

## Trust Skill 1 Character

Character is the combination of qualities that distinguishes one person from another. These qualities make up who you are on the inside—not the external front you may sometimes put up. Who are you, really? What do you do when no one is watching, when there is no one to impress? How do you treat people when you don't need something from them? Character is also made up of such qualities as integrity, honesty, sincerity, and predictability. I consider solid character to be at the very foundation of one's ability to succeed. No success is going to be profound or lasting in its effects if it stems from questionable ethics, motives, or behaviors. In his best-selling book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey offers a powerful explanation for how character is crucial to one's ultimate success:

If I try to use human influence strategies and tactics of how to get other people to do what I want, to work better, to be more motivated, to like me and each other—while my character is fundamentally flawed, marked by duplicity or insincerity—then, in the long run, I cannot be successful. My duplicity will breed distrust, and everything I do—even using so-called good human relations techniques—will be perceived as manipulative. It simply makes no difference how good the rhetoric is or even how good the intentions are; if there is little or no trust, there is no foundation for permanent success.

*Newsweek* magazine published its findings about character in the workplace. I was surprised to read from the report that today's workers are more tolerant of deception. Many workers feel that lying and cheating are acceptable. *Newsweek's* findings do not stand alone. Another survey found that nearly half of the workers surveyed engage in unethical or illegal acts.<sup>5</sup> I've even found in my personal training of persuaders that many will openly admit that they wish their integrity were better.

What is my point? This disregard for honesty and sincerity is prevalent, but it always catches up with you. People can sense falsehood, deception, or insincerity. Even if they don't pick up on it right away, time will tell. The Latin root of the word "sincerity" is *sincerus*, which means "without wax." Pillar sculptors sometimes used wax

to hide their mistakes so they could still pass their work off as unflawed. Years of weathering, however, eventually revealed their deception. As a result, a sincere person was considered to be one without wax or camouflage. It is the same with people. Deception that we may deem as harmless may get us short-term results, but it will not give us the long-term lasting results. It will also taint others' opinions of us.

The worst thing for a persuader is that your audience members probably won't ever confront you about your dishonesty or deception. They are not going to tell you that they think you are lying. They'll just never work with you again and they'll then tell all their family and friends about the bad experience they had with you behind your back.

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

—HELEN KELLER

Even if you're an honest person of admirable character, it is human nature for people to cast sweeping judgments and formulate opinions without all the facts. So, if you want genuine trust and lasting persuasion, you must avoid even the slightest appearance of anything that might be considered dishonest. If you never place yourself in a situation where one might be misled about you or your integrity, then your good, hard-earned reputation will never be compromised. Phillips Brooks, a nineteenth-century clergyman, taught: "Character is made in the small moments in our lives." Remember in those small moments to be caring, honest, and forthcoming. Don't embellish the story to make it sound better; don't omit certain information to cover your own skin. Put the interests of others ahead of your own and keep your priorities straight. In all things, exercise self-discipline, self-control, and self-mastery. Character is knowing what is right, desiring to do right, and then doing what is right.

Clear conscience never fears midnight knocking.

—CHINESE PROVERB

Abraham Lincoln stands as a worthy role model for anyone who wants to develop character. He once said, “When I lay down the reins of this administration, I want to have one friend left. And that friend is inside myself.” This statement is particularly poignant given that Lincoln was criticized so viciously while he was in office. Nevertheless, he always remained true to what he believed in his heart was right and just.

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