

A Shared Meaning of Trust

By [Del Craig](#)

Most would agree that *trust* is a cornerstone to long-lasting and healthy relationships. Yet most people wouldn't agree on its definition, or whether it is given or earned. Leaders in public, private and non-profit organizations often identify trust as an important value or guiding principle within their culture. Yet it is rare to find a business where a shared definition is communicated clearly across the organization.

The definition I've found most effective both personally and professionally is centered around three words: Consistency, Competency and Integrity.

- **Consistency:** When someone asks you to do something, you do it! Perhaps not instantly, but the person making the request knows they can count on you to *Git-R-Done* in a timely fashion.
- **Competency:** Not only can the individual making the request count on you to do it each and every time, but also that you'll perform the request *well*. They know they can count on you for a job well done.
- **Integrity:** Finally, not only can they count on you to be consistent and competent, but you'll also do it for the right reason. You do it because you were asked to without fanfare or personal motive, simply because you are fulfilling a request and it's the right thing to do.

Each time I've asked myself, "How have I violated someone's trust?", I can look back and identify my shortcomings in one of these three areas.

How is trust, which is such an important element of culture, defined in your family business? The need for a "clear and shared" definition is invaluable if you hope to build and maintain strong, lasting relationships. If you haven't already, I encourage you to lead your family and employees in developing a definition of trust and communicating it clearly and often.

Improving Trust

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

Do you trust your partners?

Often, amidst family business conflict, the trust level between individuals has been damaged. People have been hurt. And that pain can limit the willingness to reinvest emotions, time, energy or capital in individuals or the enterprise. But if the trust level between partners is to improve, two other things, beyond Del's helpful suggestion of defining trust, must be done.

First, **communication between family members must increase**. Even if heated, awkward or uncomfortable, *more* communication provides the opportunity for the individual characteristics of Del's definition to become visible. More discussion prevents harmful assumptions, clarifies misunderstandings and allows behavior to be explained. Increased interaction allows the *evidence* of consistency, competency and integrity – or whatever definition of trust your family develops – to emerge. (More communication may instead provide certainty that you *shouldn't* be in business together, but that's a topic for another time.)

Second, **family members must voice their expectations of one another**. Think about it: the damage to trust often comes because a family member behaved differently than expected. For example, they shared confidential information, or they hid information, or they didn't seek enough information. They overstepped their authority, they treated someone poorly, or they made a decision that had ruinous consequences. Generally, they did something you consider to be wrong.

To strengthen trust, it helps to lay out what is expected, as much as possible, in advance. In a non-family or more professional business, these expectations are often spelled out in job descriptions, performance evaluations, feedback sessions, organizational charts, spending limits, financial reviews, or clear statements of culture and mission. But in family businesses, such tools often aren't utilized. People think that "being family," that is, being informal and casual because of our history and relationships, removes the need to be more official in our approach.



The point is that more frequent communication and more formal, professional tools **draw out the expectations** of family members and provide an opportunity to **communicate and be on the same page**. Such elements are foundational to improving trust in your family business.

Restoring Broken Trust (Genesis 45:1-15)

By [Bill Long](#)

When trust is broken, can it ever be restored? The central theme explored in the Biblical story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50) is whether a family which has been fractured by strife can ever be put back together again.

You recall the main points. Joseph, the gifted 11th son of Jacob and Rachel, lords it over his brothers, telling them he has a dream that they will all bow down to him. Enraged at this arrogant display, the older brothers throw Joseph into a pit and then sell him to passing traders, giving him up for dead. We readers know, however, that Joseph is rescued and taken to Egypt, where he assumes a high position in Pharaoh's administration. Later, when famine strikes Israel, Joseph's brothers have to go to Egypt to beg food from Joseph. The shoe is now completely on the other foot.

Jacob the father is numbed by grief thinking he has lost Joseph; we as readers get the feeling that the family is on the brink of catastrophe. When the brothers appear before Joseph asking for food, the story reaches a critical point. Will Joseph exact revenge on his brothers? In fact, we have in Genesis 45 one of the great stories of reconciliation and restored trust in the Bible.

Three brief points relating to restored trust come out of this moving passage. First, trust was restored when the brothers each recognized their vulnerability. The 10 brothers are at Joseph's mercy but Joseph realizes that if he exacts vengeance it will destroy his father, a father he craves to see. Trust is restored when each side **recognizes the fact that they need the other** and that they have an incomplete identity apart from each other.

Second, trust is restored when Joseph interprets the situation before him in light of God's purposes and not his own. Rather than lording it over his brothers, he simply says, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth...so it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:7-8). That is, in the midst of enormous tension, Joseph **chooses to see it as God's action in their lives**, and not the result of faulty human decisions.

Finally, trust is restored when the brothers actually express intimate acts of love for each other. I am not talking about just a handshake. The passage closes: "Then he (Joseph) fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept...and he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him" (Gen 45:12-15). **Trust is restored when families embrace** and weep and kiss, when they share their deepest emotions with one another.

Restoring trust is possible, but it is a tall order indeed. Take lessons from Joseph and his brothers, and perhaps you will see that the best days of your family are yet to come.

For more family business lessons from the story of Joseph and his brothers, see our [book](#).

