

# TRUST, THE ENABLING CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF TRUTH

Mick Crews

I am, at the age of eighty, in the course of identifying the most impactful encounters that have influenced how I act and think. Included in the encounters are books, poems, plays, jokes, cartoons, pieces of music, songs, and people of all ages and from many different countries. Without exception they have supported me to recognise when I am lying to myself about who I really am.

In the main, the words and music were created by people whose names many would know. But not all of them, as they include my Mother and Grandmother. Neither of them were well educated, but I know that born later they would have made great contributions to colleges and universities. Instead they made great contributions to their children and grandchildren with words that probably came from their Grandmothers and Mothers. One of the sayings was, *"Tell the truth and shame the devil."* Since they didn't come from the world of academia, no book was written to support the assertion. It involved trust and usage to validate its veracity and worth.

The word "trust" is a useful segue from the world of grandmothers and mothers to the world of work. Trust is necessary for truth to thrive and is a vital ingredient in any context. Trust unlocks the power of truth.

A time existed when deals were sealed without pen and paper, but by the physical act of shaking hands. The spit on the hand and the handshake provided the opportunity to both "feel" the truth and seal the deal. It was one highly simple act in which two people joined together without the need for corporate lawyers and reams of paper.

I and four other board colleagues were involved in the buy-out of a long-established shipping company, which had been created through acquisitions by a brilliant Edwardian entrepreneur. We were financed by a consortium of ten merchant banks. The legal papers stood three feet high and I remember thinking that it was more than likely that a number of errors had been tucked away. Never-the-less, we all trusted that the legal work was true and accurate, and went ahead. I hoped that somewhere we would find that we had by chance acquired a few acres of valuable Docklands property. We hadn't, but we did now own an old coaling depot on the Suez Canal!

Over the course of the first few months of ownership we met for lunch with representatives of the banks. One was particularly interesting. When I asked how he decided to invest his company's money he replied that, although all of our forecasts looked impressive, he based his decision on the fact that we looked competent and he trusted us. The truth rested on his trust of us. We had acted in good faith and so had he.

At an early stage of my P&G career I spent time training a graduate management entrant in some of the arcane aspects of Job Study. He was an Irishman, and an Oxford graduate in Literature. We soon exhausted the designated agenda and he introduced me to the poetry of Louis McNiece. His poem, "What is Truth?" has guided me in many situations:

What is truth? says Pilate,  
Waits for no answer;

Double your stakes, says the clock  
To the ageing dancer;

Double the guard, says Authority  
Treble the bars;

Holes in the sky, says the child,  
Scanning the stars.

The truth looks different when viewed from different points of view.

One wise man observed, "*The main difficulty with a point of view is that we are standing on it!*" We all know that, and lie to ourselves about who we really are.

This one pops up for me frequently when recalling something from the past. I KNOW that my version is absolutely accurate. I know that my recall is true and it often takes a long while for me to stop lying to myself about my infallible memory and benefit from another's.

~~~

Two colleagues and I were invited to review a new vehicle start up programme in a major British start some years ago. A team of fourteen engineers had worked for eighteen months planning and creating a meticulously detailed plan. Our conclusion was that it was extremely thorough, but we thought that one aspect was missing; there were no procedures or training for dealing with a breakdown in the process. Their response was that having spent so much time developing the plan it was expected to be foolproof, and further, they would get credit for solving problems as they occurred rather than building in procedures that could be seen to be expecting them.

The truth for this company was that engineering excellence would solve all problems, and that was how problems were solved and performance judged.

~~~

I was invited to review a very large Coaching Programme that had produced poor results in a national pharmaceutical company. The truth was that the programme was completely misconstrued as yet another management control, and managers could not be trusted to release the potential of their people.

David Franks and I were commissioned to help improve the cohesion and effectiveness of the senior management Transport Team of a large company. We offered a three-day programme. The truth was that David and I designed the first day in some detail and then flexed the work, depending on what arose. The team cottoned onto this and asked if they could sit in on our planning conversation, to see how we decided what the next steps should be. We trusted both them and ourselves. They claimed that sitting in proved to be the most productive and informative part of the programme. Once again, a context of trust allowed the truth of what was needed to emerge.

~~~

David and I were working together again with the Chief Executives of a European packaging company. It was made up of companies from the UK, France, Holland, Germany and Italy. Such a variety of cultures needed a wide range of approaches to establish an effective method for reaching consensus on the veracity and validity of considerations to be used in making judgements.

The event lasted three days. On the third day we handed the programme back to the participants. We asked them to select an issue that had been on the Board agenda without a resolution. In response to the question they looked knowingly at each other and replied, "*You bet! We have one that has been around for some months.*"

After an hour or so we noticed that the Italian guy had not said anything. I asked if he had a resolution. He replied, "*Of course,*" but that he'd never been asked. His proposal was more than adequate and agreement was quickly established.

End of story? No way. The Dutch representative said that it couldn't be right if it was reached so easily! It seems that for some the truth can only be reached after a lot of struggle and effort. The Italian view was that what was required was ease and elegance. He gets my vote. But ease and elegance is only reached after a lot of hard work. As Kabir said,

There is nothing but water in the holy pools.

I know. I have been swimming in them.

All the gods sculpted of wood or ivory can't say a word.

I know, I have been crying out to them.

The Sacred Books of the East are nothing but words.

I looked through their covers one day sideways.

What Kabir talks of is only what he has lived through.  
If you have not lived through something, it is not true.