

HR Leaders as Trusted Business Advisors

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Introduction

Not since WWII has there been a time at which human resource issues have mattered so much to CEOs. But need alone can't guarantee that HR leaders will be seen as trusted business advisors. In rising to the opportunity, HR leaders can learn from how others have, or have not, become trusted business advisors. This series of three articles discusses the nature of trusted advisors and trust itself, the process by which trust is created, and the unique challenges facing the HR community in becoming Trusted Advisors.

Other service professionals offer a touchstone. HR professionals share 6 defining traits with other service professionals—lawyers, accountants, and consultants. All are (1) perceived as content experts, selling (2) intangible services at (3) high prices, offering benefits which are (4) large but (5) difficult to quantify, and which entail (6) a high risk/reward ratio to the buyer. These traits condition what it takes to become a trusted advisor. HR professionals can draw down on the experiences of their sister professions in their quest to become trusted advisors.

I. Trusted Advisors and the Nature of Trust

HR is a consultative function. In many respects, an HR executive is no different from a lawyer, an advertising executive, or a management consultant. She has a great deal of responsibility and very little authority. She has deep functional expertise, but must work with clients who do not have that expertise, often don't want to know it, and may not even respect it. Finally, she must gain the respect and even liking of her clients in order to be heard, and to be effective in her job. In short—an HR exec must function as a consultant.

There are consultants and there are consultants. At the lowest level of the consulting hierarchy there is simply purchase of technical expertise. At the higher levels of consultative relationship, one can begin to talk about a Trusted Business Advisor. At these levels, a consultative professional can have true influence and leverage over an organization, bringing his or her functional expertise to bear without artificial limitation, where appropriate, for the greater good of the organization. Most HR execs aspire to—or should aspire to—this level.

Benefits of Trusted Advisorship

Advisors and clients alike can benefit from a trusted advisor relationship. In such a relationship, information is shared, which allows better problem definitions and better solutions. Contexts are better understood. Advice is much more likely to be heeded, and to be right in the first place. Inefficiency of communication is reduced. Connections are

made between issues, which might not otherwise be made. Insights are produced, and are of higher quality than would otherwise be the case. People become personally fulfilled, which is not only of intrinsic worth, but helps build effectiveness and loyalty as well. Trust-based relationships with clients are relationships, which last, with the attendant benefits of economics as well. Trusted advisors and their advisees all benefit richly.

The key to Trusted Business Advisor relationships is trust. Consultants must work to become trustworthier. Being trustworthy is born to some; the rest of us can improve on it. There are three parts to understanding trust—understanding the levels of relationships, the components of trust, and the process of trust creation.

Levels of Relationships

Professional relationships operate at several levels:

1. Expertise-based—paradigm of giving answers
2. Needs-based—paradigm of solving problems
3. Relationship-based—paradigm of customization
4. Trust-based—paradigm of personalization.

Levels 1 and 2 operate in primarily rational terms. Levels 3 and 4 operate largely in the non-rational realm--which is far from the same thing as irrational. Most professionals' time is spent, quite appropriately, working at the lower levels. The important issue for the would-be trusted advisor is not how much time is spent at which level, but the ability to move at a moment's notice, when demanded, across levels.

The first level—expertise-based—is characterized by the paradigm of answering questions. The client has a question, the professional knows the answer. When we operate at this level, our client is buying our expertise; of course, if this is the only level we ever operate at, we are in danger of being replaced by a database.

At the second level—needs based—a significant shift in viewpoint takes place. The question, not the answer, becomes paramount. At this level, the consultant begins to focus on the critical skill of problem redefinition, refining the problem statement jointly with the client until it is clear what the core issue is and how it might be solved. Operating at this level implies higher levels of value-added. It also requires a mindset of non-scarcity—sometimes consultants are worried they'll run out of answers. When they realize there is no end to problems, this ceases to be a concern.

At the third level—relationship-based—solutions begin to take on an organizational context. What works for Lucent may not work for GE or British Rail. At this level, the professional's advice begins to be valued in much broader realms than the initial area of expertise; her perspective is valuable beyond the original professional arena.

Finally there is the trusted advisor level, where everything suddenly takes on the added dimension of the personal. We feel free to recognize our clients as full human beings,

and they do the same with us; we are sought out freely in times of reflection, and feel free to share our insights openly with our clients, regardless of the subject matter. Some trusted advisor relationships touch not only the personal, but also the private. Others become very personal, but never become private at all. Private lives include spouses and children, vacation, life outside work; personal lives include all the emotional dimensions of private life, but they are lived within the organizational boundaries. Sharing or not sharing private lives is a unique decision for each advisor/client pair to make on their own; the answer is not critical. What is critical is that the advisor treats his or her client as a full person. The inability to see our clients as full human beings keeps us from being able to relate to them as full trusted advisors.

The Trust Equation

Trust is one of those words we use casually, as if everyone knows what it means. In fact, we often use it to say many different things. What one says is not always what the other hears. The transition from “old” to “new” economy makes this particularly clear.

For example, the phrase “trust takes time” used to be self-evident. It was about relationships, coming to understand others, becoming acquainted. Accountants sometimes joke, “It takes 7 years to become a trusted advisor”—seven years being the statutory limit imposed by the SEC on any one person maintaining the primary client relationship. In truth, however, it never took time—it took repeated experiences, and the acquisition of repeated experiences took time—lunches, meetings and the like. Nowadays, experiences can accumulate rapidly—and therefore so can trust.

Trust itself is a dual relationship—one party is trustworthy, the other trusts. Most of us talk as if trust is a simply understood relationship, but it is rich and complex. Trust has four components, which can be arrayed in the form of the Trust Equation:

$$T = \frac{C + R + I}{S}$$

Where:

Credibility	has to do with the words we speak—are we believable?
Reliability	has to do with the actions we take—are we dependable?
Intimacy	has to do with the safety of discussions—am I discrete?
Self-Orientation	has to do with attention—on whom is my attention focused?

Credibility and reliability are the two rational parts of the trust equation. They are also the areas in which most professional service firms spend most of their time trying to convince clients of their trustworthiness. These factors include credentials, predictability, dependability and familiarity. Professionals often rely solely on these two factors, thus missing all the no-rational levels that go into creating trust.

The intimacy factor essentially has to do with a sense that the professional understands how the other feels, and knows how to deal with that knowledge. Empathy and discretion are the hallmarks of intimacy.

Self-orientation is alone in the denominator, which means both that it reduces trust, and that it is probably more powerful than the other three factors. A high level of self-orientation on the part of an advisor means that his primary focus is himself; such an advisor cannot be counted on to operate in our best interests, or even to know what they are.

The most obvious form of self-orientation is selfishness; but it is hardly the only, or even the most common. Frequently professionals have only the best motives, and are unselfish--but they are also self-conscious and self-absorbed. They worry about their credentials, about how they are being perceived, about how smart they seem, and about whether they'll get the job. To that extent, they are not focused on the client in front of them--and to that extent they won't be trusted. Think about how you evaluate a pediatrician for your child; most likely you put a great deal of weight on how he or she relates to both your child and to your concerns. The same is true of all clients.

Intimacy and self-orientation work almost entirely in the non-rational realm. This makes them uncomfortable for many service professionals--though in this regard HR people often have relative strengths.

Personal and Organizational Trust

We talk occasionally about organizational trust. In fact, the preponderance of what is meant by trust—the full richness of its meaning—is found largely in the individual and interpersonal arena, not in organizations. “Organizational trust” is, if not an oxymoron, then at least a limited concept.

The term “organizational trust” usually refers to the “R” component in the trust equation—reliability. When we speak of organizations we can trust, we usually mean they are clear and unambiguous, they are dependable, they have rules and procedures, which are transparent, they behave consistently over time, and they are accessible.

For the most part, we don't talk about organizations as being “credible”—we talk about people as being credible. And while this is largely true for credibility, it is almost entirely true for intimacy and self-orientation. Corporations almost by definition are incapable of intimacy. People in one organization may on average be more self-oriented than in another organization—but that is a collective trait of individuals, not a trait of an organization.

The truth is, the preponderance of the meaning of the word trust is individual. Trust lies primarily in the realm not of organizational dynamics, but of interpersonal dynamics. The movie *The Godfather* had it wrong when it said, “It's not personal, it's business.” The truth is, it is business, and it is personal.

Trust and Risk

Trust without risk is an oxymoron. “Trust” without risk-taking is not—it is either blind faith or a calculable bet. To trust requires that we have some knowledge of our situation and its risks—and that we are willing to make ourselves to some extent vulnerable and dependent on the not-guaranteed goodwill of another.

Trust thus begins with risk. A defining characteristic of trusted advisors is that they take personal risks early on, thus creating trust. A classic example is pricing. It feels “risky” to mention price of a prospective project too early—the professional fears it will be seen as crass, or might scare off the client before the client has had a chance to hear the benefits side of the value equation.

But if price is not mentioned early on, it becomes more difficult to mention later; to the point of being extremely uncomfortable and very embarrassing if it turns out that the parties harbored very different expectations all along. The trusted advisor learns that it is far better to take a small personal risk—that of being rejected early on—for the sake of reducing a much larger, and joint, business risk later on.

Thus a management consultant might say, for example, “Listen, I once embarrassed myself and a client by not mentioning price early enough. I don’t want to put either of us in a difficult situation—I’m thinking right now that this feels like a low six-digit number price. Were you thinking of an order of magnitude different, either higher or lower? I just want to make sure we’re understanding each other.” Does it feel risky? Yes; but nowhere near as risky as having to quote a specific figure later after a series of discussions with no mention of price.

Trust, Risk and Fear

Arguably the root negative human emotion is fear. Below the surface of anger, jealousy and other negative emotions lies the fear of losing what we have, or of not getting what we want. A natural response to fear is to limit risk-taking—which in turn limits the opportunity for trust. So overcoming fear turns out to be critical for the trusted advisor.

Fear in professional services takes several specific forms:

- Fear of not having the answer
- Fear of appearing stupid
- Fear of not knowing where to start
- Fear of being inaccurate

The natural responses to these fears include retreating or attacking, covering up our self-perceived ignorance, refusing to engage in certain discussions or to take what feel like risky steps into the unknown—particularly the emotional unknown. We reduce risk out of fear. Unfortunately, that reduces trust.

If a consultant is afraid of not having the answer, he may dodge the question, or answer in a vague or blustery manner, or may simply say he’d prefer to get back to the client

later with a more complete answer. All of these are risk-avoiding responses to the fear of not having the answer. The problem is, they avoid temporary “losses” at the price of creating longer-term honesty and trust. The potential for larger losses thus piles up.

This pattern of fear-based responses to risk is typical among lawyers, accountants and consultants—and not surprisingly so. All their professional lives they have been taught that the way to success is hard work focused on the rational mastery of their chosen technical field. When faced with a difficult client situation, it is a rare lawyer that doesn’t use the blunt force of his or her expertise and credentials to reassert his or her dominance of the situation. It takes personal courage to face fears head-on; yet that is the basis for trust. Is the HR/client relationship really any different?

II. The Trust Creation Process

Trust creation follows a process. That process can be seen closely replicated in many key business processes—most especially selling and negotiation. Dominant models of both the sales and negotiation processes map out something very akin to steps 2-5 of the 5-step trust creation process. This should not be surprising; effective selling and negotiation rely on created larger communities within which membership of both parties becomes mutually beneficial.

The Trust Creation Process

Trust does not happen in a vacuum. It comes about in a fairly clear, sequential five-step process, called ELFEC—Engage, Listen, Frame, Envision, Commit.

The sequence is important; the process grinds to a halt if done much out of order.

A more detailed version of the steps is:

Engage around an issue meaningful to the client

Listen to what is important and real to the client; get the data, affirm the importance of that data to the client, and demonstrate you recognize it.

Frame the true root issue, without blame, through a series of problem statements and hypotheses.

Envision an alternative reality, including specific descriptions of outcomes and results.

Commit to actionable next steps that imply significant commitment and movement.

The ELFEC trust development process describes generically the evolution of trust in an interpersonal relationship—including successful consultative interactions.

In working with professional service firms, there are consistently two sources of trouble in the trust development process:

1. not spending enough time or going deep enough in the listening step;
2. jumping to commitment/action without passing through steps 2, 3 and 4.

The process of trust creation is highly dependent on thorough listening, and on going through a defined sequence of listening, problem statement and envisioning, before dealing with commitments to action.

The Tools of Trust

A trust-based relationship—one trusting, one trusted—is a higher-order human relationship. It takes a certain level of self-confidence and compassion to participate on either end. So it shouldn't be surprising that the ability to be trustworthy cannot easily be reduced to purely behavioral skills. Certainly techniques like mirroring, reflective listening, or problem definition are important parts of being trusted—but skills alone do not trustworthiness make. The ability to be trusted must come partly from within.

Being trusted calls for both skillsets and mindsets. Together they form the tools of trust.

Skillsets

There are five skillsets useful to becoming trustworthy:

1. ***Listening to earn the right.***

Done comprehensively, listening “earns the right” to proceed to the next step in the trust process, or the giving-of-advice process, or the selling process. It requires three distinct phases—each operating in the rational realm and in the non-rational realm. The three phases are a) get the data, b) get the context, c) acknowledge.

First, the rational side. We may ask, “What is the volume in this process?” The rational data answer is “3000 transactions per month.” Some professionals leave it at that. But even in the purely rational realm, a data point with no context is often useless. If we ask a simple contexting question—“How big is that?”—we may find out, “That’s the most it’s ever been.” We then use paraphrasing—“So, 3000, the most it’s every been, right?” not only to make sure we have the data and context right, but also to confirm to the speaker that she is being heard, and heard correctly.

The same sequence must happen on the non-rational side. We might ask “What role did you play in that?” and find out “I ran the project to increase volume.” That is emotional data—it tells us something about individual. A contexting question might then be, “What was that like?” and we might find out, “They said I couldn’t do it.” This tells us that the speaker has some justifiable pride in this accomplishment. Empathy--the emotional equivalent of rational paraphrasing—is then called for—“Wow, that must have been quite an accomplishment for you.”

If these six steps are followed, the listener can be assured that the speaker will feel she has been heard. By so doing, the listener has “earned the right” to move on to other things—like problem statements and solutions and next steps and answers. Without having gone through those six steps adequately, the listener cannot be sure that he has earned the right. The speaker may not overtly say “you don’t get it”—they rarely are so blunt—but they will resist in any of a thousand different ways, until and unless the listener earns the right, by assuring the speaker that she has been thoroughly heard and understood by the listener.

2. ***Metaphor.*** The power of story telling has been described well elsewhere. It allows the other party to arrive at their own conclusions without a sense of duress; it encourages creative thinking; it defuses conflict-based solutions; and it reminds teller and listener alike that the search for meaning is valuable. Most importantly, it conveys understanding without judgment.
3. ***Name It and Claim It.*** This might be termed “Radical Truth-telling in Socially Acceptable Terms.” The point is to speak what otherwise would not be spoken, to talk about the elephant in the parlor, the emperor’s new clothes. It is the

quintessential tool for emotional risk-minimization without risk avoidance. Common opportunities for Name It and Claim It include pricing, persistent disagreements, discomfort on the part of client or professional, unspoken conflicts between people, and concerns about outcomes.

The skill of Name It and Claim It consists of using as many caveats as are necessary to slightly overcompensate for what is about to be said--then to say it. Common caveats include “I may have missed something here but...” “I hope you’ll forgive me bringing this up but” “Perhaps I missed something earlier but...” “You are probably going to touch on this anyway but...” “I’m sure someone else has already dealt with this but...” “I realize this is a difficult subject and don’t wish to cause discomfort but...” “I hope you’ll tell me if you feel this is too far out of bounds, but...”

4. **The Language of Trust.** If we examine our language rigorously, we will often find two mistakes—unjustified attribution and blame throwing. For example, one might say when frustrated, “That client is just out to get us.” First of all, we cannot in principle, ever truly say with confidence what goes on in another’s mind. Misunderstood motives abound every day. Second, any hint of blaming another person for troubles is almost completely useless at best, and very harmful at worst. What we should say—and think--in frustrating circumstances is something more like, “I’m feeling frustrated by our interactions with that client.” Our own language, and that of our team, is a good clue to whether or not we are thinking clearly.
5. **Thinking Out Loud.** Thinking out loud lets the client see the consultant’s thought process. It may feel like a risk to the consultant, but is perceived by the client as inclusive. It also lets the client contribute to the thinking. It also frees up the consultant to truly listen, instead of thinking about what he’s going to say when he’s done pretending to listen. What’s it sound like? “OK, lets see now, you’ve said that we’ve got X, Y and Z, now I’m thinking out loud here so help me out, OK, so what comes to my mind first is the Q issue. Although there is usually an aspect of Z, so we have to keep that in mind. Now lets see, you also said....” That is not sloppy thinking; it is real thinking, as seen in development.

Mindsets

There are three mindsets useful in becoming trustworthy:

1. **We Not Me.** This mindset goes beyond the common exhortation to look for a “win-win” solution. Win-win implies fundamentally divergent interests, which can in some rare cases converge. We Not Me says that my interests and the interests of my client are fundamentally the same. From a long term and holistic perspective, it is inconceivable that a course of action could be

good for my client and not good for me, or vice versa. If the congruity is not immediately apparent, then more honest talking needs to be done.

2. ***Dare to be Great.*** Most business issues get framed as tradeoffs between parties perceived as being in conflict. There are, of course, tradeoffs in the world. But unless we begin by first looking for transcendent, optimum, all-needs-exceeded solutions, we will never find them; further, we will miss the opportunity to define shared interests with our clients. Dare to be great—start by imagining how every party to the issue could solve all their problems and then some.
3. ***Find the Higher Ground.*** Solutions are rarely found at the level at which the problem statements was originally made. Ask the meta-question. Ask what's behind what everyone else is talking about. Reframe the problem at a higher level.

Five Mistakes—How Not to Be a Trusted Advisor

1. ***Overemphasize the technical.*** This is the single most common mistake made by service professionals. You choose your child's pediatrician at least as much by how they relate to you and your child as you do on where they got their degree; your clients do exactly the same with you. It's not about your credentials. People want holes, not shovels. And managers want results, not techniques for getting them. Talk results, not expertise.
2. ***Speed through the listening process.*** It is not enough to get the data. You also have to get the context. And the client must know you got it. And not just the rational data, the emotional data too. All of it. You may feel stupid paraphrasing, using open questions and waiting out pregnant pauses; that's OK. The client will tell you when you've got it; don't presume it until they say so.
3. ***Jump quickly to action.*** Consultants are self-driven by the need to show results. Often clients are co-conspirators in this; they say "You're the expert, you've got the data now, you've seen this before, what should we do?" This is a fear-based question on the part of the client, but it takes a lot of courage on the part of the consultant to say, "You know, right now I can think of four possible approaches, and I really don't know which is right, and probably won't know until we continue talking about this, so lets do, and together we'll begin to rule them out."
4. ***Focus on answers.*** It is not about answers, it's about questions. Specifically about redefining the question. If clients were certain they had the right question,

they could get the right answer from a database. What they want is not just an answer, but confidence that they have asked the right question.

5. **Focus on me, not we.** Do you ever find yourself thinking ‘how can I control this meeting?’ or ‘I can’t handle any more scope creep on this’ or ‘They’re not confident of me I need to show them I know my stuff’ or ‘I’ll set the agenda.’ Then you’re acting in what you think is your best interest, not the best interest of you and your client together. Which really means it’s not your best interest either. Always share agendas with your client; learn to say you don’t know when you don’t know; and learn to say out loud what you’re thinking.

III. The HR Challenge: Becoming a Trusted Advisor

The service professions provide a great number of parallels with the situation of HR, particularly around the issues of trust. But there are some unique aspects facing HR as well.

Business Challenges

Many corporate strategic issues today are at heart HR issues. To name just a few:

1. Demographic—the bulge that is the Baby Boomers will soon hit retirement. They will not only live longer, but the workforce to support them will be smaller. Implications abound for social security, health care financing, and—most immediately—the shortfall of executive talent they’ll leave behind.
2. Technological skills—literacy in relatively young technologies is required more quickly in order to stay competitive.
3. Geographic—time and place are becoming variable rather than fixed items in the workplace formula, leaving real issues around workload management, global teams, virtual teams, and 24-hour coverage
4. Corporate change—corporate entities are merging, being acquired, doing strategic alliances, and going out of business, while new ones emerge. This forces us to reevaluate concepts of loyalty, retention and human resource investment.
5. Corporate culture—major icons of US industry from Kodak to AT&T are showing the need for radical culture shift--fast.
6. Compensation—stock options, pension portability and currency conversions are only three factors reframing traditional compensation policies.

At the same time, some HR leaders are still not considered by general management to have clear, unbiased answers to these issues. They see people issues, but they don’t see the people in charge of the people issues as being trusted advisors. What a shame! And what an opportunity!

In addition to the challenges facing the service professional in general, described in the last section, there are four unique obstacles facing the HR professional who would be a trusted advisor. They are:

- a. The illusion of common language
- b. The tyranny of “soft” skills
- c. The fallacy of the people’s defender
- d. The institutional dilemma.

The Illusion of Common Language

The language of lawyers is the law—“legalese.” The language of accountants is GAAP. The languages of strategy consultants, architects and doctors are all arcane, relatively to common language. Not so with HR.

The language of HR is deceptively simple. Terms like needs assessment, recruiting, retention, health benefits, even organizational effectiveness, sound comprehensible to the

man on the street. It is not surprising then that HR's clients are less likely to bestow the title of "expert" on someone they fancy themselves as being able to completely understand. HR's clients think they know HR issues—even when they don't.

The trick is not to develop an arcane language that sets HR apart, or to develop content sub-specialties and certifications. Rather, it is to insist on rigorously clear thinking about HR issues. Rather than blindly pursuing employee retention programs, for example, have a point of view about the right level of turnover; about the payback, return on investment and pro-cons of alternative approaches to retention; and about the priority of retention among other general business initiatives. Clear general business thinking is the antidote to feeling one's expertise is unappreciated. And since clear thinking is uncommon anyway, it'll be all the more appreciated for being expressed in plain language.

The Tyranny of "Soft" Skills

Part of intimacy is empathy; most HR people understand empathy better than other professionals, and better than their clients. This can work greatly in the favor of HR execs to become trusted business advisors--as long as they recognize that empathy alone is not a standalone virtue, nor does it create intimacy by itself.

Empathy alone—if by that is meant identification with another's feelings—runs the risk of losing the empathizer in the feelings of the one being empathized with. This is not a useful stance for a trusted advisor. A trusted advisor must be able to empathize, while at the same time retaining her objectivity about the situation.

Clients who deeply need empathy are people who themselves are not highly emotionally developed—they depend on other-validation. To respond solely to their need for empathy is to be an enabler for another's narcissism. The real value of empathy is that it demonstrates to the client that the listener can understand all dimensions of the issue—non-rational as well as rational.

Intimacy is also more than empathy alone. Intimacy has a component of truth telling, including the uncomfortable, hard, radical truth telling that is sometimes required to give face-to-face. Empathy in combination with the courage to speak hard truths, however, is a powerful combination for the enhancement of trustworthiness.

Of course, HR people must spend far more time preaching the value of empathy to their clientele than they do curbing its excesses. But that means it's easy for HR people to lose perspective and become non-critical cheerleaders for unbounded empathy.

The Fallacy of the People's Defender

Many HR people feel they have a calling to advance the cause of "their" people, and that they are often at odds with the organization in trying to do so. Some will use the language of ethics, e.g. "we have a moral obligation to stand up for the people."

Noble as this may seem, it is a deathly trap for someone seeking to be trusted by leadership—and therefore to be seen as trustworthy by employees. In its most extreme form, it amounts to saying, “I have the moral high ground here, and you do not.” If you do not have respect for the moral the perspective of a CEO or other general manager, you almost certainly will not be able to gain their trust.

This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have an ethical viewpoint about people in organizations (nor does it mean you should, for that matter). What it does mean is that if you have unresolved conflicts in your belief systems about people and organizations, you had best either resolve them or clarify them. Managers can respect the integrity of those they disagree with; but they will never trust those with unclear belief systems.

The Institutional Dilemma.

Another challenge unique to the HR community is a legacy of HR issues that unfortunately can lead to an “us vs. them” mindset. Many HR issues have an aspect either of protecting the individual against the firm, or protecting the firm against the individual. Consider:

Protect Firm from Individual	Protect Individual from the Firm
Intellectual property	Employment law
Non-compete clauses	Workplace safety
Performance reviews	Compensation guidelines
Employment at will	Promotion criteria

With a history of working these kinds of issues, it is very easy for HR professionals to cultivate an unconscious set of beliefs based on the notion of conflict. When so much of the daily work pits the firm against the employee, it can be hard to recognize the fundamental ways in which the firm and the individual can jointly benefit.

Working with an unconscious mindset of opposition can foreclose opportunities, can create conflict where conflict doesn’t have to exist, and can create a disinclination to trust others, or to feel manipulative or cynical in asking others to trust us. This is deep stuff; it requires the HR professional to think clearly about what his or her beliefs are about the relationship between the organization and the individual.

Training for Trust

As mentioned in the first part of this series, trust is predominantly an interpersonal matter; organizational trust is a largely one-dimensional reflection of the richer trust between people. But that doesn’t mean organizations should give up on the task of enhancing the trustworthiness of their people, by any means. In fact, both organization and employee stand to benefit from such efforts.

The question for HR is how to go about it? If you believe that trust is more than a skillset, then traditional training approaches—which in 21st century Western business are

largely behavioral —are insufficient. The very language of traditional training programs belies the subject. It just doesn't sound right to talk of "doing a trust needs assessment," or to speak of the result of trust training in terms like "at completion of the course, participants will have learned to demonstrate the behaviors of trustworthy people." The subject calls out for something that sounds a little more serious and complex.

The blunt answer is to look first to hiring, and second to training. While it is certainly possible to develop people's sense of trustworthiness, it requires some shifts in worldview; it may in many cases be easier to find people who already have that worldview.

But it is also possible for people to change. What changes people in the realm of trust is what also works to change people's lives in other fundamental ways. Changing a golf swing or learning to speak Spanish requires one set of change techniques, and we have become very good at applying the Industrial Revolution tools of breaking down processes into rote steps to accomplish them. Trust is different.

Learning to be trustworthy—and to trust—requires more of our human-ness. A scientific method for teaching skills like giving feedback feels pseudo-scientific when we try to apply it to making people trustworthier. Epiphanies, stories, the sharing of personal experiences, flash-of-insight moments—these are the experiences that work to shift people's mindsets.

Experiential approaches to training are thus more appropriate. Role-playing in particular can produce many "ah-ha" moments. Beyond that, corporate training programs should look outside their field to see what might be borrowed from others' approaches to endeavors like yoga, spirituality, encounter therapy, and successful volunteer organizations. The HR professional looking for the "humanness" in organizations is advised to look beyond the moralisms and behavioral expertise that constitute technical mastery, to the broader themes of humanity beyond our profession.