



**FREE  
CHAPTER**

**GABRIELLE DOLAN**

**REAL**

**COMMUNICATION**

**HOW TO BE YOU AND LEAD TRUE**

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# INTRODUCTION

This is just what the world needs, isn't it? Another bloody book on communication and leadership.

Well, I might not be the best salesperson in the world, but let me explain why I wrote this book and why you need to read it.

I have worked in business for over 35 years (which does make me feel a tad old ...). For a big chunk of that time, I have helped leaders communicate more effectively and be the absolute best that they can be: authentic, insightful, impactful, influential ... just plain real.

I know from personal experience how hard it is to work for, and work with, leaders who talk rubbish and never do what they say they do. (I don't think I am on my own here.) We are crying out for leaders who are authentic and speak in a way that is real.

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*This kind of authentic leadership and real communication  
is needed now, more than ever.*

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Why? Times have changed, and continue to change at a rapid rate (it's not slowing down!). With this change comes a whole new set of phrases, acronyms and jargon that is confusing and, at times, overwhelming. We are also more cynical of the world at large and, hence, more demanding of what we expect from the companies and leaders we work for.

So in part I of this book, we will explore the decline of trust in today's world and our confusion about knowing what or whom to trust. We'll also look at the evolving expectations of employees and customers, and why they are crying out for us to communicate to them in a more transparent and genuine way. And we'll examine the increasing amount of corporate jargon

that we use and how that can be disengaging and isolating. Finally, we will look at our addiction to acronyms and how that can lead to inefficient communication and, in many cases, miscommunication.

In part II, you'll discover some practical ways to ensure you communicate concisely by putting your audience first. We will look at the need to include emotion and stories in your communication if you want to form a genuine connection with employees and customers. You'll also learn how to prepare your content so it's more engaging and visual, helping you deliver messages with impact—no matter if you're writing an email, talking one-to-one, holding a team meeting, pitching to a client or speaking on stage to a large audience.

Then in part III, we'll dive into what it really means to be an authentic leader. Through case studies and stories, you will experience what it looks like to have the clarity to use real words, and the courage to deal with what is real and admit when you have stuffed up. We will look in depth at leaders who have congruence in their values and actions, and who show what is real to them and the people they lead.

Throughout the book I've included real-life examples, stories and case studies from my clients as well as high-profile companies. And at the end of all chapters in parts II and III, I've included 'Get REAL now' pointers and tips to help you apply the information provided to your communication and leadership. These examples and pointers will help you to see what real leadership looks like in practice and, ultimately, how you can get real with your employees, customers and colleagues.

We are all crying out for real communication and authentic leadership.

This book will show you why and how.

# CHAPTER 1

# DECLINE IN TRUST

Here's how the Oxford Dictionary defines trust:

1. Firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something.
2. Acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation.
3. The state of being responsible for someone or something.
4. A person or duty for which one has responsibility.

And here's how trust works in practice. I give my house key to my cleaners because I trust them to come in and clean my home when I'm not there and not damage or steal anything. My parents have a key to my place as a legacy from when they used to babysit the kids. My friend has a key in case I lock myself out and I can't get in, so too does my executive manager for when she needs to come to my house and work.

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*Trust makes our life, at home and work, easier.*

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If I didn't have trust, I would have to stay home every time the cleaners come.

The Cambridge Dictionary has a slightly different definition for trust from the Oxford, defining it as, 'To believe that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or something is safe and reliable'. I think this aspect is so true when you look not just at the people around you—your friends, your leaders, your team, your peers and your clients—but also at the information you are presented with by those people.

We trust financial institutions with our money and superannuation. We trust our accountants to ensure they file our tax legally. We trust our insurance companies to pay out if we get sick or our house burn downs. We trust our local barista when they say they serve organic coffee and won't make it too hot. We trust our kids when they say they don't have any homework.<sup>1</sup>

The flip side to all of this is that when we lose trust, life becomes much, much harder.

Without trust, we don't make decisions as quickly or we take more time to double check information. If we don't trust our doctor, we seek out a second or perhaps third opinion. If we don't trust our accountant, we spend a large amount of time checking and double-checking the tax statements. If we don't trust our partners, we spend a lot of time thinking and expecting the worst.

As a leader, if your people don't trust you, they will not follow you. And if you look over your shoulder and no-one is following you, guess what? You may have the title of leader but you are not a leader. The title is all you have.

If you are a business and customers lose trust in you, you lose their loyalty and their spending dollars. And when it comes out that an abuse of trust has been performed deliberately, this can cause enormous brand damage—which, you will soon see, is near impossible to repair. Once lost, trust is very hard to earn back.

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*Knowing who to trust and what to trust has become significantly harder.*

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<sup>1</sup> Well, maybe we are a little bit suspicious of that.

# Who do you trust?

Edelman, a global communications marketing firm, conduct an annual global study to determine levels of trust. The 2018 results revealed that we are in a battle for the truth, and knowing who we can trust to provide this. The research showed an overall decline in trust, specifically in the United States, where they experienced the steepest decrease for any country (out of the 28 included in the research) ever measured over the 18 years of this study.

The report also looked at the levels of trust in four institutions:

1. media
2. government
3. business
4. non-government organisations.

Findings from the report showed:

- Non-government organisations are distrusted in 10 countries and have seen a decline in trust in 14 of the 28 included countries over the past year from 2017 to 2018.
- While business has experienced an increase in trust in 14 out of the 28 countries, it is still distrusted overall in 18 countries.
- Trust in government has also increased, this time in 16 countries, but they are still distrusted in 21 of the 28 countries.

One of the perhaps most disturbing findings is that for the first time media is the most distrusted institution, being distrusted in 22 of the 28 countries. The study classifies media as both content (what is being communicated) and platform (how it is being communicated, including traditional TV and radio but also social media platforms such as Facebook). While trust in *journalists* rose 5 points to 59, trust in *platforms* dropped 2 points to 51.

Overall, 59 per cent of participants stated that they were not sure what is true and what is not, 56 per cent stated that they do not know which politicians to trust and 42 per cent say they do not know which companies or brands to trust.



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*This lack of trust in the media—both in content and platform—has largely arisen due to the rise of fake news and alternative facts.*

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## The birth of ‘alternative facts’

When did alternative facts replace lies? Well, after Donald Trump’s US presidential inauguration in 2017, Sean Spicer, his press secretary at the time, stated that present at the event was ‘the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration. Period’.

The backlash was swift, with images popping up over media comparing Barack Obama’s inauguration crowd side by side with Trump’s. The fact was that the images showed the crowd on the streets of Washington DC for Obama were far larger than the number who turned up for Trump. Period.

After making that statement, Spicer told the media that he would be honest with the American people, but also stated that the White House may sometimes ‘disagree with facts’.

That same day, the US Counselor to the President, Kellyanne Conway, was interviewed on *Meet the Press* and was asked to defend the White House and Sean Spicer’s false statement about the attendance numbers at Trump’s inauguration. When challenged on why Spicer would ‘utter a provable falsehood’, Conway replied that Spicer was giving ‘alternative facts’.

Conway’s choice of words was widely mocked on social media and criticised by journalists. It was described as a ‘George Orwell phrase’ and even helped increase sales of his book, *1984*, pushing it to the number one bestseller position on Amazon and forcing a 75 000 reprint by publisher Penguin.

Conway later defended the phrase, defining ‘alternative facts’ as ‘additional facts and alternative information’.

Surely alternative facts would be more accurately defined as lies.

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*If we have the highest office in the United States claiming alternative facts as real, that this is having a negative impact on trust overall is hardly a surprise.*

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# Faking it

‘Fake news’ is another term that has entered our modern-day vocabulary.

Of course, fake news is nothing new. Cases have been recorded as far back as the first century BC, when Octavian apparently ran a fake news campaign against his rival Mark Antony, publishing a false document of Mark Antony’s will, which stated that he wished to be entombed in the mausoleum of the Ptolemaic pharaohs. This invoked outrage from the Roman people, who were already unhappy with Mark Antony marrying<sup>2</sup> Cleopatra (after divorcing Octavian’s sister) and appointing her ruler of Egypt, Cyprus, Crete and Syria.

After Mark Antony was defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium, Cleopatra was forced to flee to Egypt so she spread fake news of her own suicide. However, she forgot to tell her husband (a major oversight, which some historians argue was deliberate) and he thought she was really dead, so he committed suicide himself.

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*Fake news is the deliberate spreading of fabricated information with the intention to deceive, typically for political or financial gain.*

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This kind of deception seems to be on the rise as advances in technology make fake news more believable. For example, researchers have developed programs that allow you to swap faces on videos. With an application such as FakeApp (which started life as a program enabling users to make fake celebrity porn), people can create very convincing fake videos about anything they choose. The capability—and accessibility—of this technology means it is very easy for anyone with a bit of technical know-how to create fake news.

This technology is not only making fake news more convincing and, therefore, easier to believe, but is also allowing it to be spread at a faster rate and to reach more people. While news in the past was communicated by traditional print and mainstream media outlets, it is now increasingly being spread by social media.

New technologies for creating fake audio are also on the market. Programs allow you to edit audio in much the same way as you can edit

<sup>2</sup> There’s even dispute around if they ever actually were married.

a photo. The Canadian company Lyrebird, for example, allows you to fake someone else's voice.

So emerging technologies will literally allow you to create an audio clip of anyone saying anything. This could have some serious repercussions, with people being forced to defend an audio clip of something they never actually said or, conversely, people easily being able to deny something they did say, claiming it as fake audio. Imagine the impact that could have on political campaigns!

Some people may create fake news to undermine their opponents or to elevate themselves. Some even do it for fun or satire.

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*In any case, this has a significant impact on who  
and what we trust.*

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The Edelman report mentioned earlier in this chapter stated that 7 out of 10 participants were worried that false information in fake news will be used as a weapon. The report also showed that 63 per cent agreed the average person does not know how to tell good journalism from rumours of falsehoods, and that 59 per cent agreed it is becoming harder to tell if a piece of news was produced by a respected media institution.

With an increase in citizen journalism, where anyone looking for 15 minutes of fame with a smartphone can provide newsworthy content to mainstream media channels, plus more convincing technology readily available to us, distrust looks set to increase.

## **Trust me, it's important**

As can be seen from the focus areas in the Edelman report, in society we delegate important aspects of our lives to four major institutions:

1. media, for information and knowledge
2. government, to provide national security and public policy
3. business, for our economic and wellbeing needs
4. non-government organisations, for social causes and issues.

Edelman believe that in order for us to feel safe with this delegation, ‘we need to trust them to act with integrity and with our best interest in mind’. But when we don’t believe these institutions are acting in this way, distrust starts to set in.

They also suggest that ‘trust is a forward looking metric’ and is an indicator of whether people will find you credible in the future. As opposed to reputation, which is based on previous behaviour.

Trust is a critical asset that institutions, companies and individuals need to fight for.

Let’s look at the finance industry as a case in point on why trust is so important. According to Edelman’s 2018 report, the finance industry was the least trusted industry of all. This finding is backed up by Deloitte, who in July 2018 released their recent research into the Australian financial industry, where they’d surveyed over 1000 Australian consumers. The insights in this report show that trust in the Australian financial services industry had ‘taken a dive’. The report stated that:

- 32 per cent of customers said their trust in the finance industry had deteriorated in the previous 12 months
- 25 per cent of customers did not trust the financial services industry, with banking and insurance the least trusted
- 47 per cent (that’s almost half) of customers did not trust their own financial service provider.

To really show the extent of distrust in the financial services industry in Australia, 23 per cent of those surveyed said they would consider switching to financial services provided by an airline carrier such as Qantas and Virgin.

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*This insight, I believe, shows not only how far the finance industry has fallen in the eyes of its customers but also how important trust is.*

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We have lost so much faith in the traditional finance industry that we are considering having our financial services needs met by airline carriers. When we lose trust in companies or industries, we will naturally seek

what they offer elsewhere, even if what we seek is not that organisation's main area of expertise! I trust Qantas with my life every time I fly with them, so is it really too much of a stretch to trust them with my superannuation or savings?

This is a real danger for traditional finance companies as new players enter the market and provide more choice for customers. As Sean Pillot de Chenecey says in his 2018 book *The Post-Truth Business*, 'If a brand isn't trustworthy, when choice is available it'll be rejected in favour of one that is'.

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*Companies need to be more aware that, along with losing business to their competitors due to a lack of trust, they can also lose business to other industries.*

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From 2013 to 2018, Australia went through two royal commissions into institutions that just a generation ago were the pinnacle of trust in society. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse investigated many religious institutions, mainly the Catholic Church, and the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry investigated finance institutions.

The Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry uncovered:

- systematic processes for forging documents
- failing to verify customers' living expenses before lending them money
- selling insurance to people who couldn't afford it
- selling insurance to people who could never claim on it
- charging fees to people who had died
- charging fees for no service
- lying to regulators.

To the big question of why these failures happened, the interim report stated 'Too often, the answer seems to be greed—the pursuit of short-term profit at the expense of basic standards of honesty'. These findings have created significant trust issues for the organisations involved.

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*Trust comes with a high price.*

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## What does losing trust cost?

In 2015, the German car manufacturer Volkswagen admitted cheating on emissions tests in the United States. Named the ‘diesel dupe’, the US Environmental Protection Agency found that many Volkswagen diesel cars had software called a ‘defeat device’ installed in their engines. This software was specifically installed in cars to allow them to cheat the US emissions tests, with the installation then being systematically covered up.

The year prior to the cheating being discovered, US regulators had raised concerns with Volkswagen about their emissions levels, but the company claimed the levels were the result of ‘technical issues’ and originally denied any claims of discrepancy.

The eventual discovery of the cheating led to millions of cars worldwide being recalled, at an estimated cost of \$US18 billion. Volkswagen’s share price fell by one-third days after the scandal broke.

In the wake of the scandal, Volkswagen US CEO Michael Horn said, ‘We’ve totally screwed up’. The Volkswagen parent group’s chief executive at the time, Martin Winterkorn, said his company had ‘broken the trust of our customers and the public’. Winterkorn resigned as a direct result of the scandal and was replaced by Matthias Mueller, the former head of Porsche. One of Mueller’s first statements was, ‘My most urgent task is to win back trust for the Volkswagen Group’.

In January 2017, Volkswagen pleaded guilty to criminal charges and admitted that their engineers had developed the defeat devices because their diesel models could not pass the US emissions standards without them. They were fined US\$2.8 billion.

Former CEO Winterkorn was charged with fraud and conspiracy in May 2018.

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*Cheating isn’t cheap, and it could have long-term, serious repercussions. So you’ve got to ask yourself, is it really worth it?*

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# Why it's so hard to rebuild trust

In Australia in September 2018, most of the larger banks raised their interest rates—except for NAB, with group Chief Executive Officer (at the time) Andrew Thorburn stating the need to rebuild trust as the contributing factor behind their decision. In a video to the market, Thorburn said, ‘We need to rebuild the trust of our customers... By focusing more on our customers, we build trust and advocacy, and this creates a more sustainable business’.

Analysts estimate that for every month NAB does not raise their rates as the other banks have, they are forgoing approximately \$29 million<sup>3</sup>. Some analysts have said this move is a gamble, while some have said it's a great PR stunt. The reality is that NAB, as well as the rest of the finance industry—not to mention many of our religious and political leaders—need to rebuild trust but it has to be genuine.

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*Attempts to rebuild trust cannot be faked.*

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Let's look at Facebook as another example. In 2018, Facebook launched a global marketing campaign in a bid to win back their customers' trust after Facebook allowed an app to access users' data without users knowing. They ended up harvesting the profiles of a reported 87 million users around the world during 2014 and 2015. This information was later used by Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 US presidential campaign to influence voters. It was not until 2018—and following the courage of a whistleblower—that this was discovered.

The TV advert Facebook launched to win back trust starts with a voiceover, ‘We came here for the friends’, and continues with ‘But then something happened. We had to deal with spam, click bait, fake news and data misuse. That's going to change. From now on, Facebook will do more to keep you safe and protect your privacy’. The advert ends with ‘Because when this place does what it was built for, we all get a little closer’.

Ironically, Facebook's attempt to win back their customers' trust had the opposite effect. Most people took the advert as a blatant attempt to position

<sup>3</sup> They did raise interest rates months later on 27 January 2019.

the spam, click bait, fake news and data misuse as something that happened to Facebook, without any acknowledgement of the part Facebook played in contributing to the issues. All we really wanted was an apology.

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*The problem with severing trust is that when trust is broken, it is extremely hard to restore.*

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We probably all know this on a personal level from when a colleague, friend, family member or partner has betrayed our trust. The pain from this is the worst kind of emotional pain. When we trust people, we rely on them and when this is broken—and especially when it is broken deliberately—we feel betrayed. Sometimes we even feel naive for putting our trust in the person in the first place, and feel guilty that it's somehow our fault.

Betrayal, guilt and faith...they are some serious emotions. This is why, at the very heart of it, trust is emotional. It's not logical or rational, and that's why rebuilding trust is so hard.

Token 'tick the box' exercises will not cut it when it comes to rebuilding trust. Attempts to rebuild trust need to be authentic. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American philosopher, famously once wrote, 'What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary'. Put another way, your actions will speak louder than your carefully crafted words.

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*It is perhaps one of the main reasons why real words, genuine communication and authentic leadership are needed more than ever before.*

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# What's happened to **real**? In a world of **jargon, acronyms** and **distrust**, does **authenticity** in leadership mean **anything** anymore?

The answer is a resounding YES. As the expectations of customers and employees evolve at a breakneck pace, businesses and organisations are starving for real communication and authentic leadership.

But there's a lot of baggage and distrust to overcome. *Real Communication* shows you how decades of systematic deceit, jargon, alternative facts and a top-down culture of self-protection have nurtured cynicism in our organisations. With real-life case studies, pointers and guidelines, leadership consultant Gabrielle Dolan shows you how authenticity can earn trust with honest communication, and why it's well worth the effort.

## **Great leadership demands commitment. Are you ready to get real? Learn how to:**


- communicate more effectively
- improve employee engagement
- help your team cope with change
- lead significant organisational transformation
- manage the new generation of employees.

When trust is broken, it is extremely hard to rebuild. *Real Communication* shows you how to do it, and the payoff is priceless.

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