



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

---

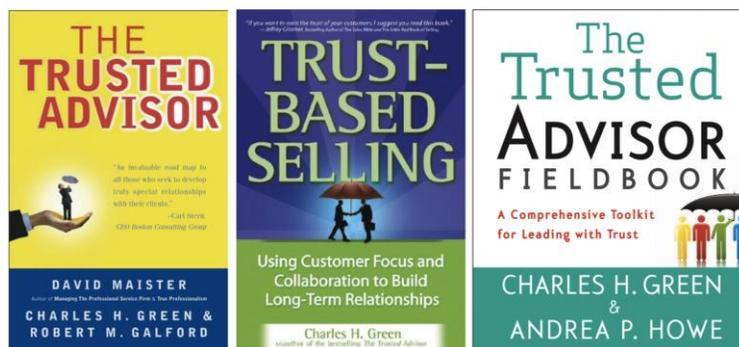
By Charles H. Green, Sandra Styer and Bob Bowers

Trusted Advisor Associates LLC, a management consultancy focused on the role of trust in business, analyzed the data from what is arguably the world's largest study of personal trustworthiness, based on data gathered from 63,939 respondents who took the Trust Quotient Assessment between 2008 and 2014.

The data are based on founder Charles H. Green's Trust Quotient Assessment—a proprietary self-assessment instrument that measures trustworthiness as a composite of four components: Credibility, Reliability, Intimacy, and Self-orientation. Each respondent's trust score was determined by answers to 20 questions—five questions for each of the four components—which were 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 frequently not the smartest way to increase trustworthiness or to expand your business.

In this White Paper we suggest that companies should focus more on soft skills when it comes to building trust with clients, suppliers, and colleagues. In determining trustworthiness, we address the roles of gender, age, and industry affiliation, as well as regional and cultural differences. These and other trust-related questions are answered in a study conducted by Trusted Advisor Associates LLC.



## what makes us trustworthy?

The Trust Quotient score is a measure of how respondents rated themselves on the four subcomponents 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 and empathetic all make people trust us.
- Self-orientation – The more people feel we are focused on ourselves, rather than on them, the *less* they trust us.

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

### The Trust Quotient Equation:

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

The literal Trust Quotient or “TQ” calculation is based on this equation; it yields a possible range of scores from 0.6 to 15. The average TQ across all respondents was 7.1

*Reliability was the most commonly reported strength – BUT it’s not the most effective .*

Our studies found that the most commonly reported strength for participants was Reliability. For 41% of respondents, this was the highest component score (or tied for highest).

However, for comparative purposes in this paper we discuss 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. In these terms, the average score was 82.5.

By contrast, Intimacy and low Self-orientation were the least often reported strengths; only 18% of respondents led with Intimacy, and 19% with favorable (meaning low) Self-orientation. *We show later that neither Credibility nor Reliability is the key to developing trust; rather it’s the soft skills. These are not innate, unchanging characteristics; all can be improved.*

## some key findings at a glance: trust ratings by gender, age, location, and job

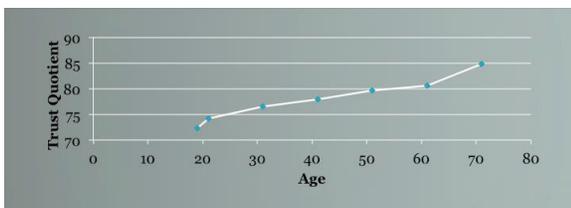
### Are women more trustworthy than men?

Overall, women rated themselves as more trustworthy, 83.9 than men at 82.2 – a statistically significant difference of 1.7. The differences are instructive: women and men score almost equally on Credibility and Self-orientation. Women have an edge in Reliability – 21.9 vs. 21.5. But the big difference lies in the factor of Intimacy, where women on average are 0.8 points higher – 20.6 vs. 19.8. Thus much of the gender difference derives from higher scores in the key factor of Intimacy.

### What's the relationship between age and trustworthiness?

One of the strongest correlations in the Trust Quotient (TQ) study is the linking of trustworthiness and age. The older we get, the more trustworthy we are – or at least think we are. In our classroom work, we have found significant commonsensical support for this finding.

Interestingly, the increase in overall TQ is driven by nearly equal increases in each of the component scores as we age, indicating that we feel we have become more Credible, more Reliable, better at Intimacy, and less Self-oriented.



### Do cultural differences matter?

When broken down by global region, the overall data show there are more similarities than differences between people answering the assessment. Highest in overall TQ scores is the US at 82.3, while Japan comes in with the lowest overall of 75.6.

*However, we strongly caution against drawing conclusions based on aggregate single-point data across cultures – trust is a culturally complex phenomenon.*

Japan	75.6
Latin America	79.3
Europe	80.0
China	81.0
Asia Pacific	81.7
US	82.3

### How does trustworthiness vary by industry or job?

Again overall, there are few discernible patterns at the job and industry level. As a broad statement, those with jobs requiring high personal interaction such as general management, training, and sales tend to rate higher than those in more solitary roles such as research, accounting, and legal. The same loose pattern holds true when looking at results aggregated by industry.

**These data underscore that trustworthiness is a personal attribute, broadly distributed across all industries.**

This also suggests a large opportunity – no matter what industry you’re in – to differentiate

yourself by building a business with high concentrations of trustworthy people.

## a surprising finding: intimacy trumps expertise in building trustworthiness

*What trumps expertise in building trust? The surprising answer is this: Intimacy.*

We noticed that for a majority of respondents, the top two component scores formed a clear “leading pair,” indicating areas of strength. Based on these survey results, Trusted Advisor

Associates has developed six distinct Trust Temperaments™ by looking at these leading pairs. These Temperaments are indicators of an individual’s natural inclinations when it comes to building trust.

We then compared the overall TQ ratings of the Temperaments with one another; the chart below shows how Intimacy is the shared component among the top-scoring Temperaments.

### Trust Temperaments™ Ranked by Effectiveness

Trust Temperament™	Strongest in	Ranked by Frequency of Occurrence	Percent of Total Group	Ranked by Effectiveness
<b>RI – The Doer</b>	Reliability + <b>Intimacy</b>	3	19%	<b>1</b>
<b>CI – The Catalyst</b>	Credibility + <b>Intimacy</b>	4	11%	<b>2</b>
<b>IS – The Connector</b>	<b>Intimacy</b> + Self-orientation	5/6	10%	<b>3</b>
<b>CR – The Expert</b>	Credibility + Reliability	1	30%	4
<b>RS – The Steward</b>	Reliability + Self-orientation	2	20%	5
<b>CS – The Professor</b>	Credibility + Self-orientation	5/6	10%	6

*“Frequency” is occurrence over the entire respondent group of people who have taken the Trust Quotient assessment. “Effectiveness” is a ranking of their overall scores on the numeric Trust Quotient. Here Self-orientation indicates low Self-orientation, or favorable S scores.*

These Trust Temperaments are our innate preferences for building trust with others. They are the strengths we draw on spontaneously and naturally. Most people can act in a way that looks and functions like another Temperament – or set of Temperaments – as different situations require, but in our classroom work we’ve noted that people usually find it exhausting to go far outside their innate type for long periods.

## Trust Temperament Frequencies and Rankings

By a wide margin, the most common Trust Temperament across the 63,939 respondents was The Expert—those whose trustworthiness is based foremost on Credibility and Reliability; 30% of the pool ranked themselves as Experts. However, the data show that this combination scored fourth in overall trustworthiness, making it one of the less effective trustworthiness strategies.

The component that is shared in the three highest scoring temperaments is Intimacy, an ability to connect with other people and make them feel safe.

The data shows that the most trustworthy of the Trust Temperaments is The Doer, the one who is strongest in Reliability and Intimacy. This is the PTA President, the kindly drill sergeant, the person who gets things done. Over 40% of the respondents in the survey led with Reliability; when combined with Intimacy, it's the most powerful formula for building trust.

*The kindly drill sergeant –  
the one who is strongest  
in Reliability and Intimacy –  
is the most trustworthy  
Trust Temperament.*

Intriguingly, those we credit for their expertise or subject-matter knowledge – The Expert and The Professor – scored lower in overall trustworthiness. This suggests that skill mastery and knowledge are among the least effective means for building trust. Ironically, this is what most companies emphasize when they think of building client trust.

### How do the Trust Component Scores relate to the overall Trust Quotient?

An interesting finding in the data is that the more consistent the trust component scores for any individual, the higher the overall Trust Quotient. The highest Trust Quotient shows up in those who have balanced component scores. In contrast, the higher the standard deviation between the four component scores, the lower the Trust Quotient total.

**This highlights the importance of integrity. We do not trust those who are erratic or inconsistent; they do not seem whole, or integral..**

## the 360 view: are we as trustworthy as others think we are?

Another frequently raised question is how we see ourselves compared to how others see us. A

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

then asked colleagues (internal raters) and clients (external raters) to anonymously fill out the same

small subset of the entire database took the Trust Quotient Assessment themselves and

questionnaire. Three primary conclusions arise from the data:

- Participants tend to think less highly of themselves than their professional contacts think of them. The subset of participants in this sample rated themselves overall at 82.6, while their contacts, internal and external, rated them 87.1 on average.
- Our findings also show a greater discrepancy for women in their self-ratings and the ratings of them by colleagues and clients. Women rated themselves overall at 83.9, while the combined colleagues and clients rating of them was 88.5.
- In general, clients thought even more highly of the 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

## going against conventional wisdom: trustworthiness can be taught

*Trustworthiness can be  
taught, and learned*

Are you better off fixing your weaknesses or leading with your strengths? Some business leaders make the case that to improve performance, people and businesses should leverage their strengths rather than concentrate on fixing their weaknesses.

This makes a great deal of sense in areas of skills mastery. But when it comes to trust, the

opposite is demonstrably true. By becoming aware of an imbalance in their trustworthiness strategies and working to correct that imbalance, individuals can strengthen their overall trustworthiness.

By focusing on even minor improvements in their weak components, people see a major impact on their overall ability to build trust. Our studies found that improving weaknesses, which has the effect of lowering the standard deviation among components, raises their trust scores.

## how can you *use the data* to improve your business?

Companies can use these findings to make a measurable – and rapid – impact on their employees' trustworthiness; the data offer insights into the steps that will produce the greatest return.

- **Move the emphasis off Credibility.** Credibility (credentials and skill mastery), on which most companies place a premium, is the least helpful in building trust. More skills training alone won't build trust relationships.
- **Instead, work to increase Intimacy.** Intimacy skills *can* be taught and learned, and offer perhaps the best path forward for most companies to make a real and sustained impact on the trustworthiness of

their people. The ability to make others feel safe, and to show empathy and personal vulnerability are keys to building trust.

Most companies, however, do little to develop the intimacy skills of their people. Our findings suggest this is a missed opportunity.

- **Build a culture** which helps individuals lower their Self-orientation, look at the longer term, and work collaboratively. Moving the focus on to the long term and away from the short term, and on to relationships rather than transactions, helps build trust relationships. This allows companies to reap the benefits of stronger client relationships and greater trust among team members.

**Trusted Advisor Associates LLC** is a management consultancy with a world-wide practice in helping individuals and organizations become trusted advisors to their clients and customers. Trusted Advisor Associates offers services in Trust Diagnostics™ at the individual and organizational levels, 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). Charles H. Green is 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.

**Contact:** 973.714.4451 • [cgreen@trustedadvisor.com](mailto:cgreen@trustedadvisor.com) • [www.trustedadvisor.com](http://www.trustedadvisor.com)



**Sandy Styer**, also a graduate of Harvard Business School, has spent most of her career in the corporate world, developing new products, bringing new ideas to market, and leading organizational change. She heads the Trust Diagnostics™ practice at Trusted Advisor Associates LLC. To learn more about assessing and building trust within your organization, contact Sandy Styer.

**Contact:** 973.625.9390 • [sstyer@trustedadvisor.com](mailto:sstyer@trustedadvisor.com) • [www.trustedadvisor.com](http://www.trustedadvisor.com)



**Soliant Consulting** specializes in custom software development for business process improvement and workgroup collaboration. “We are a band of creative business consultants and developers who have a passion for well-architected information systems, for building efficient applications, and most of all for solving real problems.

Our culture is one of service, and our primary focus lies with crafting excellent, relevant systems that make a positive impact on our clients’ businesses.

Soliant Consulting creates data applications that support business process improvement in organizations around the country. We focus on rapid application development tools, specializing in Adobe® Flex™, FileMaker® Pro, Web/ PHP, and Salesforce.com.”

**Contact:** Bob Bowers, CEO • 312.850.3830 • [bbowers@soliantconsulting.com](mailto:bbowers@soliantconsulting.com) • [www.soliantconsulting.com](http://www.soliantconsulting.com)

**To take the Trust Quotient Assessment yourself, go to: [trustsuite.trustedadvisor.com](http://trustsuite.trustedadvisor.com)**