

How to Think Less and Trust More

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Trust is not basing your level of belief on evidence. While evidence builds confidence, trust is a feeling first. It's a sensation. It's a deep knowing that it will all work out.

The how of trust is unknown. Our mind even tries to figure it out, weigh options, and logically navigate it. While the mind is a powerful tool to subdue the dragon of defeat or assist in walking up the ladder of good feeling thoughts, trust isn't something you can make sense of. It's a connection you establish, nurture and grow.

Being familiar with this connection comes with understanding the **quality** of it. What it is and what it isn't.

When we land here we trust. We trust that our needs are going to be met. That our caretakers will inevitably come to our aid.

As we are introduced to the world and begin to venture out of the nest we call home, we learn how to navigate our reality. Most of us are taught to think our way through life. While that's a useful skill, there are other ways to play the game.

Before I dive into how to navigate trust, let's talk about how it works and why we stop too soon.

The story about elephants that can teach us about our limits

There's this concept in psychology called learned helplessness. The story essentially goes like this. To train the boundaries for a baby elephant, one ankle is tied to a post or tree. When a baby elephant is small, let's call him Tiny, it's easy to train him that moving beyond the length of the chain is impossible. Every time Tiny tries to escape, he's quickly ratcheted back. Over time, Tiny's experience tells him that there's no use trying because this is just how far I can go.

But Tiny doesn't know that the limits of his environment as a small elephant are only temporary and that someday this chain will no longer contain him. But as Tiny gets older and larger, he still stays within the confines of the imposed limitation. Even though he can easily break the chains or snap the rope, he doesn't because that's what he's been trained to believe is his limit.

When translating the animal to human experience the father of positive psychology Dr. Martin Seligman found the results to differ because of our ability to rationalize the experience. This [explanatory style](#) is what is key to having an adaptable mindset and conditioning your brain to

find a way to release resistance, develop learned optimism, and ultimately see new choices that are available.

Education and learned helplessness

For a very large portion of our lives, we are taught to shut up, only speak when spoken to, sit down, listen, and basically conform. Yes, I'm over exaggerating a bit. But think about it. Most children spend six to eight hours a day, five days a week, nine months out of the year for grades K through 12. That's roughly 2,457 days out of 4,745 in those 13 years. About 52% of their young lives.

This is not an article on schools, but given the state of affairs when it comes to education, my guess is you'll be hearing something about that from me in the future. Now the vast majority of schools are very linear, left brain, and heavy on logic. Besides the old "always trust your first answer," our early years in the educational system are mostly focused on the group and learning how to think.

Nowhere in our formal education system has there been a strong focus on the individual, on developing strengths, understanding how to navigate our emotional terrain, develop emotional intelligence, or how to trust.

We're talking about 52% of a child's life spent sitting down, following rules, testing out, preparing, and living almost exclusively in the intellect. This doesn't even start to get at the amount of homework we typically see in that time period either.

A large portion of our lives is spent believing thinking is the only way. Breaking the chains of operating purely from the intellect requires exercising our power to choose and training trust.

The power of choice and moving from thinking to feeling

I remember when I first realized I have a choice. It was one of those moments where it felt like my entire reality popped. Where I saw every choice I made in life up until that point and how the overwhelming majority of them were based on rebellion and non-choice.

Before the gestalt of "I have a choice," I had just navigated a large decision. I was done as a live in private chef and contemplating my next move. I was trying to decide between the only two options I thought I had. One was go to Arizona for a food related job and the other was to stay in LA. I had been working in people's kitchens for years and I was spent. It was time for a personal reinvention. I had something in mind that felt right. Something that was more in line with a new direction, but all the mental noise and all the reasons why it was too risky clouded my ability to choose. Going to Arizona was the only option. Or so I thought. Sitting in my living room and looking at the only options I thought I had I said... "I don't have a choice. I have to do this."

In that particular moment I didn't trust myself. I remember feeling helpless, defeated, beat up and heavy. I constantly felt like I had to sacrifice and nothing seemed to click. What I didn't know was that this choice was doomed from the beginning. It was based on non-choice. I wouldn't say that it was a wrong decision. I don't necessarily believe in that. It's not that anything was inherently wrong with going to Arizona, but the belief that I didn't have another choice. That was the error. Not following my feeling and exploring the other option which eventually did come into fruition, that was a mistake. Taking a snapshot of this event, the qualities were that of panic, desperation, need, doubt, blame, heavy, and defeat.

The beauty of this reality is that once we realize we've taken a wrong turn, we can always get back on track. Understanding how to use your feelings as your guide and trust the quality of your choice will always lead you in the right direction.

The time I trusted and it all worked out

This was the most pivotal moment that completely changed the course of my life.

After college I decided not to go to med school. Not because I didn't believe in medicine, but it just didn't feel right. I remember exactly where I was sitting at my parents house in Rochester, NY. During a study session with my 20 pound med school entrance exam prep book I heard and felt a resounding NO. It was then that I decided not to go to med school.

I didn't actually have a plan at the time, but deep down I could feel that something huge just shifted. It wasn't easy. I had to get over all kinds of feelings like giving up, feeling like a failure, disappointing my parents, and who I was now that I wasn't going to have this prestigious label.

As the days and weeks went on I started to get the sense to move out to California where my Aunt and Uncle lived. I got curious and followed the feeling and started to piece together a plan that equally felt good and made sense from a financial and time perspective.

As the winding road of life has it, the work I had planned for my arrival fell through and I had to figure out what to do next.

I ended up getting a job working in the Schecter Guitar warehouse packing guitars. Not the most exciting thing, but it would do for now. It did happen to be conveniently located near my cousin's house.

At the time my cousin was cooking a Macrobiotic diet for her husband that was responsible for putting a pretty aggressive form of prostate cancer into remission and keeping it at bay for a long time.

I was completely fascinated by this and started helping her make food in the mornings before heading into packing. After adopting the diet and lifestyle, I eventually went on to study macrobiotics and worked as a live in private chef for six or so years.

None of it made sense, but it just kept working out one step at a time. Following the feeling and continuing down this path with trust led me in a completely new direction. If I had tried to logically figure any of this out and fit all the pieces together ahead of time, who knows where that would have led.

It took some serious balls to make that first leap. It was by no means a direct path and certainly wasn't the path that was initially prepared for me.

Sure there were blips on the radar like pain, disappointment, depression, and dissolved relationships. But those moments when it was time to make a choice all showed similar qualities. They didn't look like the aforementioned qualities characteristic of the decree "I don't have a choice." These qualities were curiosity, presence, faith, guidance, instruction, open, receptive, decisive, and swift. Sure some of it felt scary, unsure, and unpredictable, but those moments became an opportunity to develop a new relationship with receiving guidance and taking action.

To trust is to choose. It's to be open to the possibility that what you feel and what you think is valid. Not only valid, but accurate. And not just accurate, but reliable. You have the idea, inspiration, thought, feeling, or notion for a reason. Listening to all the reasons why you can't or why it's not going to work isn't getting you any further down the road.

What if you just trusted your next step. Without having to know or see the whole picture ahead of time of how that thing is going to unfold. Without having to know all the right answers, but just being willing to let it unfold and trust that you will "figure it out."

Look back over the moments where you trusted your next step. Remember how you felt, how things worked out, and the quality of those choice moments.

In contrast, look at the times where you doubted your actions and maybe took a next step that didn't feel right because you thought it was your only option. Now is your chance to use them to learn from and give you the barometer of feeling your way to trust.

Trusting what you think and feel is not reckless. It's not irresponsible. It's not winging it or flying by the seat of your pants. In fact, it's not any of those labels you've heard along the way.

It's deeply vulnerable. Can be scary as fuck, AND super liberating, freeing, and invigorating.

Consider trust a tactical lesson in intuition and building up a toolkit of reliable inner promptings that inform you on your next best step. And remember to cut yourself a little slack when you're

starting to trust yourself, maybe for the first few times ever. I mean you did spend more than half of your adolescent life living purely from the intellect.

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