



Our Thinking Series:

The Question of Trust

by Norman Buckley, Author Facet5

Question. “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”

If you were completing Facet5 you may easily be asked this question or one very like it. You would also have about 18 related questions all asking about your attitude to other people, how kind and helpful you try to be and how much you trust others. These are all domains of Affection, one of the five core elements of Facet5.

But this wasn’t asked in a Facet5 questionnaire. This exact question was asked as part of a serious study into people’s attitudes and in particular differences in attitudes between the South and North in the USA. And when they looked at the results it was fascinating.

People in the south were far less likely to trust others. Only 24.9% of Southerners said that people could be trusted compared to 38.7% of people not from the South. On that basis, if you apply a Facet5 lens to it, you would think that people from the South were lower Affection. More pragmatic, somewhat self centred with a tendency to look after themselves and their kin before they start looking to help others.

And it seems this is true. Researchers at Baylor University in Texas found that “Southerners are relatively close-knit and interact within small and dense networks. Social spheres often overlap: People that work together may go to church together, attend sports events for their kids. This type of network often produces a lot of solidarity and trust within the ‘in group,’ but distrust toward outsiders.” In culture terms this is Collectivist.

Compared to Southerners, non-Southerners have a large number of weak and transient friendships. Social networks in the non-South are considered individualistic, and that promotes trust of people who might be considered outsiders.

But this research had a specific and interesting focus. It was on attitudes to protecting the environment. It seems that people who trust (high Affection) are also much more concerned about saving their environment. They may have loosely defined networks and social links but they trust those links and are prepared to put themselves out for the “greater good”.

So what is the lesson from this research?

So this is where it gets really interesting. These differences in Trust (Affection) suggest that different strategies are needed to get an environmental measure accepted. Where Trust (Affection) is low you are more likely to get people to act by assuring them that long-term benefits of conservation outweigh short-term costs and are consistent with their values of “family first” and a short term, look after yourselves agenda. In other areas where trust is high people are more willing to pursue a liberal agenda and to accept some element of personal sacrifice in order to deliver to the greater good.

What does it mean from a Facet5 perspective?

This is important in coaching and counselling with Facet5. To persuade people with high Affection you need to focus on the broader social benefits and the impact on a wide range of people. For low Affection, focus on the shorter term and more specific benefits for them and those they are close to.

Kyle Irwin, Nick Berigan, Trust, Culture, and Cooperation: A Social Dilemma Analysis of Pro-Environmental Behaviors, The Sociological Quarterly Volume 54, Issue 3, pages 424–449, Summer 2013

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