

Trust is at the Heart  
*of*  
Everything

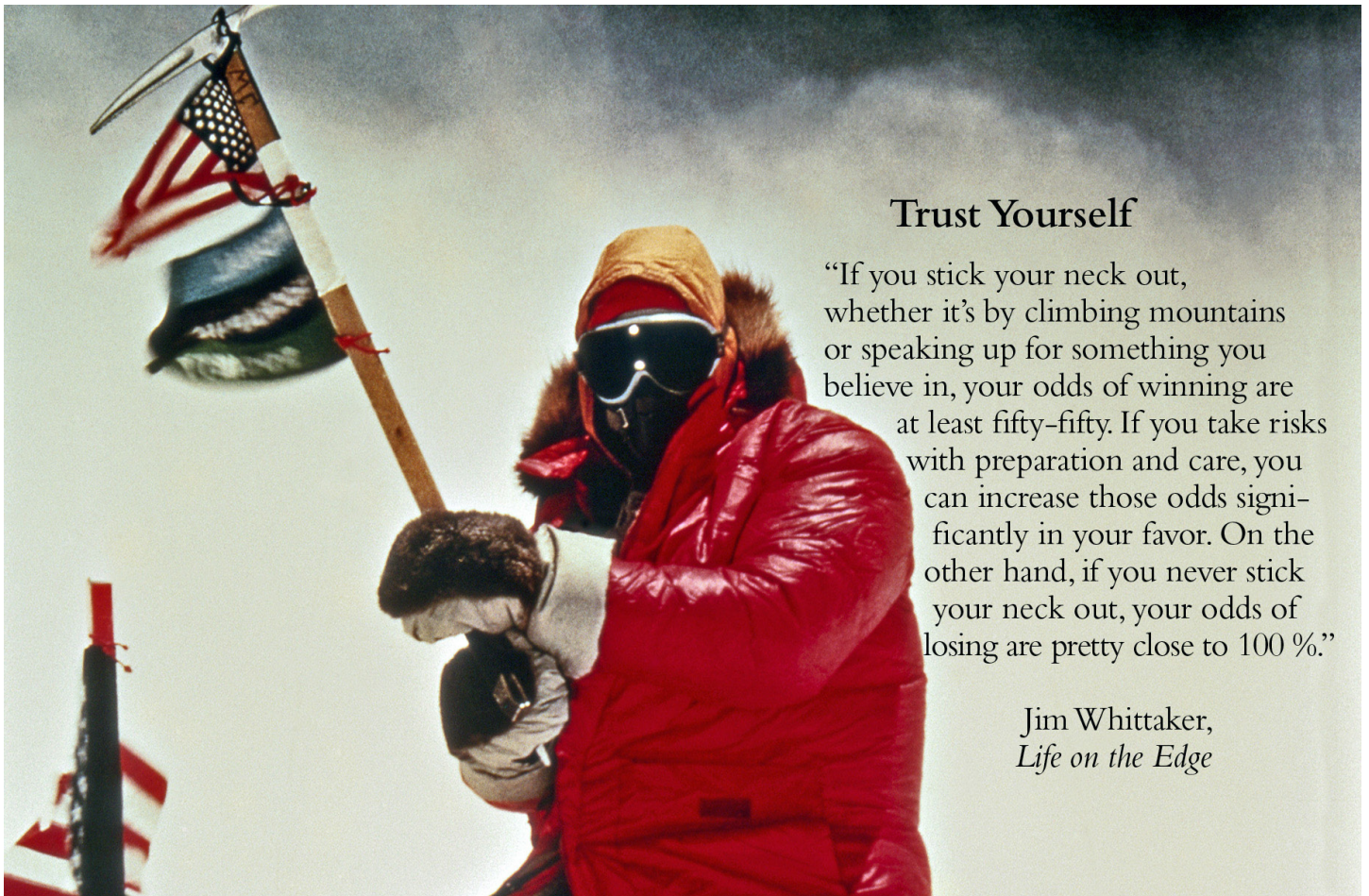


*by*  
-Rod Zeeb-

  
FAMILY  
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*Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding.*  
Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)





## Trust Yourself

“If you stick your neck out, whether it’s by climbing mountains or speaking up for something you believe in, your odds of winning are at least fifty-fifty. If you take risks with preparation and care, you can increase those odds significantly in your favor. On the other hand, if you never stick your neck out, your odds of losing are pretty close to 100 %.”

Jim Whittaker,  
*Life on the Edge*

## TRUST IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING

-ROD ZEEB-

ON THE MORNING OF MAY 1, 1963, JIM WHITTAKER HAD EVERY GOOD REASON IN THE WORLD TO GIVE UP. The winds on Mt. Everest were swirling at over 50 miles per hour. The temperature was minus 30<sup>o</sup> F, and his 50-pound backpack felt three times that heavy in the thin, freezing air. The fact that he had lost 25 pounds in his five weeks in Nepal didn’t help, either. He was wearing snow goggles, but that hadn’t prevented one of his eyeballs from freezing up. Now, he and his Sherpa guide Nawang Gombu had made it to within 50 feet of the summit of the great mountain, but without binocular vision it was almost impossible to judge distances. To make matters worse, he hadn’t had any bottled oxygen since they were at 23,900 feet, and now they were approaching 29,000 feet, where oxygen molecules were scarce. Whittaker became so woozy from lack of breathable air that he could no longer put one foot carefully in front of the other as they neared the top of the mountain. It took every ounce of strength and resolve he could muster to stumble forward, inch by inch.

Whittaker was as prepared for the climb as any man could be. At his home in Washington state he had trained with 60 pounds of bricks in his pack, and in the winter he swam in the frigid waters of a lake to acclimate his body to extreme cold. He was an experienced climber in the best shape of his life. So were the other 18 Americans who made the journey to Nepal with him to prepare for the ascent. They included photographers and scientists, each of whom hoped they would be selected by the team leader to make the final assault on the peak. On the second day of the group’s climb to Base Camp at 17,800 feet, an enormous section of the Khumbu Icefall gave way in a shattering crash of huge ice chunks, burying one of the American climbers under tons of ice and rock. The climbing team was devastated, but they decided to continue their ascent. Each man understood the risks when he began the journey.

Edmund Hillary, a mountaineer from New Zealand, had been the first to conquer Mt. Everest 10 years earlier, in 1953. Since then several other teams had made the attempt, but prior to Whittaker's climb, only a pair of Swiss mountaineers had succeeded. Whittaker was determined to become the first American to plant the US flag in the snow and ice at the top of the world. He planned to do it properly.

Whittaker and Gombu were the only members of the team who were able to make the final assault. Now, exhausted, oxygen-deprived, nearly snow blind, with the storm increasing in ferocity around them and the prize only yards ahead, Whittaker had to make the decision. Should they call on their deepest reserves of physical and emotional energy, take the chance, and make the final push? Or should they take the safe and prudent course of action and immediately head back down the mountain to where they had cached a supply of oxygen bottles? At what price glory, Whittaker wondered? And, at what cost caution?

With his physical strength sapped and his lungs screaming for oxygen, Whittaker had only one place to turn to make his decision: that place was trust. He trusted his gear, and the years he had spent conditioning his body for the rigors of climbing that gave him trust in his ability to mount one, final push to the top. He trusted his mountaineering experience, and his instincts. He trusted the team that had accompanied him to Base Camp, and, especially, he trusted the wiry, five foot two Sherpa at his side. The cumulative weight of all that trust made Whittaker's decision an easy one: he and Gombu would defy the winds, freezing temperatures, treacherous ice-sheets, gasping lungs, and bone-deep tiredness. They would conquer the peak. Right now.

He nodded at Gombu, and pointed to the summit. "You go first," he shouted above the howling wind. It was an honor to be the first member of any team to stand atop the summit. Whittaker wanted Gombu to have that honor now. The guide had earned Whittaker's trust, and with it the right to claim the honor of being the first team member to stand atop Everest.

Gombu shook his head. "No, Big Jim, you go first," he shouted in reply.

Whittaker smiled. With that, the two men leaned into the

wind and made their way side-by-side to the summit at the roof of the world, 29,028 feet above sea level.

Skill, conditioning, preparation, and the right gear and team got Jim Whittaker to within 50 feet of the summit. The first American to stand atop Mt. Everest knew that it was trust that got him the rest of the way.

### The Meaning of Trust

Trust is an attitude, and a gift. When we trust another person we do so with the expectation that they will behave in a manner that is *worthy* of the trust we have invested in them. When they do, we conclude that they are trustworthy.

For mountaineers like Jim Whittaker, trust is a solid, measurable, tangible characteristic. So is the trustworthiness from which trust flows. It is every bit as real as the hard granite of the mountain peaks he climbs. The same can be said of the way that soldiers, police officers, firefighters and others who daily place their very lives in the hands of their comrades regard the value of trust. For them, trust is not some abstract quality; it is a physical and emotional expression of their firm belief in the absolute reliability, truth, capability and strength of the people, institutions, plans, and shared values upon which they depend completely—every day.

Trust is present in our lives in many ways. It is part of the confidence, faith, and certainty about our relationships with our friends, families, schools, employers, coaches, faith leaders, and other people and organizations with whom we interact. And, on the highest plain of human experience, trust is a pre-condition for the spiritual journeys we take in the course of our lives. The acceptance of the reality of a higher power beyond human comprehension is the ultimate expression of trust.

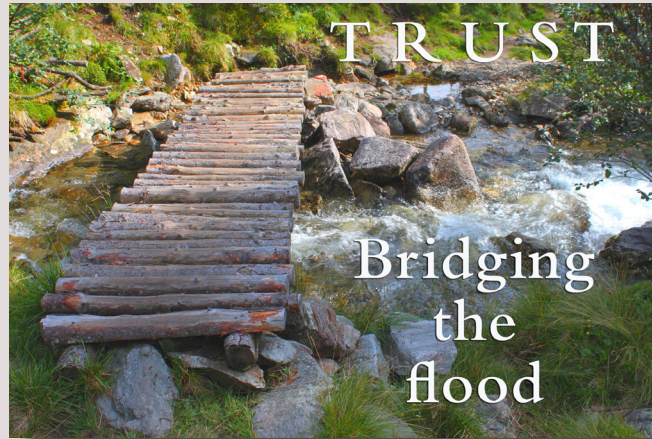
To trust someone or something is not the same as to rely upon them. You do not *trust* your alarm clock, mobile device, or car. You rely upon them to do the job for which they were designed and built. Period. For example, you may rely on the newspaper delivery guy (yes, some people still get newspapers delivered to their door!) to hit the center of the porch each morning, but your reliance on the accuracy of his throwing arm does not require that you invest your trust in him.

**“TRUST IS THE GLUE OF LIFE. IT IS THE MOST ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. IT IS THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE THAT HOLDS ALL RELATIONSHIPS TOGETHER.”**



You may be *disappointed* if he forgets to deliver the Sunday paper, but you will not feel *betrayed*.

That is an important distinction: establishing a trusting relationship with someone always carries with it the risk that the other person may someday behave in a way that is not trustworthy. If you share a deep and intensely personal secret in confidence with someone you trust, for example, and they jump right on social media and spill your story to the entire world, you won't feel disappointed. You will feel betrayed. Most of us get over disappointments pretty easily. Betrayal, on the other hand, can weigh on our hearts for life. This illustrates why our decision to invest trust in another person is such a big deal, and why being considered to be trustworthy by another person is such a great honor.



The dam collapsed under the weight of torrential rain, sending a wall of water and debris thundering across the valley floor. The rancher's wife was safe in town, but their home was on low-lying ground, and he and his young son had to make it to the footbridge and over the creek to get to his truck. He yelled for the boy to follow him, and together they raced through the pelting rain and gale-force winds.

Only yesterday, the meandering creek was just a few feet deep under the bridge. Now, the headwater of the flood barreling their way had turned the creek into a turbulent river. Water and tree branches were already spilling over the bridge, and in a minute it would be impassable.

As they reached the bridge, a surge of water began to flow over the wooden rails.

"Hold my hand," yelled the father. "I don't want the water to sweep you away."

"No, daddy," shouted the boy in reply. "I want you to hold *my* hand!"

The rancher looked down, took his son's hand tightly in his own, and then raced across the bridge, an instant before a cascade of water and broken fence posts rammed into the little bridge and tore it from its abutments.

The rancher and his son watched the bridge swirl and tumble against the creek banks before it broke up and disappeared beneath the current.

The rancher put the boy in the truck, wrapped him in a blanket, started the engine, and got the heater going. As he pulled away from the flooded creek, the rancher looked down at his son.

"Why did you ask me to hold your hand when I asked you to hold mine," he asked his son. "Is there a difference?"

The boy nodded. "It's a giant difference, dad. If I am holding *your* hand and then something bad happens, I might have to let go because I can't hold on any more."

"Ok," his dad said slowly. "But if I hold *your* hand instead?"

The boy smiled. "I know that you will never let go of my hand, never, no matter what happens."

The rancher turned off the gravel road and onto the highway, joining a long line of cars headed for the safety of the hills. He wrapped one arm around his son.

"That's right," he said softly. "No matter what happens."



## Trust & the Truth

The definitive ‘meaning’ of truth, and a perfect definition of the concept, have eluded philosophers for thousands of years. At the risk of putting them out of business with our own definition, we will simply suggest that, as we use it here, ‘truth’ means to be in ‘accord’ with reality, or fact. It describes the way in which the words we use and the thoughts we act upon correspond to the reality that is independent of us.

Truth-telling is the essential, foundational characteristic of the individual who seeks to achieve self-mastery. Truth is the strongest substance in the universe, and the most powerful. No law or weapon devised by man can defeat it, no force of nature can blunt its impact, and no rhetorical trick can keep it submerged.



**“IT DOES NOT REQUIRE MANY WORDS TO SPEAK THE TRUTH.”**

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce (1840-1904)

In a very real sense, all relations of people with each other, the whole of life of the community in fact, depend on faithfulness to truth. It has been that way since organized societies first emerged on earth.

4,000 years ago, in a city in Mesopotamia, a Sumerian businessman etched these words on a clay tablet:

*Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.*

That may be one of the earliest historical artifacts we have discovered that references truth-telling. Even so, it’s more likely than not that parents going back to the Neolithic Era were as insistent about their children telling the truth about the woolly mammoth in the front yard as modern parents are

about their children fessing up to who devoured the last bowl of ice cream.

In a *Journal of Basic and Applied Psychology* study conducted in 2006, researchers found that in just a 10-minute conversation, three out of five people will say at least one lie, and that Americans in general average about 11 lies per week.

Is it that hard to tell the truth? If it sometimes wasn’t difficult to be truthful, there would be no lies. Lies are born out of a thousand motivations; to cover up an accident, smooth over an embarrassing incident, inflate one’s personal standing and story, gain advantage over another, or paper over a personal insecurity. A lie may be told in pursuit of money, or fame, or power. It may seek to blame another person, or to damage their reputation. We tend to distinguish between ‘Big’ lies (the kind that can start wars), and small, or ‘White’ lies (“*Sure, you look great in that outfit, no, really, you do!*”). The white lie is often told in the context of trying not to hurt someone’s feelings, or to make them feel better about something.



After WW II, many stories came out about the heroism of parents who were interred with their children in the Nazi death camps. Eyewitnesses who survived the Holocaust described parents holding their children close as they were marched into the gas chambers. The parents knew full well what awaited them behind the massive metal doors. What they were overheard telling their children, however, did not truthfully describe the horror that lay ahead. “It’s going to be alright,” parents told their frightened, shivering children, “there is nothing to worry about, hold mommy’s hand, we’ll be fine, we’ll be fine....”

Are there any among us who would condemn those parents for being untruthful to their children at that awful moment? I think not. Not if we have a heart. Understanding and practicing truthfulness is a key attribute of a person of solid character. It is a central behavior of a trustworthy person. However, truthfulness can also require (as the example above so clearly and painfully illustrates) a firm grasp of other core virtues, in those rare instances where the absolute protection of another person may require telling something other than the truth.

This is by no means a license to think you are automatically justified in being untruthful in a particular situation. But, even as philosophers continue to debate the meaning of truth, the fact remains that each of us will face moments in our lives when we may have to choose between the virtue of telling



an absolute truth which may actually do harm, or speaking something less than the truth in order to achieve a greater good. Discerning when such an action is the responsible and moral thing to do requires a solid grounding in wisdom and integrity.

**“IT IS NOT THE OATH THAT MAKES US BELIEVE THE MAN,  
BUT THE MAN THE OATH.”**

Aeschylus (525-456 BC)

The thing about most lies, of course, is that they are a lot like compounded interest on a savings account...they keep growing and growing and growing like a cancerous tumor, even if a given lie is told only once. Author and humorist Mark Twain said that *“the great thing about telling the truth is that you don’t have to remember anything.”* A lie needs to be fed, updated, supported and bolstered with layer upon layer of supporting falsehoods. The truth need be told only once. It stands on its own.



Truthfulness works in two directions: it can be focused externally, as when we relay information about people, circumstances and events taking place around us. But, truth telling also works internally; that is, when we tell the truth to ourselves about ourselves. In combination, telling the truth to others and to ourselves helps us to become the kind of person other people trust and want to be around.

**“LOVE ALL, TRUST A FEW, DO WRONG TO NONE.”**

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

From the simple promise a child makes to care for the new puppy, to the promise of the teenager to drive safely as a condition of getting his license, and on to the solemn promises made at the marriage alter, we enshrine the things that are most important to us within a framework of vows and pledges. And, we do so in the service of personal honor.

Honor is a quality that is realized in direct proportion to an individual’s adherence to a specific code of conduct that defines the moral and ethical standards of an organization, social structure, creed, or institution. By definition, this path is an honorable entity in and of itself, exclusive of the way in which any individual may choose to follow or not follow it. This is important to recognize because, even if a person strays from the path at some point in his life, the path itself remains unchanged. The path—and the benefits of walking

within its bounds—therefore remain accessible even to those who may have stepped away from it for one reason or another.

Every promise we make communicates how much we value the person or entity to whom we make it. It is, in fact, a tangible extension of our personal honor to another. We alone are responsible for ‘holding’ and protecting our own honor. It cannot be given—or taken—from us by any person or government. Along with faith it is the strongest force within us. Our honor can no more be pierced by an insult than by a spear. It is the well of strength upon which the warrior draws in battle, and it is also the quality that allows us to be the most open, vulnerable and gentle when called upon. No other person or group is responsible for maintaining or protecting our honor; it is a deeply personal possession, and its value is beyond measure.

Some say that personal honor, once lost, can never be replenished. When we make a promise, they say, it is as if we are holding our honor cupped in our hands, like water. When we keep our word and honor our promise, we are keeping our hands tightly clasped so none of the water can fall to the ground. If we do not keep a promise, the water begins to drip from between our fingers. If we don’t show up to help our friends paint the house as we promised, out drips some water. Don’t show up to work on time—again—another drip. Don’t honor a business deal, drip, don’t keep our vows to our spouse, don’t follow through with a promise to our children, drip, drip and drip. At some point, if we break our promises often enough, the water will be gone. And so will our honor.



The honorable individual takes care to keep his promises. That care is what makes him more trustworthy in the eyes of others.



**“A PROMISE MADE IS A DEBT UNPAID.”**

Robert Service (1874-1958)

## The components of Honesty

Honesty is made up in equal parts of attitude, belief and behavior. It is greater than the sum of the words with which we express ourselves because it is also a measure of the actions we take. We use the word honesty to describe those who have integrity, and who are straightforward and truthful. It is a quality that we ascribe to those who do not lie, or steal or cheat. Honest is a catch-all descriptor for those whose behavior we find to be ethical, moral, principled, fair, and on the level. Honesty is a treasured human virtue in part because when we model honest behavior we share a priceless, lasting gift to those around us. In his play, *All's Well that Ends Well*, William Shakespeare spoke to the enduring, multi-generational impact of this virtue when he said, “No legacy is so rich as honesty.”

Honesty shares two things in common with dishonesty: neither can be restrained once practiced, and each set ripples in motion that no one can hide from. A dishonest person faces one immutable reality that the honest person does not, however: he cannot wish truth and facts out of existence. He may try to ignore them, but he cannot throw them out of his mind. He must rely on the inability of those whom he has fooled to discover the truth about his actions. In other words, he must surround himself with people whom he believes are fools, or with people who are as dishonest as he is.

That is not exactly a recipe for a full, rich, productive life.

Abraham Lincoln understood the futility of the dishonest person who believes he can actually get away with it: “You can fool all the people some of the time,” he said, “and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time.”

Modern commentators (especially academics) on the virtue of honesty have taken some shots at the value, in some cases going so far as to suggest that viewing honesty in the context of moral standards is an outdated and overrated perspective. The field of situational ethics, for example, argues that decision-making (including the decision to be honest) should always be based upon the circumstances of a partic-

ular situation, and not upon fixed law, including moral law. One problem with that perspective—among others—is that the choice to be dishonest in any circumstance is also the choice to ignore reality. It does not take a PhD in philosophy to understand that in the arm-wrestling contest of life, reality will beat un-reality every time. The victory may not be dramatic and immediate, but, in the words of author Ayn Rand, “We can ignore reality, but we cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.”

### Honesty pays

The benefits of living by a code of conduct based upon honesty pays dividends now, in the future, and, as Shakespeare notes, it even becomes a part of the legacy you will leave to your children. Among those benefits:

- **Staying out of trouble:** It may seem obvious, but it’s true—there is no better way of avoiding problems and quickly resolving issues when they do pop up than by being honest.

- **Becoming more courageous:** Honesty helps carry an individual past their fear, and helps them stand up for what they believe in, speak out when they need to, and face the difficult decisions and tasks we all have to master in life.

- **Making the best friends:** People who value honesty in their own lives recognize others who feel the same way. Their circle of

friends of good character widen, and they enjoy greater opportunities to enjoy wonderful, life-enhancing relationships.

- **Breaking free from fear:** People who honestly sharing their feelings and thoughts are more authentic, and they enjoy greater self-confidence.

- **Preventing ‘gunnysacking’:** Gunnysacking describes how a person mentally stores up grievances in their interactions with others, instead of resolving them on the spot. When their gunnysack gets overloaded, they may reach their personal boiling point and overreact in some way. When a person is honest from the get-go with others, however, that gunnysack will never get the chance to fill up.





• **Enjoying better health:** Being honest doesn't just make you feel great for a moment; studies confirm that an honest approach to life can significantly improve a person's mental and physical health.

• **Trusting, and being trusted:** People who are honest with themselves and with others enjoy higher levels of trust from the people in their lives.

### Is exaggeration dishonest?

It's fair to say that exaggeration done for the purpose of putting other people down, misrepresenting important facts, or seeking personal enrichment or reward is dishonest. On the other hand, there is a different, gentler, and humorous kind of exaggeration that is designed for the sole purpose of making people smile. Case in point:



People who tell the truth, keep their promises, and maintain their honesty are considered to be dependable.

Dependability is the glue that holds our everyday lives together. We depend on the alarm to ring right on time, on the hot water heater to warm our morning shower, and on the toaster to pop up that perfectly browned bagel. We depend on our cell phone to bring the world to our fingertips, on our car to start, and on traffic signals to keep the morning commute only moderately crazy. And as we go through our day we automatically and without forethought expect that the hundreds of machines, systems, tools, organizations, and services with which we interact on a daily basis will dependably perform their functions; seamlessly, properly, and without so much as a hiccup.

Mostly, though, we depend upon other people. We depend upon our family and friends to be there for us in good times and bad. We depend upon our employers to treat us with dignity and respect, and our employees to give us their best efforts. We depend upon the coach to be fair, on the doctor to be thorough, the attorney to be wise, and our faith leader to be inspirational.

Our lives are part of a complex web of inter-dependent relationships. From the mundane and ordinary (the garbage truck *will* be here on Tuesday morning), to the spectacular and extraordinary (the booster rockets *will* fire properly, and my space ship *will* lift off safely from earth), we are, in almost every human interaction imaginable, dependent to some degree on other people.

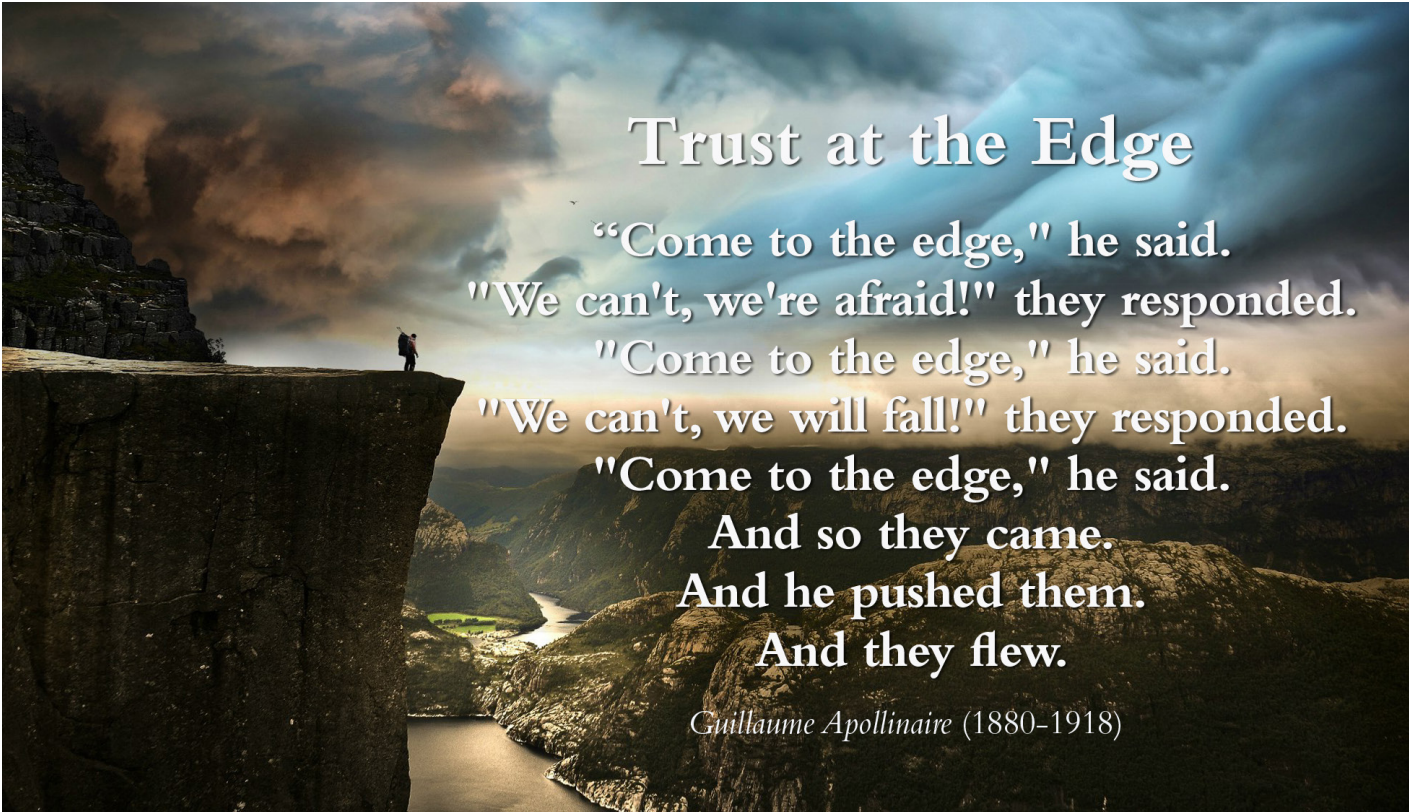
But what of the survival expert, you might ask, who braves a week alone in a deep forest wilderness? Isn't he completely independent of others, at least for that experience? After all, it's just him against nature—who is he dependent upon for that? Let's see... is he wearing dependable boots? If he has no tent, sleeping bag, food or cooking gear, does he at least have a dependable knife? Some rope or fishing line? They'd better be first quality to help get him through the week. And was he trained in outdoor survival by someone upon whose wisdom and experience he might have to draw for his very survival out there in the wild? To become as independent as one person can possibly be—in any circumstance—we must at one time have been the recipients of dependable instruction, training, guidance, and advice. We all depend on *somebody*.

**“NO MAN IS AN ISLAND.”**

John Donne (1573-631)

To be that dependable 'somebody' is a hallmark characteristic of the individual who achieves self-mastery. It is a quality built on a bedrock of personal responsibility, faithfulness, promise-keeping, and punctuality. To be regarded as dependable is an important personal achievement; it means you are a steadfast friend, a reliable employee, a trusted spouse, and a valued and respected member of your community.





# Trust at the Edge

“Come to the edge,” he said.  
“We can't, we're afraid!” they responded.  
“Come to the edge,” he said.  
“We can't, we will fall!” they responded.  
“Come to the edge,” he said.  
And so they came.  
And he pushed them.  
And they flew.

*Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)*

## “I trust you.”

These are the unformed words of the newborn baby gazing up at its mother, and the source of the confident expression on the face of the five-year old when his dad removes the training wheels and gives the bike a gentle shove.

“I trust you” is on the lips of a father when his daughter is off to her first prom, and it rings loud and clear in the affirmative response of the soldier when his commander sends him into battle. “I trust you,” says a leader when asking a team member to shoulder a great responsibility.

When a young couple join hands at their wedding ceremony, “I trust you” is present in every loving glance they share. “I trust you” is in the nod we give to the surgeon before the operation, and to the pilot when our flight hits severe turbulence. And, “I trust you” is the offering we take before our God with every prayer we lift up.

We can give no greater gift to another person than our trust. Our investment of trust makes us at once more vulnerable, but also infinitely stronger, because of the fruits that will bud, and grow, and ripen on the tree of trust. Confidence and certainty, support and encouragement, assistance, enlightenment, and love each flower on that tree.

To be considered a trustworthy person, then, is one of the most important personal attainments to which we can aspire.

It means that people know with absolute certainty that

what we are telling them is the truth. They have complete confidence that we will follow through with any promise we make. They can depend on us. Always. No matter what.

Where others may be required by statute or threat of sanction to behave in a trustworthy manner (for example, attorneys and accountants in the performance of client duties), most people are motivated to be trustworthy by something else entirely: their honor. Honorable conduct begets trustworthiness, which in turn helps to nurture the conditions under which an individual can achieve self-mastery.

The importance of giving and receiving trust in the reciprocal relationships of life cannot be overstated. Trust frames and defines almost every action you will take, and every word you will speak in the course of your life.



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