

THE 5 ESSENTIALS OF TRUST

From Dr. Henry Cloud, NYT Best-Selling Author of *Boundaries* and *Trust*

Trust is the fuel for all of life. Nothing in our world works without it. These five essentials help us know what to look for in others and what to live out ourselves. Each one includes a **working definition**, a **real-world example**, and a **reflection question** for personal application.

THE EVIDENCE Why Trust Matters		
50% higher productivity <small>Dr. Paul Zak, HBR Neuroscience Research</small>	76% more engagement <small>High-trust vs. low-trust companies</small>	Only 21% of employees trust leadership <small>Gallup Workplace Survey</small>
1	Understanding	
Trust begins when people feel known. The task is to listen and understand what others want, feel, and value. When someone feels that you truly understand them, the brain shifts from guarded to open, and trust takes its first step. Red Flag: You skip listening and go straight to trying to convince. People comply but never fully trust you.	In Practice: Before presenting your solution in a meeting, you ask: "Help me understand what matters most to you on this." You listen fully before responding. The other person feels heard, and trust takes its first step. Reflect: When was the last time you made someone feel truly understood?	
2	Motive	
Understanding alone is not enough. People need to know your motive is right, meaning you are genuinely for their good and not just your own. When motive is to benefit others and not just ourselves, everyone profits. Red Flag: You help others only when there is something in it for you. People sense the calculation and withhold trust.	In Practice: A colleague asks for your input on their proposal. Instead of positioning yourself to look good, you give honest feedback focused on making their work stronger, even when no one else is watching. Reflect: Do the people around you believe you are genuinely for their success?	
3	Ability	
Understanding and good motive must be supported by ability. Someone can be caring, honest, and well-intentioned but still not be the right person to trust in a specific context. Ability means they can deliver what you are trusting them to deliver. Red Flag: You trust people based on how much you like them rather than whether they can actually deliver in that specific area.	In Practice: You need someone to lead a safety initiative across three production lines. Your best friend at work is trustworthy and hardworking, but has never managed cross-functionally. You choose the person with the proven operational experience instead. Reflect: Are you clear about what you are trusting each person in your life to deliver?	
4	Character	
Character is more than honesty and ethics, though those are bedrock. It also includes the personal traits and makeup of qualities needed for what you are trusting someone to do. If you cannot believe a person, you have nothing to stand on. Red Flag: Someone talks a great game publicly but behaves differently behind closed doors. Duplicity erodes trust faster than any single failure.	In Practice: You notice a team member is consistent: the same person in public and private, transparent about mistakes, and accountable without being reminded. That consistency earns deeper trust than charisma ever could. Reflect: Are you the same person in every room you walk into?	
5	Track Record	
What someone has done before is the best indicator of what will happen next. When we trust someone, we place ourselves in a vulnerable position. A proven track record reduces the risk of that vulnerability and raises the odds considerably. Red Flag: You give someone full trust based on a promise with no evidence. Hope is not a strategy for trust decisions.	In Practice: Before promoting someone to a supervisor, you review their history: Have they met commitments consistently? Have they handled pressure? Have they owned mistakes? The pattern tells you more than the interview. Reflect: What does your own track record say about you to the people who depend on you?	
KC'S COACHING TIP The Trust Audit		
Before you decide whether to trust someone, run them through all five essentials. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they understand you? • Is their motive for your good? • Do they have the ability to deliver? • Does their character hold up under pressure? • What does their track record actually show? Five questions. One honest answer for each. That is your trust decision.		

