


TRUST YOUR VOICE

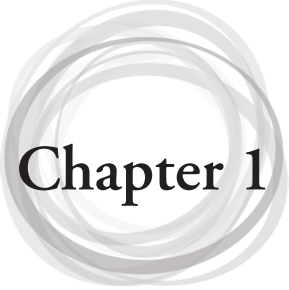


A
ROADMAP
TO
FOCUS
AND
INFLUENCE

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AND

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Chapter 1

Trust: How Can We Build It?

While I wrote this book, America faced unprecedented challenges: presidential impeachment hearings; the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing shutdown of the U.S. economy; a historic surge in unemployment; and racial tension and social unrest resulting in protests, looting, burning of Bibles, defacing of statues, and destruction of property—even an attack on the U.S. Capitol. As a result of this period of chaos, competing narratives, and growing division, you may find yourself asking, “Whom can I trust?”

Increasingly, you’ve probably wondered about the roles of government, businesses, individuals, and the media, and the calls to reform these institutions that make up the fabric of our daily lives. In the midst of such rapid change, the deluge of information and misinformation feels staggering.

Like many Americans, you may feel it is hard to know which sources are telling the truth. Is whatever television news you watch accurate? Does the media have an agenda? Are newspapers reliable? Trusted sources are difficult to come by, and this increased distrust undermines the authority and credibility of government, institutions, elected officials, and the media.

Trust is essential, but it seems to be slipping out of our culture. Increasingly, we mistrust the government, the media, even other people—especially those who seem to be different from us.

According to the article “Building Trust in America,” we have a crisis of trust in our country.

American National Election Studies began asking about trust in the federal government in 1958, when 75 percent of the population demonstrated trust in government. These levels of trust eroded during the late 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the turbulence of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and economic struggles. During the 1980s and 1990s, trust in the government fluctuated, tending to coincide with good economic growth. It reached a three-decade high shortly after the 9/11 attacks, but since 2007 less than 30 percent of respondents have said they can trust the federal government always or most of the time. In particular, the *2019 Gallup Confidence in Institutions* survey found Americans have the least amount of confidence in Congress, with only 11 percent saying they trust Congress “a great deal,” and 52 percent saying they have very little or no confidence in Congress.¹

When people lack trust in each other and institutions, “they are less likely to comply with laws and regulations, pay taxes, tolerate different viewpoints or ways of life, contribute to economic vitality, resist the appeals of demagogues, or support their neighbors . . . They are less likely to create and invent.”² Citizens will be unwilling to cooperate freely if they do not believe that others are responsible and trustworthy or that their rights are guaranteed and protected.

So how can this lack of trust be solved? How will we progress, individually and as a society, if trust is gone? It begins with dialogue. “Trust builds when people feel they are part of a community- or society-wide enterprise that takes their concerns and voices into account.”³ And dialogue happens when people trust their own voices enough to share their opinions and work together to find solutions.

1 from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WiyDk0rQ8nqvdsnvVJb5IuFqdOC-i0jbyug_BkEEKVY/edit

2 See “Six Ways to Repair Declining Trust” on the Stanford Social Innovation Review at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six_ways_to_repair_declining_social_trust

3 Ibid.

All of us desire significance and purpose. To reach these goals, we must have trust in ourselves and others to think and make decisions that will lead to positive outcomes in the long term. But how do we develop trust?

In his classic book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."⁴

For many years, I kept waiting for confidence to somehow show up. Eventually, I realized that I needed to trust my own voice, even when it was shaking. I needed to let go of doing it all alone and intentionally surround myself with people who I could trust to help me achieve my potential. I also needed to be willing to help them ignite their potential.

Giving Women Something Better

In 2013, my husband and I attended several conferences featuring discussions and research on the impact of public policies on entrepreneurial values in our society. One event featured Campbell Brown, Susan Crow, and Christina Hoff-Summers. At this "women's event," they talked about women in politics, policy, and economics and the entrepreneurial culture in the U.S. The topic fascinated me, and I wanted to share it, so I invited some friends to attend it with me.

We came back energized to learn more and participate more. My friend Beth suggested we take it a step further than just attending an event. It would be even better if we could organize something with women in our neighborhood. Beth suggested we get together and determine who we are and figure out who would like to talk about ideas in policy, economic theories, and current public policies impacting people's desire to start and grow businesses, to engage in their community. What if we didn't even have to go downtown to have a discussion on important public policy issues?

So, a few friends and I decided we'd organize an evening, which we called Political Fiber. Juicing was popular at the time, so I said, "Come over to my house to drink green juice and vodka and discuss the future direction of America." Why not, right? Beth and another friend, Joan, who are much more extroverted than I am, invited people. And 15 women came!

4 Frankel, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1959. 66.

We all sat in my living room, looking at each other and silently asking, Okay, now what? To start, we went around the room and each woman shared why she was there. That's where I discovered the power of the round-table discussion model of going around the room systematically. Giving space for all women, even the quiet ones, to share perspectives, ideas, hesitations, experiences on complex problems that our society faces, is empowering. Women are eager to learn and engage in substantive discussion about the way the world works.

At that first meeting, as we went around the room, a theme quickly emerged. Most of the women felt there was no space to speak up, to strengthen their voices. Over and over, people said things like, "I come from a political family, but I quickly learned that you can get attacked for just asking questions. I've just learned to be quiet." Or "I learned not to make waves, to be polite." Or "I came to understand that asking questions or talking about things I thought should change could be triggers for some."

Although I'm an introvert, I have a strong "reformer"⁵ personality, and I wanted to give us women something better. We decided we would get together again. To prepare for that gathering, we asked people to brainstorm a name for the group, something besides Political Fiber. We also agreed to read a book and discuss it. Because we were interested in economics and policy, we thought *Free to Choose* by Milton and Rose Friedman might make for some interesting discussion.

As I prepared for the next meeting, I was talking to a neighbor, and he told me that Rose Friedman, Milton Friedman's wife, was a prominent economist of her own, and she really challenged Milton Friedman. She was all about having these economic conversations. So, I thought maybe we should call ourselves the Rose Friedman Society. (A name that ultimately didn't stick!)

5 The Reformer is Type One in the Enneagram Test which I encourage you to take to help you define/describe your own personality. Ones are people of practical action—they wish to be *useful* in the best sense of the word. On some level of consciousness, they feel that they "have a mission" to fulfill in life, if only to try their best to reduce the disorder they see in their environment. <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-1/>

I was pleasantly surprised that 25 people came to the next meeting! As word spread, we asked people to read the first four chapters of *Free to Choose*. A group of 25 was too big for discussion, so we divided into four groups, then regrouped at the end to summarize what each of us had talked about. Breaking into smaller groups gave everyone in the room a chance to talk and share their perspectives. Knowing they'd have to present a summary of their smaller group discussion kept everyone on their toes.

The energy in the room was just unbelievable.

It was an event where women could use their minds, stretch their intellect. They felt valued, energized, respected, and connected. They each felt that they had a mind of their own.

That's when I realized, I'm on to something.

For our next meeting, the women in the group said they wanted to talk about healthcare—a big topic, especially because this was 2014. The Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, had been signed into law using a presidential executive order in March of 2010, but most of it had gone into effect January 1, 2014. Healthcare premiums were rising dramatically for some people, making it a hot-button issue for everyone.

The experience of reading the first four chapters of a book with the group showed me that we needed to have something to ground the conversation. Saying we'd discuss something so broad as “healthcare” meant we were flooded with information. It was hard to know what sources were reliable since opinions abound. I started sending all kinds of articles to the group. I wasn't a healthcare expert, so as I did research, I simply forwarded the information I found to the group. We had mountains of material to read. One woman invited an expert in health insurance, and we had some politicians lined up to discuss the legislation, but we were overloaded with information.

I quickly realized we needed a brief.

A policy brief is not a white paper but a shorter document that sums up the facts on an issue—how did we get here and what are we trying to solve—and outlines possible policy changes (i.e. legislation) that might be used to address that issue. Policy briefs often make a recommendation to lawmakers, but I wanted a brief that showed all sides of the issue and the

ramifications of what different options might be, how much our federal government is already doing and spending, how to research the involvement of state government and feature local solutions and engagement of privately owned businesses and nonprofits. Creating a readable, concise document that examined the various sides of the issue would keep our discussions more focused and allow us to fact-check the information we included in our discussion. Beth, who helped organize those early meetings, was instrumental in helping write and shape the briefs we began to produce.

I also quickly realized that we needed a better way to communicate. We had a Facebook group, we had emails, and we tried to use online invitations to let people invite friends, but it became unmanageable. We had to be a little more organized and communicate privately with people who were enthused about meeting to talk about public policy!

Gathering with Women Who Gather Women

At about that time, I attended an event organized by the American Enterprise Institute. There, I met Angela Braly, former chief executive officer for WellPoint, Inc., a large health insurance company now known as Anthem. We met during cocktail hour, and, since she was in the healthcare industry, I told her about my experience with Foov Fitness, a company I had started to engage people with intellectual disabilities to exercise. And I also mentioned my women's group that was meeting to discuss policy, including healthcare.

When I described the idea behind this group—reading and researching relevant material and then gathering as a group to discuss it—Angela told me, “That sounds like a Bible study.” And I said, “What is that?” Because although I'd grown up Catholic, I'd never heard of people getting together to read Scripture this way, to get guidance and introspection, and to talk about it. So, she sent me a little Bible study booklet, and I was fascinated. I'd never seen one before. Reading through it and understanding how it worked gave me the confidence to say, I want to ask people to read material, ponder good questions, then gather to discuss it.

Angela told me that she had also gathered women around policy addressing poverty in Indiana. She introduced me to Kathy Hubbard, also from

Indiana, with whom she had organized the event. They agreed that women seemed to be peripheral to the public policy dialogue and that most conferences confined our participation to so-called women's issues: pay equity, work leave, education, and representation. We wanted a place where women could learn, discover their voices, and be heard on economic issues..

The three of us had a common trait: whenever we see a situation, we take the lead to do something to change what needs to be changed. We convened to define a vision for groups of women across the country to gather in their communities and take leadership roles in the public policy dialogue by openly sharing their views on the impact of public policy on creativity in an open economy.

Angela and Kathy believed in the model that I stumbled upon of women coming together in small groups to host discussions based on facts. We searched for other organizations that were doing something similar. After all, the three of us had each started groups for women to discuss policy. And we'd happened to meet? Surely there were others doing the same thing. But although we found many groups that focused on political parties and candidates training and inviting speakers, we couldn't find any that focused on grassroots policy education and discussion designed to develop the leadership skills of everyday women.

So, in 2015, we launched The Policy Circle (thepolicycircle.org), a non-profit, nonpartisan grassroots educational organization. We created a website for members to access a library of policy briefs, which we co-wrote with experts. Rather than doing research themselves, group members simply have to read the brief and come prepared to share their perspectives and listen to the views of others on the policy and how they relate to their family, their work, and their community. That seems simple, but it flips the model. Women are asked to form a circle, meet five times, self-facilitate, and learn about and discuss topics they are not familiar with. It requires courage and leadership. And the experience builds social capital.

A circle starts with three people, and each invites one person, which makes six. Then all six of them invite one more person, so you've got twelve people. That's a circle. The Policy Circle was launched to engage women, but men are not excluded if a group chooses to include them.

When you are invited to a Policy Circle, you know that you're going to speak. The experience is transformational. You read a policy brief differently when you know that you will have to present your understanding of the issues. You internalize the issue and compose your own way of expressing your views. You gain trust in yourself. You gain confidence.

To get started, you're given a simple question to frame your ideas: What is the lens you read this brief through? How does that lens impact the way you see it? What actions would you take to engage with this issue in your community and in your company? The round table discussion model to share the lenses through which women understand an issue also gives women an opportunity to share their life focus. You find out meaningful things about each other. You discover the multiple hats and experiences that women bring to the table: perhaps they grew up in housing projects, or lived abroad, or studied biomedical engineering, or started their own business. Maybe they are healthcare professionals, or financial planners. They might be caring for elderly parents with Alzheimer's or children with special needs, and juggling that with a career. The model and the invitation to talk about the lens through which you are reading the brief gives you the chance to speak up, to use your voice, and to trust it.

I have found that women are very focused on the day-to-day and the busyness of their lives. American women especially gravitate to the to-do list. They want to do something right away, they want to act. That's great, but we want to invite women into higher levels of leadership, into navigating complex issues and leading with ideas and vision before getting things done. The Policy Circle invites them to first reflect, connect the dots, and then plan what would be the most impactful, rather than focusing on temporary fixes. They learn to take a step back to look at the root causes of problems rather than rushing to quick "band-aid" solutions.

This simple process of reflection and planning helps people to build trust in themselves enough to act. For many, it is the beginning of learning to trust their voice, even when it shakes.

Trust Challenge:

What issue matters deeply to you? What's one thing you can do to learn more about that issue? This week, reach out to someone who might share



your interest in that issue and just have a conversation about it. Ask them about the lens they view the issue through.

Gathering to discuss ideas in a group, whether it is for a book club, Bible study or Policy Circle, is a powerful way to learn. What is your experience with this type of group? What specific benefits do you think such gatherings provide?