

How do you recover trust once it is broken or lost? Can trust that is compromised or broken be restored? How?

Trust and Redemption in the Army Profession

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April 15, 2016

*"Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me."*¹

¹ McGraw-Hill Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs. © 2002 by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Fool+me+once,+shame+on+you;+fool+me+twice,+shame+on+me> (Accessed April 10, 2016)

Introduction

“The foundation of our profession is centered on trust...it will take every measure of competence and commitment to forge ahead and above all it will take character.”² Former Army Chief of Staff General Raymond T. Odierno’s quote in *The Army Ethic White Paper* underscores the importance of trust among Army professionals. Trust is the essence of all relationships, transcending military, educational, and business practices.³ Trust is absolutely essential for organizational performance.⁴ Renowned trust expert and Utah State Professor James Davis describes trust as the “willingness to be vulnerable to another person.”⁵ Trust is the bedrock of the Army profession and is one of the essential characteristics defining the Army as a profession.⁶ Leaders earn trust by leading by example, demonstrating character, competence, and commitment.⁷ As trust is earned, it can also be taken away. Army leaders lose trust by failing to demonstrate character, competence, or commitment.

Hypothesis/position/problem statement:

The purpose of this paper is to analyze trust as it relates to character, competence, and commitment and determine whether or not trust can be restored once broken. Two examples of trust broken by Army leaders are analyzed with one resulting

² Department of the Army. *The Army Ethic White Paper*. The Center for Army Profession and Ethic; 2014. <http://cape.army.mil/white-papers.php> (Accessed April 10, 2016) pg 1.

³ Covey, Stephen MR. *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. Simon and Schuster, 2006. 1.

⁴ IBID. 203

⁵ Davis, Jim. TEDx Talk about Trust Youtube.com

⁶ Department of the Army. *Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, The Army Profession* (Washington, D.C: US Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-4

⁷ IBID. 3-2

in trust restoration but not the other. Finally, recommendations for the Army Character Development Strategy are discussed to more effectively build trust in organizations and recover quickly from potential fracturing of trust in organizations.

Army Doctrinal Reference Publication-1 defines both external and internal trust in the Army. External trust is the confidence and faith that the American people have in the Army to serve the Nation ethically, effectively, and efficiently.⁸ Internal trust is found within the Army and is reliance on the character, competence, and commitment of Army professionals to live by and uphold the Army ethic.⁹ Trust is the vital organizing principle establishing conditions necessary for mission command.¹⁰ Trust is broken when one of the Army Profession's three certification criteria (character, competence, commitment) become invalid by an Army professional's decisions.¹¹ A violation of each criterion carries with it different ramifications for the trust of the offender.

A lack of competence is often the result of inexperience or the need for more training. Competence is an Army professional's ability to successfully perform duty with discipline and to standard.¹² Trust lost through a lack of competence is restored through a leader's demonstrated dedication to self-betterment, maturity, or simply getting to start over with a blank slate. A new Lieutenant for example, lacking maturity and wisdom, may unknowingly demonstrate a lack of competence while out in the field with his or her platoon. This may cause the platoon to lose trust in the platoon leader, but only until he or she is given a second chance to demonstrate competency. Army professionals are forgiving of leaders lacking competence, as long as a genuine effort is

⁸ IBID. 3-1

⁹ IBID. 3-2

¹⁰ IBID. 3-2

¹¹ IBID. 3-2

¹² IBID.

made to learn and improve. A lack of competence over a period of time is a problem.

Army leaders demonstrating a long term lack of competence, coupled with a reluctance or inability to learn and improve will not restore trust once it is broken.

Trust broken due to a lack of commitment is difficult but not impossible to restore. Commitment is an Army professional's resolve to contribute honorable service to the Nation and accomplish the mission despite adversity, obstacles, and challenges.¹³ An Army leader demonstrating a lack of commitment certainly loses the trust of his or her subordinates, but can recover if recommitted to the Army profession. This is brought about through reflection and personal inventory. The leader must decide if honorable service to the Nation is truly what he or she desires and should seek the counsel of a trusted mentor.

Trust broken due to a lack of character is hardest to restore requiring two essential and complimentary responses from the offender. Character is dedication and adherence to the Army Ethic, including Army Values, as consistently and faithfully demonstrated in decisions and actions.¹⁴ Tolerance for a lack of character is very low for Army leaders especially commissioned officers who are expected to serve as the moral exemplars for their units.¹⁵ Depending on the gravity of the offense and whether or not it is criminal in nature, leaders in the Army are often afforded a second chance to restore trust (See Army Redemption Model Below). Remedial training and education can reduce character related issues in Army organizations and can alter unethical

¹³ IBID.

¹⁴ IBID.

¹⁵ LTC Pete Kilner, Leader Challenge Lecture at West Point. 2014. Center for the enhancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning.

behavior in Army leaders.¹⁶ Superiors balance punishment and remediation when choosing whether or not to document an unethical act in an Army leader's permanent file or keep it local. The two essential and complimentary efforts required to restore trust due to lack of character are a convincing apology with genuine remorse and a redoubled demonstration of character, competence, and commitment over time. Without both of these efforts working in unison, trust will never be restored once broken.¹⁷

Regardless of circumstance, the probability of trust being restored is directly proportional to the guilty party's immediate response. Trust is visceral and people can quickly sense whether or not they should give someone a second chance.¹⁸ The restoration of trust immediately following an incident is rooted in accountability, transparency, and humility.¹⁹ A genuine, sincere apology in which the guilty party admits to wrongdoing is key to restoring trust. This is seen by the members of an organization as a willingness to value the relationship the person has with them more than being right or losing face. Sincere and remorseful apologies are both transactional and transformational.²⁰ They are transactional because they rebalance the trust relationship between the guilty party and the members of the organization. They are transformational because they provide an opportunity for redemption and growth. This first effort will initially determine whether or not the leader is given a second chance to

¹⁶ Ferguson, Keith H. Can Trust Be Restored? Military Review. March-April 2015. 30

¹⁷ Kador, John. *Effective apology: Mending fences, building bridges, and restoring trust*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009. 28

¹⁸ Ferguson, Keith H. Can Trust Be Restored? Military Review. March-April 2015. 27

¹⁹ Kador, John. *Effective apology: Mending fences, building bridges, and restoring trust*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009. 28

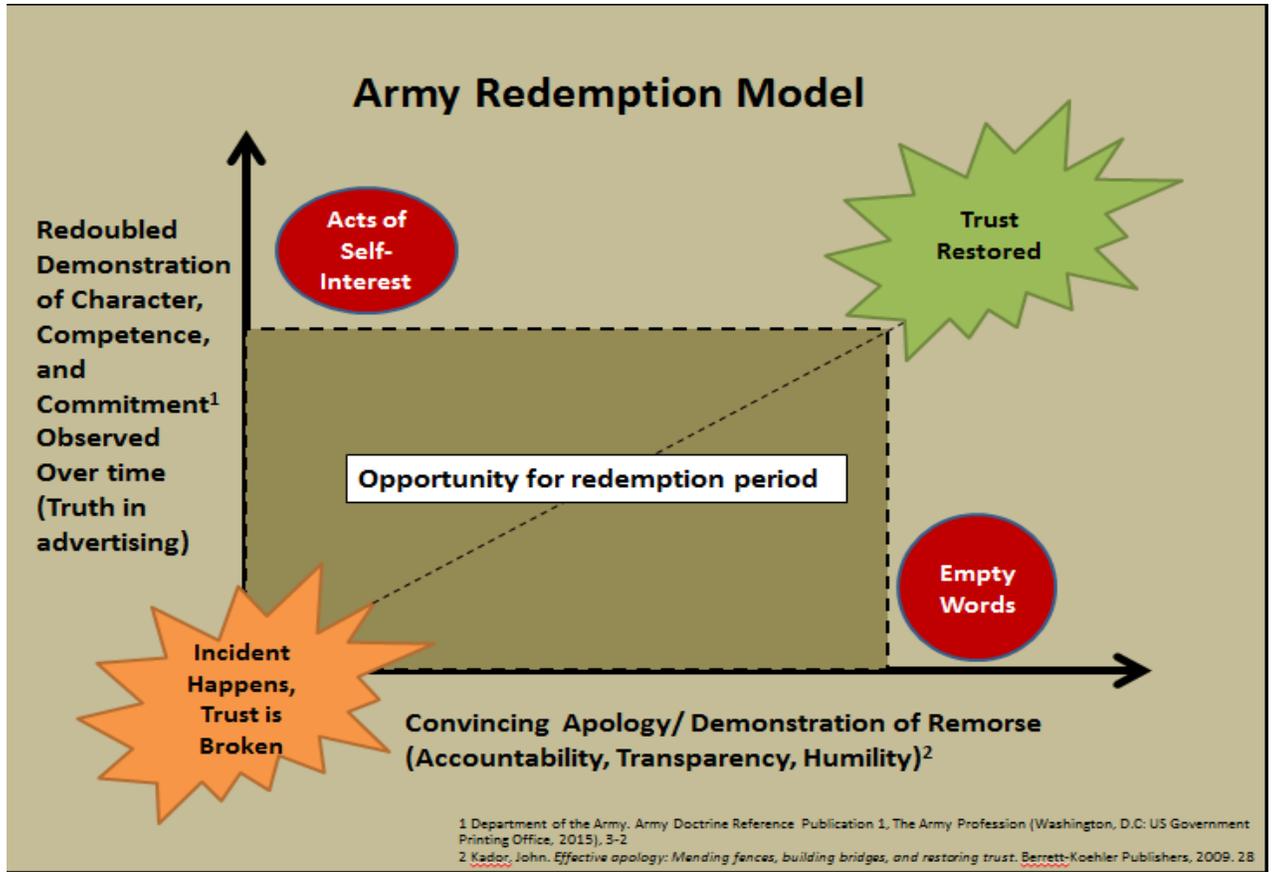
²⁰ IBID.

restore trust.²¹ An Army leader facing the music and admitting wrong doing is more likely to repair broken trust than one who is defensive or in denial.²²

The second effort is truth in advertising. Following the convincing apology and display of remorse, the leader must endeavor to demonstrate a real change in their behavior by a strict adherence to the Army ethic over a period of time proportional to the gravity of the offense. This takes place in an undefined span of time following an incident where people are watching and deciding whether or not to give the leader a second chance. For the purpose of this essay, this is known as the “opportunity for redemption period.” Any flittering display of unethical behavior will cause the trust to immediately break once more. Army leaders working to regain trust should be thick skinned and expect others to question their motives during this period as people come to terms with their emotions and opinions of the leader. Only by repeatedly doing the right thing over time will trust be restored. Any effort without a convincing apology or display of remorse will be seen as self-serving and disingenuous, resulting in trust remaining broken.

²¹ IBID. 23

²² IBID.



For the purposes of this paper, stories involving two junior leaders who broke the trust of their organizations were selected to demonstrate what is required to restore trust. Both leaders graduated from the same commissioning source and were serving in the same battalion when they demonstrated a lack of competence, character, or commitment. This background information accounts for many variables including character development at their commissioning source, the battalion's command climate, existing trust in the organization, and propensity for the restoration of trust. Due to their own actions, both experienced the devastating loss of trust from subordinates, peers, and superiors, yet only one recovered and restored trust.

The first junior leader was a platoon leader new to the unit who was arrested just prior to the battalion's deployment for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). His decision to drink and drive was further complicated by the loaded and not registered firearm found underneath his car seat. This junior leader responded with an honest and sincere apology to the battalion leadership, including a proclaimed recommitment to the Army profession and a genuine display of remorse. The battalion leadership decided to give him a second chance at restoring trust and allowed him to redeem himself as a leader during the deployment. Unfortunately, his true character came out over time as he repeatedly made unethical decisions violating others' trust again and again. The nadir came one day when caught in a lie about a different subject, this junior leader blurted out the way he really felt about the DUI, suggesting everyone overreacted. His patterned unethical behavior negated his apology and led to consensus among his leadership; his lack of character made him unfit for the Army profession.

The second junior leader was similarly new to the unit and serving as a platoon leader when he errantly directed Mark 19 grenade fire on Soldiers from his own company. When his platoon took contact in Afghanistan, he ordered his Mark 19 gunner to fire in the direction of where he thought the enemy was engaging him, resulting in fratricide as another platoon was conducting a patrol nearby. Miraculously, no Soldiers were killed and only a few were injured from the grenades. This junior leader responded by sincerely apologizing to his company and his battalion leadership and by demonstrating genuine remorse through his behavior in the ensuing weeks. It was obvious he felt awful for what happened. An investigation concluded that he did not know where he was or what he was supposed to be doing on the patrol and he

violated the Rules of Engagement (ROE) by directing Mark 19 fire against a target he could not see. To make matters worse, he may have attempted to intentionally mislead the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) in the ensuing chaos of the incident to avoid getting in trouble. Following a justifiable reprimand and rehabilitative period on the battalion staff, he too was given a second chance. He responded by serving the rest of the deployment to the best of his ability and strictly adhering to the Army Ethic and the Army Values. He dedicated himself to learning all he could about weapon systems, combat operations, and surface danger zones (SDZs) to ensure no other fratricide would occur. He handled ridicule and doubt with patience and grace, deciding to learn and grow from his experience. In the end, he was able to restore the trust of his subordinates, peers, and superiors and while the event adversely affected his first evaluation as an officer, it did not end his career.

The difference between these two junior officers was what they did when given the opportunity. The first officer was unwilling or unable to take advantage of the second chance when in the “opportunity for redemption period,” failing to demonstrate a rededication to the Army profession. The second officer was able to capitalize on the opportunity and finished the deployment with people trusting him more than before the incident. This is because the first officer failed to demonstrate character, competence, and commitment after his incident, which negated his sincere apology. The second officer not only apologized and demonstrated remorse, but also demonstrated true character, competence, and commitment, possessing the humility to face doubters and ridiculers along the way. The second officer was able to recover and continue serving while the first terminated his career. The difference between the two officer’s abilities to

restore trust resides in their character as Army professionals. Lastly, the Army does leaders and Soldiers a favor by moving everyone every few years. This provides the opportunity to start fresh and not be held back by mistakes or misgivings of the past. In the first junior leader's case, he had plenty of new commanders and supervisors who all came to the same conclusion about his character and trustworthiness.

The Army must continue to deliberately develop character in its leaders to effectively build trust and be cognizant of fractured trust. Army leaders should be educated just as business leaders in crisis management when something happens internally in an organization. How quickly a leader can respond with accountability, transparency, and humility and how aware they are of their actions during the "opportunity for redemption period," will determine personal credibility and inspire trust in the unit. The leader must dedicate themselves to demonstrating character, competence, and commitment, knowing full well they are being scrutinized and must be ready to face doubt and criticism. Any strategy aimed at character development must take into account the person's character before joining the Army. Perhaps the first officer's character was at odds with the Army Ethic and Army Values long before joining. He most likely slipped through the cracks at his commissioning source, never fully accepting the officership identity. The Army must decide whether or not they want someone of ill repute to join, if they think his or her character can be developed to a level commensurate to others. To determine this, screening criteria could be applied as part of accessions to determine entry level character. Conversely, screening recruits for character may deny opportunities for citizens who have poor character but are

profoundly changed by their experience in the Army and leave initial entry training strongly embracing the Army Ethic and the Army Values.

Research Methodology:

Research for this paper was conducted using the Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS and web searches including Google Scholar. Data was collected from print and electronic sources including the Center for Army Leadership. And the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this paper was to analyze trust as it relates to competence, character, and commitment and determine whether or not leaders can restore trust once broken. Depending on the severity of the situation, trust can be restored if the leader involved responds immediately with accountability, transparency, and humility, strictly adhering to the demonstration of character, competence, and commitment over time. The Army must continue to develop leaders who build trust and know what to do when it fractures. The Army should also determine whether or not a recruit's character is a factor in accessions and whether or not the Army is capable of developing character in someone with poor character. Without character and trust, the Army is no longer a profession.²³

²³ Department of the Army. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1, The Army Profession (Washington, D.C: US Government Printing Office, 2015), 3-2

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