

WHAT INFLUENCERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



BY PHIL COOKE

When it comes to leadership and influence, we rarely talk about trust. When we do, it's usually in terms of honesty and integrity. Questions like: "Can I trust you to honour your word?" or "Can you be trusted with finances?" usually come to mind. Those questions are important, but the truth is, trust is a far deeper issue, and when it comes to your team, employees, congregation, or followers, trust may be the single most important connection you can build. To achieve that connection, here are some principles every leader and influencer should know:

TRUST DOESN'T COME EASILY

This is the most marketed, sold, pitched to, and promoted generation in history. They've grown up around brand names, Super Bowl commercials, and sales pitches. They make judgements about everything they encounter through apps like "Yelp." That's why when you tell them your conference will "shake nations" or your new book will "transform the culture" they're naturally sceptical – and should be. They're weary of all the hype and have learned to see through it.

THEY STOPPED TRUSTING EARLY IN LIFE

Half of all American children will witness their parent's divorce. In fact, nearly that many will see the breakup of a parent's second marriage and one of every 10 will experience three or more parental divorces. We can pretend it doesn't impact kids, or convince ourselves that "It's for the good of the children," but a study six years after their parent's marriage breakup revealed even after all that time, these children tended to be "lonely, unhappy, anxious and insecure."

THEY'VE GROWN UP IN A SCEPTICAL CULTURE

In the old days, the media gave celebrities and leaders a pass. Rarely was President mentioned (or even shown), and the adulterous affairs of leaders like John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr were virtually ignored. But since Richard Nixon and Watergate, everything changed. Today, reporters scour personal records, emails, or dig back decades to expose mistakes and wrongdoing. Shows like TMZ were created to reveal "celebrity secrets." Watching TV, the Internet, or using social media today makes it virtually impossible to believe that anyone can be trusted.

THE MEDIA CAN BE PARTICULARLY VICIOUS WHEN IT COMES TO RELIGION

Over the last few decades in most prime time programs, the "Christian" character will usually be the crazy person, the paedophile, or the hypocrite. Religious belief is regularly ridiculed in science programs or made fun of on talk shows. With little to counter those images, it's easy to understand the lack of trust when it comes to faith.

NEVER IN HISTORY HAS THE CONCEPT OF "TRUST" BEEN SO UNDERMINED ON A DAILY BASIS

That's why leaders and influencers today need to be very intentional when it comes to building trust with your team, employees, congregation or followers. I could write a book on the subject, but here are a few places to start:

JUST BE REAL

Everyone sees through the hype so tone down the exaggeration on your resume, stop making everything about yourself, and re-focus on others. It's been said often, but authenticity matters more than ever.

STOP HIDING YOUR MISTAKES

Be vulnerable and show your team that you're not perfect. (Trust me – they already noticed.) Showing your imperfections can actually be a powerful way to connect with others.

FINALLY, CREATE A CULTURE WHERE IT'S SAFE TO FAIL

Developing trust is about creating an atmosphere where people are comfortable being themselves. Never relax standards of excellence or integrity, but allow people the room to stretch, take risks, and do it without punishment. The trust that comes out of that experience will take your entire team to a new level of performance – not to mention friendship. ■