

# Where to Begin the Journey?

written by CD | AUGUST 10, 2019

When a new person joins, the first impression you make on them sets the foundation for the rest of your journey together. So, the question arises: Where to Begin the Journey? Before expressing your objectives as a leader, first establish with yourself what you believe to be the foundation of such as relationship.

See also [New Hires](#) for thoughts on the three most impactful people in determining the joy, success and fulfillment an employee finds in their job.

Begin with deciding if you buy into the notion that solving for the team member's best interest is also in your own and your organization's best interest. Do you believe that the most effective people are those that love what they do and the more they have passion for what they do, the greater their value to the organization is likely to be. If you don't believe this with conviction, you will be hampered in your own success and that of your team. They will know the difference subconsciously or consciously.



## Trust

Legendary football coach [Lou Holtz](#), now retired and in the College Football Hall of Fame, had an uncanny ability to turn losing teams into winners. During his college coaching career, he compiled a record of 249 wins, 132 losses, and 7 ties. Holtz's 1988 Notre Dame team was undefeated and determined to be the consensus national champion. Holtz said that players had three implicit questions about a new coach:

1. *"Can I trust you?"*
2. *"Are you committed?"*
3. *"Do you care about me?"*

This brings to mind two quotes about thinking well of others and the impact it may have on them...

- Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great. – Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Thinking too well of people often allows them to be better than they otherwise would.  
– Nelson Mandela

## Effective Communication

Effective communication is often addressed in the form of [tools](#) you can use. These include active listening, empathic listening, powerful questions, making eye contact, not interrupting, paying attention, withholding judgement, echoing back, radical candor, ... To effectively use any of these techniques is our genuine interest to hear what the other person is saying and to have genuine concern for their well-being. If we're not genuinely interested, they will know, even if only subconsciously.



Clever Hans (in [German](#): der Kluge Hans) was an [Orlov Trotterhorse](#) that was claimed to have performed [arithmetic](#) and other intellectual tasks. After a formal investigation in 1907, [psychologist Oskar Pfungst](#) demonstrated that the horse was not actually performing these mental tasks, but was watching the reactions of his trainer

If you don't believe with conviction, it might help to dig deeper into some of the the well researched [books](#) about teams. Note, successful teams have been built around amazing players such as those described in

[Tim Grover's Relentless – From Good to Great to Unstoppable](#) and there is much to be learned there as well, but for that type of team, please refer to Grover's book.

Hans' ability to stop stomping out the "right" answer was cued by the audience changing demeanor once he arrived at it. Horses and humans take non-verbal cues as to our intent. All those techniques that serve as cues will come more naturally, be more convincing and effective if our interest in those we lead, live and work with can sense it's genuine.

## Whispering

In her article [4 Leadership Lessons from Horse Whispering](#), Praseeda Nair points out...

- *Studies into human communication reveals that only 7 per cent of any communication is conveyed through actual words; 93 per cent are conveyed non-verbally, through facial expressions, posture and tone.*
- *Horse whispering is all about communicating using non-verbal cues and body language. Trainers believe horses are as unique as individuals, so it's easy to extrapolate this form of communication for between interpersonal conversations.*
- *Trainers say that leading a horse only requires three main things: establishing trust, demonstrating respect, and communicating directions clearly. Here are the main leadership lessons to learn from communicating with horses.*

## Start with who you're solving for

Once you have the conviction that you're solving for the other, you can start to get them on board by telling and showing them that their best interest is in your best interest.

## A Powerful Question

Once you are both clear on your intent, the journey can begin either at the first interview with a powerful question. It can certainly also begin later with a first "real" powerful conversation in your first 1-on-1 (if you weren't part of the interview process).

Towards the end of the first interaction, I like to arrive at asking an employee or candidate to relate a time or experience that fundamentally changed who they are. You often get the most amazing stories, you also learn who they are and what they value, and you feel you should share something in return yourself. Now, you have a foundation of genuine interest in the person upon which a relationship of trust can be built.

A question that reveals who they are and what they want in life also provides the context in which more immediate goals can be framed. Now, when you might need to have a difficult conversation, it won't be a conflict of one opinion against the other in a battle of offense and defensiveness, but rather a mutual objective of getting past the challenge. If the question/conversation is truly powerful, it can lead to a self realization for that person about what matters to them, what gives them energy and clarity on why their near term objectives are important to them. Simon Sinek says building relationships is hard work on [How to Establish Trust When Building Relationships](#). As Brené Brown puts it in [The power of vulnerability](#), in order to connect, we have to be seen.

What changed you?

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Where should that conversation end?

Ideally, the person you're hoping to lead or already leading walks away with a feeling of genuine trust that you are going to solve for their best interest together with them. It's ok if they understand their success will benefit the business and you, but that should be the outcome and not the objective. When they believe your benefit and the business are the primary objective and their success is an outcome and not the objective, you will discover they are not nearly as motivated.

Your intent may be good, but it is the impact that matters. In closing, it can be good to ask them if they genuinely believe you are interested in and will solve for what's best for them. If they don't, and you might tell by how they say it more than the words they use, you know have something to work on. Until that foundation of trust is there, all other conversations will be much less impactful.

### Caveat – What if it doesn't turn out?

When you hire someone or engage with them as a client, you should be convinced it will work out such that they are successful and you should solve to that end. However, you should also let them know you don't have a crystal ball, and no matter how how you try to set them up for success, there is no guarantee it will work. Ultimately, if they are succeeding, you have a responsibility to them, others on the team and yourself to recognize that could leave you in a place where you believe that engagement isn't successful. You should both accept that's a possible outcome from day one.

At SAS – 37 consecutive years of record earnings—\$2.8 billion in 2012.

Something like this can also be done in a team setting where everyone goes around the room – possibly over lunch – relating something about themselves no one else in the room knows. This can help the team feel more connected. A fun alternative is to have everyone write their experience on a piece of paper that each person will then pull one to read and the team guesses who it might be. It may help to open by giving an example or two from your own life to provide context for the types of things people might say or write down.

At some of the companies I've worked, we've also had new hires get up in the company to tell a story that no one knows with bonus points if it's embarrassing – this too can help provide a foundation for a more human connection.

### In the Classroom

Similarly, when teaching, especially 8th graders, it's hard to make progress in the classroom if there isn't a connection established. I remember a school event where parents were dumbfounded that their 8th graders were asking me to be in selfies with them. If you can have that kind of connection with 8th graders, you can also help the appreciate that you're objective is to prepare them for life and help them learn how to learn.

As a teacher, a parent, a mentor, a manager, and a human,  
I like:

*“If you are personally interested in the child,  
they can sense it in about five minutes,  
and I think they are forever grateful  
because most schools are not like that.”*

[National award-winning Palo Alto teacher takes unusual approach](#)

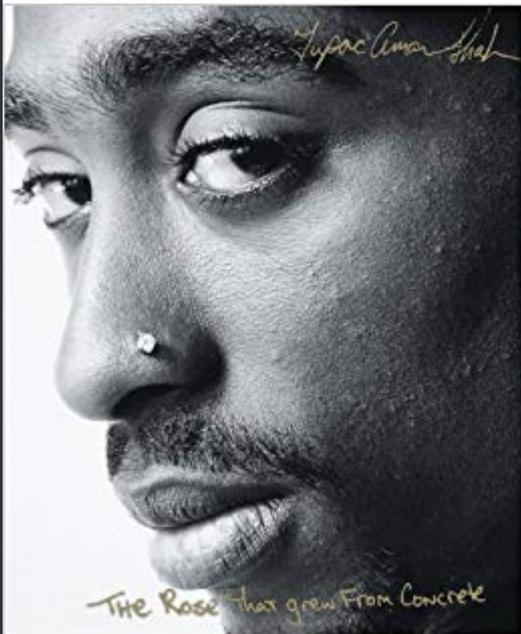
TRICK — Trust, Respect, Independence, Collaboration and Kindness



Actor James Franco with former teacher Esther Wojcicki

[National award-winning Palo Alto teacher takes unusual approach](#)

In another classroom – Growing Roses from Concrete



I showed up for my first teaching assignment to learn the teacher had quit the previous day and asked if I'd be willing to lead the class. The class was made of 8th graders that other teachers had given up on being able to manage in their classrooms. The students later confided in me that every one of them was in a gang and they figured they'd be lucky to live to the age of 18. Hence, education wasn't a big priority for them – and education beyond high school was beyond their wildest dreams.

I remembered a book one of my professors had suggested that she used when she taught at juvenile hall. It was Tupac Shakur's book of poetry [The Rose That Grew From Concrete](#).

The students were surprised that I bought them each a copy and that I even knew who Tupac was. They didn't know that Pac wrote poetry, they had not expected me to be showing them something from Pac they hadn't know about. Most of these 8th graders told me it was the first book they ever read. They were proud to carry it around with them, and they had selected their favorite poem. Some had also been inspired to write their first poem after reading it. I could not read any of their poems without tears coming to my eyes – amazing stuff.

Some pointed out that this was cool, and the only other reading of poetry some previous teachers had tried to foist on them was some junk by Shakespeare. I pointed out that Shakespeare just grew up in a different time, in another country and on another type of “concrete”. That tweaked their curiosity, and now a door was open to expand their horizons and awareness.

See Also:

- [Video: Simon Sinek – First why and then trust](#)
- [Legendary Leadership: The Wisdom of Brad Smith](#)