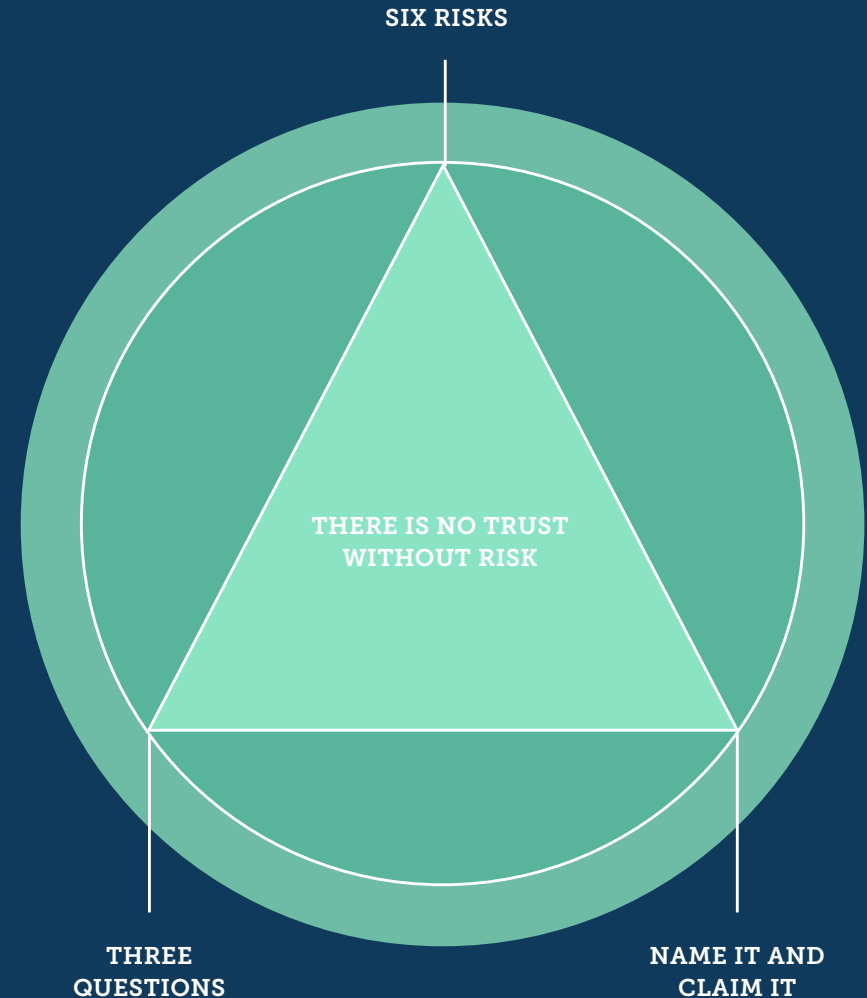


# Six Risks YOU SHOULD TAKE TO BUILD TRUST

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(Abstracted from *The Trusted Advisor Fieldbook*)  
Six Risks You Should Take to Build Trust



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# Six Risks You Should Take to Build Trust

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There is no trust without risk. Those who avoid risk lose priceless trust-building opportunities, while those who master risk-taking learn what is paradoxically the greatest risk mitigation strategy.

## **Consider this true story:**

*A client of ours we'll call Jared describes being in a sales meeting. At a key point during the meeting, Jared's potential clients became silent in a way that made Jared feel uncomfortable. The awkward moment passed, and the meeting proceeded.*

*During the debriefing, Jared and his colleagues discovered they had all been uncomfortable with the silence. They had no idea how to interpret it. Jared recounted, "We couldn't tell if they were quiet because they were turned off, or because they were really impressed!"*

Jared and his colleagues wanted very much to be seen as trusted advisors to their prospective clients. But choosing

not to comment on the silence led to a missed opportunity for trust-building and new business.

More often than not, the simple reason Jared (and others) don't comment is fear. Fear of expressing something awkward. Fear of some kind of backlash. Fear of hearing an unpleasant answer. Jared allowed fear to suppress his natural curiosity. That's normal. It's also a barrier to trust that can be overcome.

*Those who avoid risk lose priceless trust-building opportunities, while those who master risk-taking learn **what is paradoxically the greatest risk mitigation strategy.***

# Taking Risks Reduces Risk

The relationship between trust and risk is paradoxical. A relationship characterized by deep trust is a “safe haven,” which implies the absence of risk when in fact it is just the opposite—an environment where risks that serve the relationship can be taken any time and are taken often. Risk-taking naturally increases intimacy, which increases trust. And more trust ultimately leads to less risk

for all parties. Risk is to trust as inoculation is to immunity. Small doses of risk taken early mitigate much larger risks later. The best way to reduce risk in a relationship is—paradoxically—to take risks in a relationship. Taking risks means having the courage to respond with curiosity and authenticity in a moment of truth. Risk-taking requires that you go outside your own comfort zone for

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the benefit of the relationship. You expand your willingness and ability to tolerate ambiguity and exposure. People know where they stand with you and have a real sense of who you are as a professional and as a person.

Recall Jared and his team. By not acknowledging their clients' silence, they overvalued the emotional risk of causing an awkward moment and undervalued the longer-term benefit of understanding what their clients needed and where they stood.

Taking risks increases trust, and the more you take risks, the better you'll become at risk-taking. So look for opportunities to take risks.

*Look for  
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# Six Risks You Should Take

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**1. Tackle ambiguity.** Jared, the salesperson mentioned earlier, could have turned ambiguity into opportunity by saying something like: “Hmmm ... I’m not sure how to interpret the silence in the room.” Or he could have used a little humor: “Gee, that silence is getting pretty loud—it’s got my collar feeling a little tight (gesture to his collar). Any advice on how we should interpret it?”

The second example seems the riskiest, because it both reveals discomfort and invites others to open up. For those very reasons, it is also likely to build the most trust and lead to the most productive outcome. More often than not, your willingness to address things will be met with gratitude.

**2. Acknowledge uncomfortable situations.**

Caveats are conversational jewels.

Examples include:

- “Wow, this is awkward ...”
- “I wish I had better news ...”
- “The timing with this is embarrassing ...”

### 3. Deliver bad news promptly and concisely.

Practice doing it in 10 words or less. Examples include:

- "We're not going to make the deadline."
- "We just don't have the executive sponsorship we need."
- "Jim is leaving the team."

The direct approach works especially well in combination with caveats.

### 4. Take responsibility for mistakes.

No one likes to call attention to the things that have not been done well.

It is also human to make mistakes and refreshingly real to be candid about them.

"Janet, part of the problem here is that I failed to meet my commitments."

*Reciprocity applies to risk-taking as well as to listening. You never know what might open up out of your willingness to share.*

**5. Be willing to express emotions.** Your thoughts and feelings are legitimate too.

Examples:

- “Johannes, I must confess to feeling pretty frustrated by what you just said.”
- “You have no idea how happy I am to hear that.”

**6. Share something personal.** The next time you are doing the Monday morning “how-was-your-weekend-fine-thanks-yours?” exchange, don’t stop at the superficial. Try something like this: “My weekend was great, Surita, thanks for asking. My parents were in town, and Sam and I really enjoyed the babysitting they offered. We got a much-needed break.” Reciprocity applies to risk-taking as well as to listening. You never know what might open up out of your willingness to share.



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# *The Hard Truth: To Tell or Not to Tell?*

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Most of us probably agree in theory with the principle of transparency—being honest, open, and candid (except when illegal or injurious to others). On the surface, it is easy to say, “Honesty is the best policy!” Dig a little deeper and it is not so clear.

The principle of transparency is hard to live by. It’s risky. It takes courage. And it takes a certain level of discernment to figure out when sidestepping the truth is hurtful versus helpful.

Let’s look at some business examples to make this real—cases where you know something that your partner does not (or might not), and you wonder, “To tell or not to tell?”

- You've discovered a mistake in your work.** The impact is relatively minor. Does it help or hurt your relationship with your boss to call attention to it?
- You discover a mistake in your client's work.** The impact is significant. So is the likelihood of embarrassment (or worse) for your client. Are you honoring or dishonoring the relationship by saying nothing?
- You learn something unfavorable about a competitor**—one your customer is currently engaged with. Are you the hero or the jerk if you bring it up?

Sometimes a lie by omission seems like a very reasonable option. So how do you know if you should tell a client an unpleasant truth? Use the three-question transparency test.

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# The Three- Question Transparency Test

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- Is your reason for not telling for your benefit, or theirs?** Look for a personal motive behind the business justification. Consider whether it is truly in your partner's best interest to say nothing or whether your desire to avoid your own discomfort is creating a platform for rationalization.

- If you don't tell and he finds out later, will he feel misled?** This question invites you to see the situation from your partner's vantage point, which is always a good practice when it comes to relationship-building. And, if you are banking on the fact that he won't find out later, check your probabilities ... and your motives.
- Would you tell her if she were your friend?** This question cuts to the chase and invites you to set aside the arm's length decorum that defines most business relationships.

If at any point your answer is yes, find a way to say what needs to be said with compassion and diplomacy.

# How to Tell Unpleasant Truths: Name It and Claim It

Name It and Claim It is a tool for making difficult conversations easier. Use it to speak about the unspeakable in socially acceptable terms. We call it Name It and Claim It because when you “name it” you claim your power—not as in power over someone, but as in power with another. Unspoken

issues have a corrosive effect on relationships, sometimes in an obvious way, sometimes more subtly. Name It and Claim It restores power to the relationship.

Here’s how Name It and Claim It works:

**1. Define the issue.**

Get clear about the message you have to deliver. Articulate the issue simply and clearly, preferably in 10 words or less.

*Unspoken issues have a corrosive effect on relationships, sometimes in an obvious way, sometimes more subtly.*

**2. List all your concerns about speaking the issue.** These are the worries and fears that leave you reluctant to have the difficult conversation. For example, you might not be 100 percent confident in your assessment about executive sponsorship. You might also be concerned that you might offend someone by saying it.

**3. Turn your concerns into one or more caveats.** A caveat is a short phrase that you will use as a warning or cautionary detail. For example, “I may be completely missing the mark here” and “I sure don’t want to step on any toes.”

**4. Put it all together.** Combine your brief description of the issue (Step 1) with your caveats (Step 3) and deliver the news: “I may be completely missing the mark here, and I sure don’t want to step on any toes. I’m concerned we don’t have the executive sponsorship we need.”

## Are You Willing to Go First?

Trust and risk go hand in hand. A trust-based relationship exists because someone has taken a chance. While levels of risk may vary by relationship or situation, risk is always present. If you never feel uncomfortable or even scared sometimes, you are not being a trusted advisor. And if you think or say, “There isn’t enough trust in the relationship to take that risk,” check your thinking. It is the **taking of risks** that creates trust in the

first place. Becoming a trusted advisor means becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. Fortunately, practice will make you a better risk taker.

*A trust-based relationship exists because someone has taken a chance.*

## 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.

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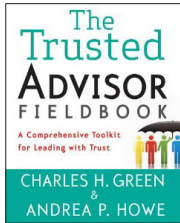
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