



In Leadership and Life, Trust Matters

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During the past weeks, as I have watched the leaves turn to vibrant shades of red, yellow, orange outside my window, I am filled with joy as if kissed by the glory of the universe. Yet as I turn toward the news, politicians await me with their loud debates to move forward, or not, on a vote that could well result in the impeachment the President. With this news, I feel frustration rising.

Still, I am not convinced that now is the most opportune time to dwell upon my frustration with dysfunctional leadership, nor that of America's declining trust in its leadership and institutions. Yet I ask myself, if not now, then when?

Obviously, I care and would like to work to make things better. However, there are challenges. How, when, or where do I begin to address this problem? Is this dilemma a sign of a changing political or cultural landscape? Could it be both? Is it even possible that America has lost her soul? If so, who will help her to rediscover her way?

In July of 2019, [the Pew Research Center \(PRC\) conducted a poll](#) asking Americans about their trust in the federal government and in one another. In short, "75% of Americans say that their fellow citizens' trust in the federal government has been shrinking, and 64% believe that about peoples' trust in each other." Moreover, "when asked a separate question about the reasons why trust has declined in the past 20 years, people offer a host of reasons in their written answers. Some worry the government is doing too much, others say too little, and others mention the government doing the wrong things or nothing at all." More can be gleaned from the article on the PRC website.

Bottomline, trust has been broken. Okay. Now that we have some important data regarding the erosion of trust, what do we do with it?

Dictionary.com defines trust (n.) as "reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence." While many might agree with this definition, is it possible to get consensus, as Americans, on naming a set of community norms or values upon which we rely in order to (re)build trust? Supposing we can achieve this, are there leaders who will agree to such a standard

as
the most appropriate and viable path forward?

One of my favorite leaders, authors, and spiritual teachers, is Don Miguel Ruiz. In 1997, he published [The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom](#). More than a decade ago, this book had a strong impact on me. It influenced my daily, simple interactions with people, some known, others not known. More importantly, it redefined my leadership.

The four agreements are based in common-sense wisdom principals:

- Be impeccable with your word. (Speak with integrity.)
- Don't take anything personally. (Nothing others do is because of you.)
- Don't make assumptions. (Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want.)
- Always do your best. (Your best is going to change from moment to moment.)

The agreements point to my earlier ponderings: what is my role in making things better, and when do I begin? What is our collective role, and when do we begin?

My extensive travels and encounters with everyday people have shown me that one thing is certain. At our core, we all want the same things: love, safety, agency, shelter, food, pleasure, and respect, to name a handful.

I believe that if we collectively apply our best efforts, we can courageously and graciously come together to discover a collective set of values in order to achieve an outcome that will offer us greater trust, unity, and harmony. The first step is often the most challenging when embarking on a new path, but I am in it to win it!

Are you willing to join me? I certainly hope so.

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