letter has now become the most effective piece of advertising you can write? It's no longer in the "I'll just dash off this thank-you letter" category.

Why is it so effective? And what can you do with a "Thanks for your referral!" letter that makes it so effective? For one thing, you can make the person feel comfortable with their recommendation of you, because you're going to do the very best job you possibly can for their friend. You're going to lean over backward to look good, and to make them look good for giving a referral of someone so conscientious. You can't make them feel like this with an ad, but it's easy to do with a letter.

Your letter can convince them that you appreciate the trust they've placed in your products or services. You can make them feel, well, like they should refer more people to you all the time. And therein lies the beauty, the value, and the monetary worth in the most valuable letter you can write: the receiver will remember it, and when the opportunity comes up again, they will continue to refer people to you.

You've heard of word-of-mouth advertising as the best (and the cheapest) form of advertising? Well, this is how you make it happen, again and again.

Sending a Hard-Working Gift

What does my office do for people who refer direct marketing consulting or copywriting clients to us? We send them a Cross Pen, and we have THEIR name engraved on it (the only person who wants a pen with my name on it is me!) Don't worry, they'll remember where they got it! By the time we ship it to them with the nice box it comes in, and of course our own personal letter of thanks, it costs us about \$25. Is it worth it? You tell me: the prospect already trusts us from receiving the recommendation from a friend. If we do any work for the new client, our copywriting and consulting fees range from... well, we get our \$25 back pretty soon. Many clients stay with us for years.

We don't convert all the prospects referred to us into actual rent-paying customers. Some don't need our high-powered direct marketing or response-driven sales material. Some aren't ready to launch products just yet; and some are just fishing. But we always seem to get more referrals from the referral source. Which we really do appreciate.

If you'd like to get more business, write an exceptional "Thank you for your referral!" letter, and keep it

at-the-ready in your computer. If you have \$25, send them an engraved Cross Pen with your letter of thanks. If not, a letter by itself will do nicely. You can't buy that kind of advertising – that goodwill or trust, or those kind referrals – at any price. Or can you?



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