

— THE ENNEAGRAM AT WORK

Building and maintaining trust

through the nine Enneagram types

Trust is not a personality trait. It is a set of behaviors — and each type builds and breaks it differently.

Three lenses: competence, reliability, motive

Building trust rests on many things. Here we filter general Enneagram type behavior through the lenses of competence, reliability, and motive — and on embodied traits like boundaries, accountability, confidentiality, integrity, and non-judgment. Trust is developed or broken through our actions, especially through the commitments we make.

01

Reliability

I will follow through, deliver consistently, and do what I say.

- Ensures actions — and non-verbals — consistently match up
- Is more precise in making commitments
- Proactively communicates problems and delays
- Regularly exceeds expectations

02

Competence

I know what I am doing — or will say when I don't — and will get the job done well.

- Consistently performs and demonstrates effectiveness
- Looks to help others
- Creates platforms to share expertise and clear communication
- Asks questions and clarifies how the answers determine the course of action

03

Motive

My intentions are positive and sincere while I stay connected and work as a team.

- **Honest and believable.** Open to saying what they mean. Shares intentions. Owns mistakes. Shares important updates with others.
- **Connected and loyal.** Puts the needs of the organization ahead of their own. Shows up in a crisis.
- **Vulnerable and trusting.** Candid in revealing flaws. Assumes positive intent.

Nine types, grouped in three centers

Each of the nine pages that follow gives you one type's natural trust strength, the place trust tends to erode, and the specific behaviors that build or break trust with them. Start with your own type. Then read the type of the person you are struggling with most.

TYPES 8 · 9 · 1

The body center

Trust is negotiated through instinct, power, and control. These types are read as trustworthy when their actions are direct and their ground is steady.

TYPES 2 · 3 · 4

The heart center

Trust is negotiated through image, feeling, and connection. These types are read as trustworthy when what they present matches what is true.

TYPES 5 · 6 · 7

The head center

Trust is negotiated through certainty, information, and planning. These types are read as trustworthy when thinking is transparent and boundaries are respected.

Powerful challenger

STRENGTH COMPETENCE

CHALLENGE MOTIVE

Natural strength

Strong and forceful. Communicate confidence. Fearless in meeting big challenges. Decisive and action-oriented. Natural leadership ability. Work very hard. Protective of others on the team. Express power in moving things forward. Not afraid of conflict or confronting tough situations.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Be direct. Say what you mean. Tell the truth.
- Keep them in the loop.
- Don't be afraid of conflict with them.
- Put requests at the top of your message — don't make them figure out what you need.
- Support them in taking action.
- Hold your ground when they challenge you.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Hide things from them. Lie.
- Leave them out of the loop.
- Act weak or take the victim role when it isn't genuine or warranted.
- Communicate indirectly.
- Undermine their authority or expose their vulnerability.
- Treat them insensitively.

Where trust erodes

Avoid awareness of vulnerability and weakness. Overdo strength and become domineering. Appear intimidating, unapproachable, hard to connect with. May not know their real impact. Over-focus on taking action leads to mistakes. Confuse their subjective view of reality for objective reality. May not acknowledge mistakes.

Modest mediator

STRENGTH **MOTIVE**
CHALLENGE RELIABILITY

Natural strength

Connect well with individuals and the team. Easily see different viewpoints. Good listeners. Unselfishly support others. Hear people out and mediate conflict. Emotionally steady and humble. Readily form positive personal connections.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Be considerate of others. Support the team.
- Ask them what they want, and hear them out.
- Don't overlook or exclude them.
- Encourage them to say "no."
- Make sure they buy in to plans.
- Don't disturb the peace unnecessarily.
- Don't tell them what to do or pressure them into things.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Minimize or dismiss them. Don't listen.
- Create needless conflict.
- Assume they will adapt to your agenda without asking what they want.
- Tell them what to do. Manipulate them.
- Overlook them or leave them out.
- Make unilateral decisions that affect others without seeking input.

Where trust erodes

Indecisive. Hard to know, and slow to act on their own priorities. Exhibit passive resistance or passive-aggressive behavior. Get stubborn when pressured. Put others before themselves. Difficult to be assertive. Say "yes" when they mean "no." Procrastinate and fail to meet deadlines.

Principled reformer

STRENGTH RELIABILITY

CHALLENGE MOTIVE

1

Natural strength

Work hard to adhere to rules and processes, fulfill expectations, and meet commitments. Communicate with care and precision about deliverables. Admit mistakes. Consistently produce high-quality output.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Be on time. Follow rules and procedures.
- Admit when you make a mistake. Be honest.
- Provide logical rationales for why you do what you do.
- Communicate progress toward shared goals.
- Always do your best. Identify problems proactively.
- Take responsibility.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Make mistakes and resist being held accountable for errors.
- Don't act on feedback or constructive criticism.
- Don't follow established processes or obey the rules.
- Don't follow through.
- Behave badly or inappropriately. Be dishonest or unethical.
- Be inconsiderate of others.

Where trust erodes

Behavior characterized by criticism and control rather than openness and vulnerability. Become resentful when things don't work well. Put a lid on emotions and impulses, so it is hard to connect with them, see good intentions, or address vulnerability. Repressed anger leaks out as micromanaging, judgment, and resentment. Can maintain impossibly high standards of perfection.

Strategic supporter

STRENGTH MOTIVE
CHALLENGE RELIABILITY

Natural strength

Demonstrate empathy and compassion. Share feelings and intentions. Prioritize building relationships through mutual support. Well-intentioned and conscientious. Sincere desire to help. Readily express care and concern for others' welfare. Bond through sharing personal information. Emphasize teamwork.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Be open and friendly. Make a personal connection.
- Do what you say you are going to do.
- Meet the needs of others.
- Appreciate and affirm them.
- Let them say "no." Encourage them to express needs.
- Accept emotions. Be considerate of others and the team.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Offer excessive negative feedback and no positive feedback.
- Be inconsiderate of others.
- Don't listen to or support them.
- Demonstrate excessive self-interest.
- Avoid doing what it takes to create rapport.
- Judge them or their feelings.
- Don't follow through on commitments.

Where trust erodes

Can react emotionally when stressed. May be unpredictable or sensitive. Overextend themselves. Have difficulty saying "no" and making boundaries. Become exhausted by over-giving. Don't communicate needs. Adjust their presentation, so may appear inauthentic. Fear disapproval. Prioritize based on affection rather than efficiency.

Productive performer

STRENGTH COMPETENCE

CHALLENGE MOTIVE

Natural strength

Meet goals. Execute on tasks. Maintain a high level of productivity. Embody the image of a competent person. Appear confident. Excel at sales and presentation. Work long hours. Get the job done. Value efficiency. Exhibit strong leadership ability and competence for others.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Demonstrate competence. Work as hard as they do.
- Support progress toward agreed-upon goals.
- Help remove obstacles to shared goals.
- Do things that make them look good.
- Support team efforts.
- Maintain a fast pace. Be efficient. Don't create delays.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Be slow. Demonstrate incompetence or lack of productivity.
- Waste their time. Get in the way of their goals.
- Fail to manage your emotional reactions.
- Make them look bad.
- Repeatedly switch goals and directions.
- Fail to do your part of a collaborative project — or do it badly.

Where trust erodes

Lack of transparency around motives and intentions. Mimic the image of success, so may appear inauthentic. Motives shift with goals and settings. Prioritize work tasks over people. Tend to be impatient. Avoid showing emotion, and may not know what they feel. Hard to connect to or know their real values.

Authentic creative

STRENGTH MOTIVE
CHALLENGE RELIABILITY

Natural strength

Emotionally intelligent and available. Authentic. Honest, even under adverse conditions. Value and work to develop meaningful interpersonal connections. Willing to express vulnerability. Encourage others to express real feelings. Motivated to create mutual understanding. Support creative collaboration.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Share your feelings. Understand theirs as they experience them.
- Make time to connect. Seek to understand them.
- Value and affirm them.
- Demonstrate authenticity.
- Support work that has meaning and purpose.
- Appreciate their ability to tell the truth. Value their emotional intuition.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Don't take the time to understand them.
- Actively devalue their emotions.
- Assume you know how they feel when you don't.
- Demonstrate inauthenticity.
- Dismiss their ideas and creative visions. Criticize them excessively.
- Pressure them to be someone they aren't. Disregard their intuitive insights.

Where trust erodes

Can shift work behavior depending on their emotional state. Can be over-sensitive and moody. Focus on what's missing. May be emotionally volatile. When triggered, may be hard to collaborate with. Prioritize creative vision over conformity to processes and agreed-upon goals.

Analytical specialist

STRENGTH COMPETENCE

CHALLENGE MOTIVE

Natural strength

Consistent, competent, and calm. Objective experts. Emotionally steady and knowledgeable. Excel at complex problem-solving. Develop the knowledge base required to get things done well. Insightful, systematic thinkers. Enjoy intellectual engagement. Demonstrate mastery of information connected to the job.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Spell out time frames and expectations clearly.
- Respect boundaries. Make clear plans.
- Back up your position with solid information. Explain your thinking.
- Communicate on a mental level; avoid excessive or unnecessary emotion.
- Acknowledge their expertise.
- Value knowledge and the ability to access information.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Don't respect boundaries. Surprise them.
- Intrude upon their private space.
- Make up information. Base decisions on bad information.
- Make plans without full understanding of the facts.
- Push for emotions or personal information. Be emotionally messy.
- Assume negative intent when they are quiet.

Where trust erodes

Difficult to communicate with on an emotional level. Resist sharing personal information. Prefer to work independently, and collaboration may feel challenging. Need privacy and boundaries. Prioritize data over people. Appear quiet and withdrawn. Can seem mysterious, aloof, or arrogant. Hard to form close working relationships.

Skeptical troubleshooter

STRENGTH COMPETENCE

CHALLENGE MOTIVE

Natural strength

Skilled at problem-solving. Good analysts and troubleshooters. Insightful forecasters of potential difficulties. Ask the right questions to test plans. Calm in a crisis. Knowledgeable and intuitive. Excel at assessing risks and threats. Good at being prepared and creating contingency plans. Loyal once trust is established.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

- Demonstrate consistency. Be honest.
- Do what you say you are going to do.
- Understand they need time to develop trust.
- Be patient with their questions.
- Value their ability to problem-solve and troubleshoot.
- Give them time to analyze information and evaluate threats.
- Be diligently trustworthy.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Keep secrets. Hold back relevant information.
- Be inconsistent. Send mixed messages. Lie to them.
- Don't keep your word.
- Refuse to answer questions or get impatient with them.
- Get defensive when they poke holes in plans.
- Dismiss them as pessimistic. Devalue their threat assessments.
- Take unnecessary risks.

Where trust erodes

May ask too many questions and delay action. Express worry and anxiety excessively. Create problems by looking for them. Convey a sense of insecurity and confusion. Project fear outward. Can appear pessimistic and expect things to go wrong. Overly focused on problems and threats. Difficulty trusting others.

Enthusiastic visionary

STRENGTH MOTIVE
CHALLENGE RELIABILITY

Natural strength

Bring a positive attitude to everything they do, and try to inspire positive feelings in others. Display sincere enthusiasm and optimism for projects and relationships. Expect, envision, and create the conditions for team success.

TO ENHANCE TRUST

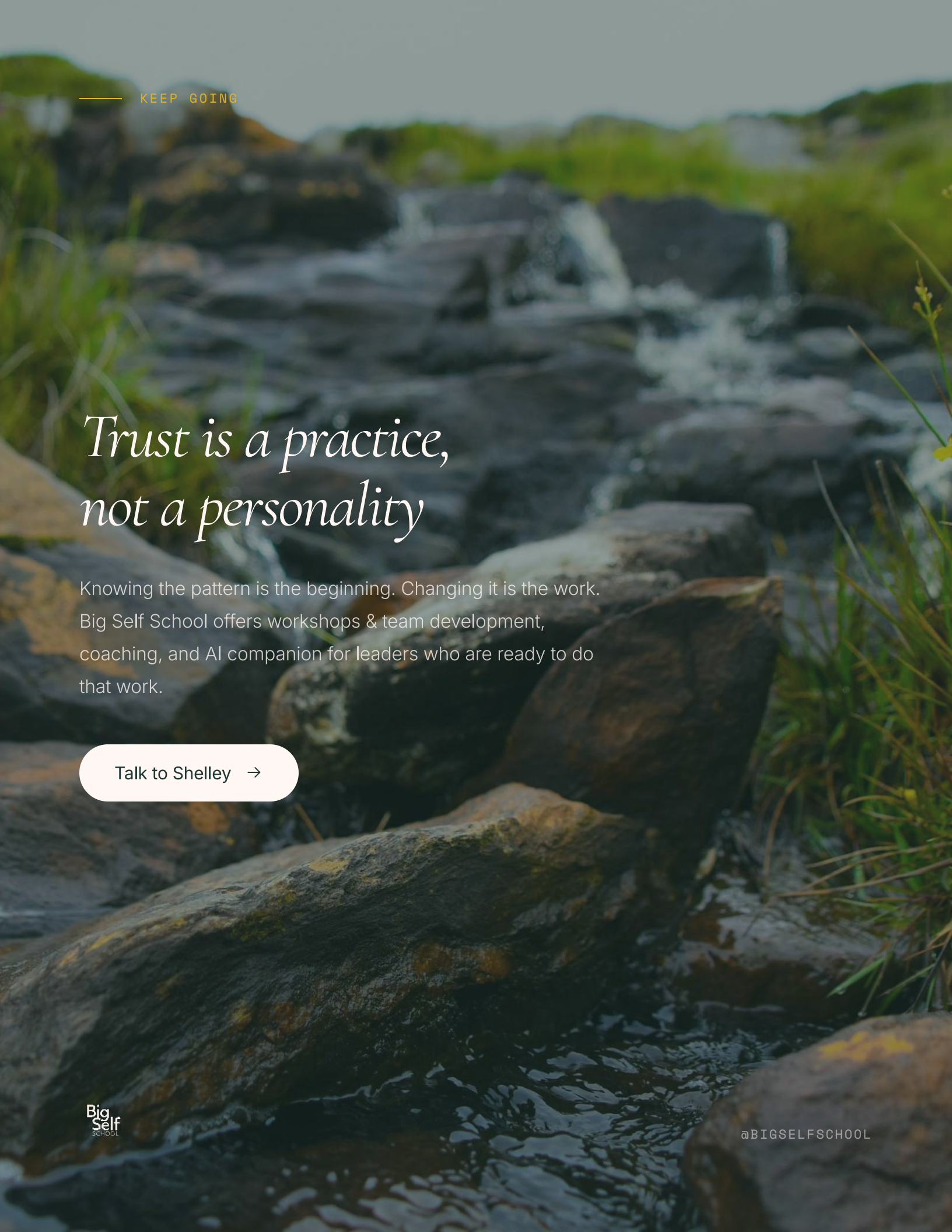
- Value their visions and plans. Be honest.
- Enjoy brainstorming. Allow them to think outside the box.
- Appreciate innovation and creativity.
- Be kind and gentle when discussing negatives.
- Take their ideas seriously. Support their interests.
- Avoid excessive limitations. Be open to outsourcing tedious tasks.

TO DIMINISH TRUST

- Confront them with excessive criticism or negativity.
- Force them to deal with discomfort.
- Put gratuitous constraints on them. Limit their options.
- Dismiss their ideas. Tell them what to do.
- Slow them down. Curtail their ability to think outside the box.
- Devalue their optimism.

Where trust erodes

Avoid challenging situations and feelings. Preference for ideas over implementation; executing on details feels tedious. Overbook themselves. Dislike dealing with constraints. Get distracted and lose focus. Have trouble with follow-through and commitments. Overly optimistic — imagination trumps realism. Promise more than they deliver. Future focus prevents presence.



KEEP GOING

Trust is a practice, not a personality

Knowing the pattern is the beginning. Changing it is the work. Big Self School offers workshops & team development, coaching, and AI companion for leaders who are ready to do that work.

Talk to Shelley →