



Think More Expertise Will Make You More Trusted? **Think Again.**

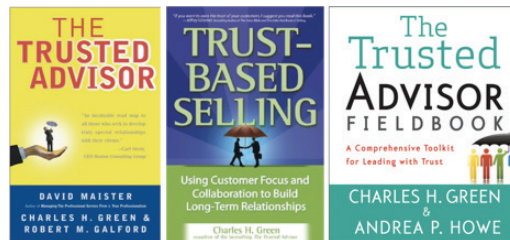
Trusted Advisor Associates LLC, a management consultancy focused on the role of trust in business, analyzed data from what is arguably the world's largest study of personal trustworthiness, based on 72,880 respondents who took the Trust Quotient Assessment between 2008 and 2015.

The Trust Quotient Assessment is a proprietary instrument that measures trustworthiness as a composite of four variables: credibility, reliability, intimacy, and self-orientation. Each respondent's trustworthiness score is determined by answers to 20 questions – five questions for each of the four variables – which are then combined to produce an overall score on a scale from 20 to 100.

Our findings show that, contrary to conventional wisdom, expertise is not the key to building trust in business and professional situations. Investing in acquiring more knowledge and adding credentials is rarely the smartest way to increase trustworthiness or to expand your business.

In this White Paper we elaborate on an important conclusion from our analysis: companies should focus more on soft skills when it comes to building trust with clients, suppliers, and colleagues.

In understanding trustworthiness, we also address the roles of gender, age, and industry affiliation, as well as regional and cultural differences.



Charles H. Green, Sandra Styer and Bob Bowers

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What Makes Us Trustworthy?

The Trust Quotient (TQ) score is a measure of how respondents rate themselves on the four variables of trustworthiness: credibility, reliability, intimacy, and self-orientation.

- ▶ **Credibility** – The words we say, the skills and credentials we bring, and the way in which people experience our expertise make people trust us.
- ▶ **Reliability** – The actions we take, our predictability, and the ways in which people find us dependable make people trust us.
- ▶ **Intimacy** – The extent to which people feel they can confide in us and perceive us as discreet, empathetic and safe all make people trust us.
- ▶ **(Low) self-orientation** – The more people feel we are focused on them, rather than on ourselves, the more they trust us.

The TQ score is calculated from these four variables and is a numeric score based on the Trust Equation, first formulated in the book *The Trusted Advisor*, by Maister, Green, and Galford.

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

THE TRUST EQUATION:

Using this equation, the TQ calculation yields a possible range of scores from 0.6 to 15. As of our most recent analysis, the average TQ across all respondents is 7.1.

However, for comparative purposes in this paper we discuss

While reliability is the most commonly reported strength, it's not the most effective.

the four components as equals by “inverting” the “S” factor – Self-orientation scores – and assigning each of the four variables 5 – 25

points, giving a total point range of from 20 to 100 points. By these terms, the average score was 82.9.

The most commonly-reported strength for participants is reliability. For 41% of respondents, this is the highest-scoring variable score.

By contrast, intimacy and favorable (or low) self-orientation are the least often reported strengths; only 18% of respondents lead with intimacy, and only 18% with favorable self-orientation. We show later that the “hard” variables of reliability (and credibility), notwithstanding frequency of emphasis, are not the strongest drivers for developing trust; rather it's the soft skills. These are not innate, unchanging characteristics; all can be improved.

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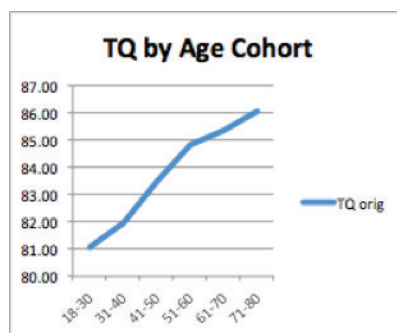
Some Key Findings At A Glance: Trustworthiness Ratings By Gender, Age, Location, And Job

WHO'S MORE TRUSTWORTHY: MEN OR WOMEN?

Overall, women rate themselves as more trustworthy than men: 83.3 compared to 82.3, a statistically significant difference. This finding is strongly underscored in our classroom work – audiences intuitively confirm it (unprompted) over 99% of the time. Looking at the differences among variables, women and men score almost equally on credibility and self-orientation. Women have a slight edge in reliability: 21.8 versus 21.5. But the big difference lies in intimacy, where women on average are 0.5 points higher: 20.4 versus 19.9. Thus the largest driver of the gender difference lies in higher intimacy scores.

WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND TRUSTWORTHINESS?

One of the strongest correlations in the TQ study is the linking of trustworthiness and age. The older we get, the more trustworthy we perceive ourselves to be. In our classroom work, we have also found significant commonsensical support for this finding.



Interestingly, as we age, the increase in overall TQ scores is driven by nearly equal increases in each of the variables. In other words, we become more credible and reliable, better at Intimacy, and less self-oriented as time passes.

DO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES MATTER?

Aggregate scores vary globally; e.g. US respondents' scores are higher than Japan's. However, pure TQ scores can be driven by cultural traits, e.g. humility or confidence – we caution against cross-cultural conclusions.

By contrast, *relative* patterns appear consistent. The TQ components are sense-making in each culture, and interact in basically the same ways and with the same frequency.

HOW DOES TRUSTWORTHINESS VARY BY INDUSTRY OR JOB?

There are few patterns at the job and industry level. Broadly, jobs requiring high personal interaction (general management, training, sales) score higher than solitary roles (research, accounting, legal). The broad pattern holds true for results aggregated by industry.

Trustworthiness is a personal attribute, broadly distributed across all industries. This suggests the feasibility of differentiation by building a business with high concentrations of trustworthy people – regardless of industry.

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A Surprising Finding: Intimacy Trumps Expertise In Building Trustworthiness

For a majority of respondents, the two highest-scoring variables form a clear “leading pair,” which we’ve used to define six distinct Trust Temperaments™. A Trust Temperament™ is an indicator of a person’s natural inclinations when it comes to building trust – in other words, your Trust Temperament™ is the strength you draw on spontaneously and naturally.

A high intimacy score is the single shared component among the three top-scoring Trust Temperaments™.

While leaders can work to embody many or all Trust Temperaments™ as different situations require, in our classroom work we’ve noted that people initially find it tiring to go far outside their innate type for long periods of time. However, we have also found that the soft skills in particular can be developed; Temperament, like industry, is not destiny.

Using overall TQ scores to rank-order the Trust Temperament™, we glean that a high intimacy score is the single shared component among the three top-scoring Trust Temperaments™.

TRUST TEMPERAMENTS™ RANKED BY EFFECTIVENESS

Trust Temperament™	Highest-Scoring Variables	Ranked by Frequency of Occurrence	Percent of Total Group	Ranked by Effectiveness
The Doer	Reliability + Intimacy (RI)	3	17%	1
The Connector	Intimacy + (low) Self-orientation (IS)	4	9%	2
The Catalyst	Credibility + Intimacy (CI)	5	8%	3
The Expert	Credibility + Reliability (CR)	1	38%	(tie) 4/5
The Steward	Reliability + (low) Self-orientation (RS)	2	21%	(tie) 4/5
The Professor	Credibility + (low) Self-orientation (CS)	6	7%	6

“Frequency” is occurrence over the entire respondent group of people who have taken the Trust Quotient Assessment. “Effectiveness” is a ranking of the average of all TQ scores by temperament; for example, respondents of the Doer temperament had higher TQ scores, on average, than respondents of all other temperaments.

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TRUST TEMPERAMENT FREQUENCIES AND RANKINGS

By a wide margin, the most common Trust Temperament™ across our 72,880 respondents is The Expert (38%)—those whose natural inclination is to lead with credibility and reliability. However, the data show that this combination is tied for next-to-last in overall trustworthiness, making it one of the least effective. The Professor—another type typically recognized for intellect and expertise—ranks last.

The trustworthiest of all is The Doer, the one who naturally leads with reliability and intimacy.

While intimacy and reliability have are somewhat stronger drivers of trustworthiness than credibility and self-orientation, we suggest the issue not a simple one of either-or, and is better viewed in terms of necessity versus sufficiency. For example, being smart may be necessary to get the interview, but it's the soft skills that get you the job.

HOW DO THE INDIVIDUAL CRIS SCORES RELATE TO THE OVERALL TRUST QUOTIENT?

Another finding is that the more consistent or balanced the individual CRIS scores for any individual, the higher the overall TQ. In contrast, the higher the standard deviation amongst the scores, the lower the TQ.

This highlights the importance of integrity. We place less trust in people who appear imbalanced or inconsistent; they do not seem whole, or integral, to us.

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The 360 View: Are We As Trustworthy As Others Think We Are?

A frequently raised question is how we see ourselves compared to how others see us. A small subset of the entire database took the self-assessment and then asked internal and external raters to anonymously fill out the same questionnaire. Three primary conclusions arise from the data:

Participants tend to think less highly of themselves than their professional contacts think of them.

- ▶ Participants tend to think less highly of themselves than others think of them. The subset of participants in this sample rated themselves overall at 82.6, while their contacts, both internal and external, rated them 87.1 on average.

- ▶ There is an even greater discrepancy for women; women rated themselves overall at 83.9, while their raters assessed them at 88.5.
- ▶ In general, clients think even more highly of participants than did their peers; external raters gave participants an overall score of 89.7, compared with internal ratings of 85.7.

COMPARISON OF SELF-RATINGS TO RATINGS BY OTHERS

Self Rating	82.6
Internal Raters	85.7
External Raters	89.7

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Going against conventional wisdom:

Trustworthiness can be learned

Are you better off fixing your weaknesses or leading with your strengths? Some business leaders make the case that to improve performance, it's best to focus on leveraging strengths.

This makes a great deal of sense in many areas. But when it comes to trust-building, the opposite is demonstrably true. Improving weaknesses, which has the effect of lowering the standard deviation among CRIS scores, raises perceived overall trustworthiness. Even minor improvements can have a major impact.

When it comes to trust-building,
improving weaknesses raises perceived
overall trustworthiness.

How can you *use the data* to improve your business?

Companies can use these findings to have a rapid impact on employees' trustworthiness; the data offer insights into the steps that will produce the greatest return:

- ▶ **Move the emphasis off credibility.** Credibility (credentials, expertise, qualifications), on which most companies place a premium, is the least helpful in building trust. An emphasis on soft skills is more effective at building trust-based relationships.
- ▶ **Work to improve intimacy and self-orientation.** The soft skills can be learned, and offer a clear path forward for an organization to have a real and sustained impact on the trustworthiness of their people. The ability to make others feel safe, to demonstrate understanding, and to show empathy and personal vulnerability are keys to building trust.

Most companies don't do enough to develop these kinds of skills. Our findings suggest this is a missed opportunity.
- ▶ **Build a culture** that helps individuals lower their self-orientation – one that values long-term orientation, collaborative work, transparency, and personal connection. This kind of organizational focus makes it possible to reap the benefits of stronger external relationships and greater trust among team members.

Trusted Advisor Associates LLC is a management consultancy with a global practice in helping individuals and organizations become trusted advisors to their clients and customers. We offer Trust Diagnostics™ for individuals and organizations, as well as learning programs, and executive coaching. The company was founded by Charles H. Green.



CHARLES H. GREEN is the author of *The Trusted Advisor* (with David Maister and Robert Galford), *Trust-based Selling*, and *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook* (with Andrea P. Howe). He's known as an original thinker on the subjects of business culture, management mores in a flat world, collaboration, innovation, and the central role of trust. Charlie spent over 20 years of his career at major consulting firms before forming Trusted Advisor Associates LLC. A graduate of Harvard Business School, he combines a rigorous intellectual discipline with humor and practical, lively advice for individuals, businesses, and the world at large.

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TO TAKE THE TRUST QUOTIENT ASSESSMENT YOURSELF, GO TO:

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KRISTIN ABELE is the Director of Diagnostics at Trusted Advisor Associates. She manages the Trust Quotient (TQ) assessment and the Multi-Rater Assessment (360), products of our diagnostics division. These tools offer an in-depth look at the trustworthiness of professionals and the organizations in which they work. Kristin works directly with our larger clients, including Fortune 500 (and equivalents globally), as well as with higher education institutions.

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