

# Trust, Credibility, and Authority

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how our relationships play a big role in helping us decide who to trust. In particular, we'll focus on:

1. Trust and Its Variants
  - a. Credibility
  - b. Authority
2. Attribution Bias
3. Trust in Conflict

## 1. Trust and Its Variants

**Trust** is an expectation that an individual will act in a positive way toward other members of the relationship, based on an assessment of previous behavior.

This assessment of previous behavior is key; we decide who to trust based on what we observe about that person.

### IN CONTEXT

You can't go up to people you just met and say, "You can trust me." They aren't going to take you at face value; they're going to say, "Who are you, and why should I trust you?" In fact, it might lead them not to trust you should you approach them like that. People are instead going to observe how you behave at work and in social situations, and then come to their own determinations about you.

If they haven't seen you behave, perhaps if you're in a new position at work, they're going to depend on the stories of others: What do other people say about you either in terms of your work record or in a social situation? What do your friends and your neighbors say about you?

Either what we observe or what we hear from others is going to help us determine our level of trust.



### TERM TO KNOW

**Trust**

An expectation that an individual will act in positive ways towards other members of the relationship, based on assessment of previous behavior.

### 1a. Credibility

One of the variants of trust is **credibility** in relationships, which is a perception that an individual has adequate knowledge and an inclination to honesty regarding particular actions or statements.

Thus, we believe people are credible in terms of what they do or say. Relationships play an important role in our decision of who is credible.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you need to hire a handyman. You're looking through the paper, and trying to make some decisions. Then you ask your neighbor, who says, "Oh, Joe's great. I know him; you can trust him."

Your neighbor's word here is probably worth more than anything you're going to see in the ads about people you don't know. You can trust your neighbor's opinion because you trust your neighbor.

➞ **EXAMPLE** We can also see this in social media. On LinkedIn, many people network in order to get jobs, recommendations, or referrals. Or there's the traditional style of networking in which you go to an event, and you meet people and give out your business card.

All of these are examples of relationships that we're building; credibility is related to trust, which is related to our relationships.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Credibility

In relationships, a perception that an individual has adequate knowledge and an inclination to honesty regarding particular actions or statements.

### 2b. Authority

**Authority** can be defined in relationships as a recognition that a member of the relationship is empowered to fill particular roles or perform particular tasks. You want somebody that you feel you can trust in a particular role of authority.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you're looking for a new doctor. You may check out what recommendations are online for a particular physician, but more often, you probably just ask someone that you know: "I'm looking for a good dentist. Do you know anybody? Who do you go to?"

You take the recommendation of a friend or a relative, somebody that you trust. You probably give more weight or value to this person's recommendation than to something else that you've read.

Once again, we depend on our relationships and what we hear from others to make decisions about authority and credibility.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Authority

In relationships, a recognition that a member of the relationship is empowered to fill particular roles or perform particular tasks.

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## 2. Attribution Bias

Another factor to mention in terms of how we make decisions is **attribution bias**, or a tendency to assign more positive traits to members of one's own group and more negative traits to non-members.

We tend to want to trust people that are more like ourselves; we feel more comfortable around people with whom we share histories and backgrounds.

For that reason, we tend to give more credence to what these people might say or do. We have a tendency to trust them more than we trust those who are not like ourselves or are unfamiliar to us.

In many cases, this attribution bias can be more powerful than evidence itself. We go with this feeling we have about an individual based on how much they are like us rather than on direct evidence.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Attribution Bias

A tendency to assign more positive traits to members of one's own group and to assign more negative traits to non-members.

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## 3. Trust in Conflict

Conflict can damage trust because we see behaviors that don't match what we originally thought about an individual. As you know, conflict can result from either something emotional or something physical; you were disappointed in some way.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** A person that you trusted never called, emailed, or got in touch at all when you were going through a very difficult time. You're now wondering, "How can I trust this person? Is this person really who I thought they were?"

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Or perhaps you loaned someone some money or something else of yours, and they won't return it. This person keeps making excuses, and this damages your trust.

In a conflict resolution process, trust is very important; both parties need to feel that they can trust the conflict-resolver. In order to accomplish that, the conflict-resolver must make sure that they give equal treatment to both parties; both parties should feel that they are being treated with the same amount of respect.

If you are a conflict-resolver, you should ensure right up front that both parties know:

- You're non-judgmental.
- You're not here to decide anything for them.
- You're not invested in the outcome.

Your role is to create a safe, comfortable, and confidential environment for the parties to talk out the issues and come to an agreement that meets their mutual needs.

You should set up these conditions at the very beginning of the process so that both parties trust you as the person who is helping to mediate or resolve the conflict.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how **trust and its variants**, credibility and authority, are determined by our relationships and how much we value them. You also learned that as human beings, we are prone to **attribution bias**; we want to trust people we see as being like ourselves. You now understand **trust in conflict** can be damaged. It's the conflict-resolver's role to establish trust between themselves and the conflicting parties by creating a safe, comfortable, and confidential environment for the parties to resolve their issues. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Attribution Bias**

A tendency to assign more positive traits to members of one's own group and to assign more negative traits to non-members.

### **Authority**

In relationships, a recognition that a member of the relationship is empowered to fill particular roles or perform particular tasks.

### **Credibility**

In relationships, a perception that an individual has adequate knowledge and an inclination to honesty regarding particular actions or statements.

### **Trust**

An expectation that an individual will act in positive ways towards other members of the relationship, based on assessment of previous behavior.