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# PEOPLE BEHAVING BADLY: HOW YOU CAN Raise Trust IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

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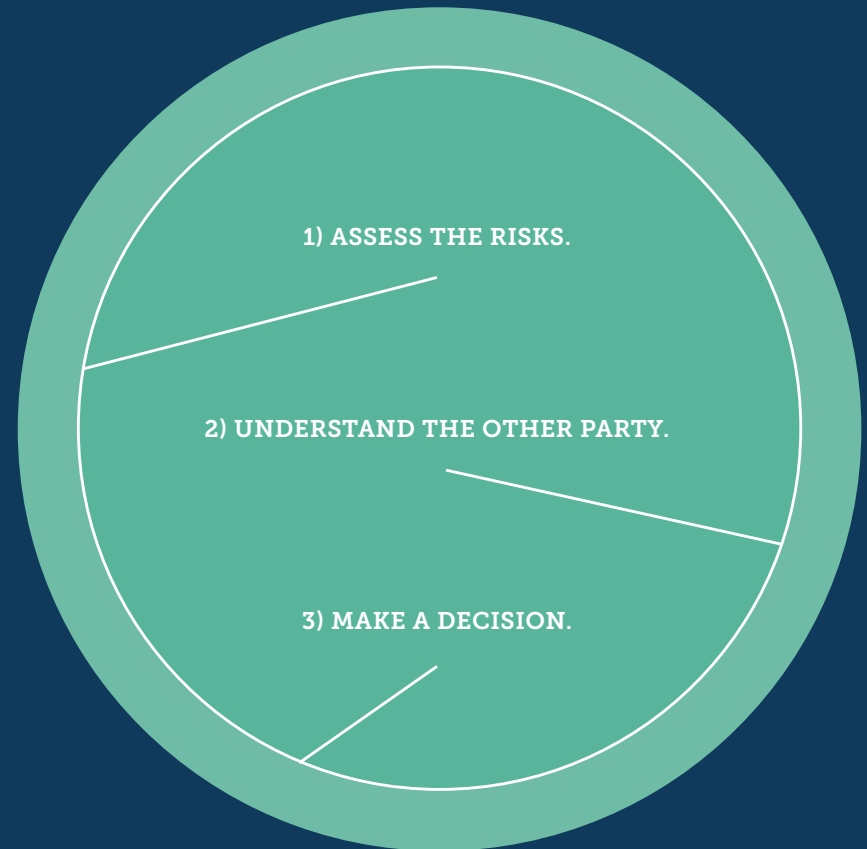
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**Abstracted from** *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook: A Comprehensive Toolkit for Leading with Trust*, by **Charles H. Green** and **Andrea P. Howe**. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. October, 2011.  
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(Abstracted from *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*)

## THREE STEPS TO CONSTRUCTIVE CONFRONTATION



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# *People Behaving Badly: How YOU Can Raise Trust in Your Organization*

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One of the most frequent reservations we hear about leading with trust is: “I would love to conduct myself like that, but I don’t trust my boss [or my colleagues] to act the same way.” This sentiment generally underestimates what you can accomplish on your own.

There is no organization with a perfect track record on trust. And there is no denying that there are real challenges facing you when you want to behave in trustworthy and trusting manners. When you feel surrounded by untrustworthy people, your first instinct may be to minimize your risk. Here’s the result if you follow that instinct—you will be sucked into the vortex of low trust yourself.

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Remember, there is no trust without risk (see Six Risks You Should Take to Build Trust). It is the act of taking risks that creates trust, and there is no more powerful application of this principle than your relationship to others in your own organization.

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# Dealing with Untrustworthy People

You may find yourself expressing reservations like these about your ability to lead with trust:

- “You don’t understand my boss. That just wouldn’t fly here.”
- “Oh, that would be a career-limiting move.”
- “I would love to work that way, but that’s just not how people do things in this organization.”
- “Until the CEO changes things, who am I to buck the system?”

These are all examples of what Phil McGee, CEO of The Wall Street Group in Jersey City, NJ, suggests are the two most corrosive qualities found in an organization: a tendency to blame others and an inability to constructively confront issues.

If you are serious about increasing the level of trust in an organization, you have to help lead the change. That's the hard-to-hear news. The good news is, if you are willing to lead with positive actions like truth-telling and constructive confrontation, trust is not only created—it becomes contagious.

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# Three Steps to Constructive Confrontation

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Let's look at a hypothetical—but very real—situation. Substitute your own circumstances if our case doesn't exactly apply to you.

Imagine you are a project manager, reporting to a senior person in charge of the customer relationship—the Client Relationship Manager or CRM. The project is scheduled to run 18 months. At the five-month mark, your projections show that you are going to be significantly late and over budget.

You feel the right thing to do is to discuss the situation with the client. Your CRM, however, wants to work on correcting the trends internally over the next six weeks,

saying, “We can fix this, and there’s nothing to be gained by getting the client upset. Let’s not mention the problem to them.”

You take the **three-question transparency test** to confirm your instincts to be candid with the client. Now what?

You may be tempted to do nothing. Inaction would avoid an uncomfortable argument with your CRM, as well as other potential unpleasantness. But if you give in to that temptation, you will fail to confront something you believe will destroy trust. And you will probably end up blaming someone else (the CRM, most likely). This is not a good outcome.

Notice that your fear of confronting your CRM is identical to your CRM’s fear of confronting the client. The same three-step approach works in both cases:

**1. Assess the risks.**

**2. Understand the other party.**

**3. Make a decision.**

## Step 1: Assess the Risks

Do not try to keep evaluating this issue in your head. Instead, make the issue tangible in a very simple way. Get out a pencil and paper:

- Draw two columns.** In one column, write something like: “Talk to CRM: Minuses and Pluses.” In the other column, write: “Don’t Talk to CRM: Minuses and Pluses.”
- Write down the worst-case result of talking to your CRM.** Start with the negative because it is uppermost in your mind—it will preoccupy you if you put it off. Write as much detail as you need to get the thought out. Now add the probability of that worst-case scenario actually happening.



- ❑ **Write down the pluses of talking to your CRM.** Assign probabilities.
- ❑ **Move on to the pluses and minuses of not talking to your CRM.** Assign probabilities.

People almost always overstate the consequences of near-term negative emotional interactions, and they understate the long-term positive business consequences of those same interactions. Forcing yourself to write out your assessment can bring you back to a more reasonable balance. If your page still suggests you avoid the conversation with your CRM, review it with a trusted friend or two, just to be sure.

If you arrive at the conclusion to talk to your CRM, go on to the next step. Otherwise, skip to “When Constructive Confrontation Doesn’t Work” (page 13).

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## Step 2: Understand the Other Party

Start by accepting that you may not convince your CRM. You have very little power to force change on other people. Your CRM is as prone to pressure and stress as you are. If you go in with arguments for your position, he is likely to dig in to his position. But if you make an attempt to listen sincerely, you will likely be listened to as well.

Approach your CRM with a request for help and an honest willingness to listen. You might say something like this:  
*"Bill, I need your help on something: I can't solve this problem on my own, and I very much want to solve it. The issue is the budget overrun projection. My instinct is to talk to the client. I'm pretty sure yours is not to do so.*

*“Where I need help is in truly understanding your thinking on this—I realize that I only really know my own point of view.*

*I ultimately want to be of one view, and that has to start with me understanding yours better. Will you help me?*

*“If I may suggest, could you approach it in simple pro/con terms for me—the pluses and the minuses of bringing it to the client now versus later? Again, I’d appreciate your helping me to understand your viewpoint here. I want us on the same page.”*

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## Step 3: Make a Decision

Be very careful not to be judgmental as you hear your CRM's response. If you have questions of clarification, ask them calmly. If your CRM has suggestions that seem unreasonable to you, ask for clarification with words like, "Help me understand how you would deal with the issue of...." Do not

get into an argument. If your CRM asks what you think, be brief and factual, and then listen to what he says in response. This is not the time for you to make your case.

If your CRM changes his mind in the meeting to your point of view, do not gloat. If you are very calm and happy with the result, say so. If you are still on the fence and feeling unresolved, you can say, "This has been very helpful. I want to sit on it for 24 hours, if I may, and get back to you."

# When Constructive Confrontation Doesn't Work

Sometimes you cannot engineer a constructive confrontation—you have tried everything and the other person continues to be untrustworthy in your view, yet you must still find a way to work together. You still have three options:

**1. Assume responsibility.** If the other party is concerned about the effect of an action you propose, offer to take on sole responsibility. You might say, “Give me six months to try out this approach. I’ll take responsibility for the results myself.”

**2. Clarify boundaries.** This strategy effectively counters vaguely threatening suggestions. For example, if you are being pressured to mislead a potential customer, you might say, “I just want to be clear here: I’m sure you’re not asking me to lie, are you?”

**3. Articulate your intentions.** This strategy helps clarify responsibility of others, as well as yourself, by stating out loud and for the record what you will do in a given situation. For example, “Just to be clear—and not that I’ll go looking for confrontation—if someone asks me a direct question about this issue, I will give them a direct answer.” Done right, it is not a threat but a prediction, around which others can plan. It can also bring others to action by your example.

## When to Walk Away

Even if you reframe the situation and follow the best practices for dealing with trust conflicts, there may be times when there is a pattern of no resolution. Some bosses and colleagues will continue to behave in ways that are not trustworthy.

Knowing when and how to choose your battles is important. Determine where your personal ethical boundaries lie. Is this a big enough issue for you to walk away? What does walk mean? Lose the sale? Transfer departments? Leave the organization?

Be careful here: people overrate the incidence of truly unrecoverable situations. At the same time, it is also true that if you have no principles worth fighting for, you have none worth living for.

# Leading with Trust

Every trust-challenged relationship requires someone to take the first step in turning it around—someone to lead with trust. And almost everyone, not just you, is scared to take the first step. Remember that the downside of risk is almost always

overstated, while the upside of risk is almost always understated. If you don't attempt to increase trust, odds are no one will. If you do, the short and long-term rewards are yours to reap.

*Every trust-challenged relationship requires someone to take the first step in turning it around—someone to lead with trust.*



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Charles H. Green** is founder and CEO of Trusted Advisor Associates. The author of *Trust-based Selling* and co-author of *The Trusted Advisor*, he has spoken to, consulted for or done seminars about trusted relationships for, or business for a wide and global range of industries and functions. Centering on the theme of trust in business relationships, Charles works with complex organizations to improve trust in sales, internal trust between organizations, and trusted advisor relationships with external clients and customers.

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**Andrea P. Howe** has been in the consulting profession for 20 years. From 1992 to 2000, she worked for AMS, a \$1B technology consulting firm. Today, Andrea's clients include top global firms in accounting, consulting, and other professional services. A skilled facilitator, she has designed and delivered hundreds of off-sites, workshops, presentations, and learning programs.

Follow Andrea on Twitter at: **@andreaphowe**

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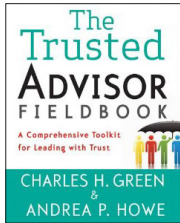
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