

THE BRAVE® TRUST BUILDER

A Leadership Guide to Building Unbreakable Trust



BY CINDY BENNING & Dragonfly Insights
Creator of the BRAVE® Leadership Model

WHY THIS WILL CHANGE YOUR LEADERSHIP FOREVER

If you're here, it's probably because you've felt something slipping in your team.

People nod in meetings, but commitments drift. You share feedback, but nothing seems to improve. You wonder if you're the only one who still cares as much as you do.

In regulated environments, trust erosion doesn't look like shouting or overt sabotage.

It looks like **polite compliance**. Surface-level agreement. A **quiet reluctance** to step up or speak out.

This short guide will give you real, human-centered ways to build trust.

It's not about controlling people.

It's about creating the conditions where they can thrive.

Because **trust isn't a single decision**—it's the sum of dozens of small signals we send every day.

WHY LISTEN TO ME?

Hi, I'm Cindy.

I've led operations in high-pressure, high-compliance industries for decades. I've been in the boardrooms, on the production floors, and in the trenches with leaders like you—people who care deeply about their teams and results, but sometimes get the feeling that something is off.



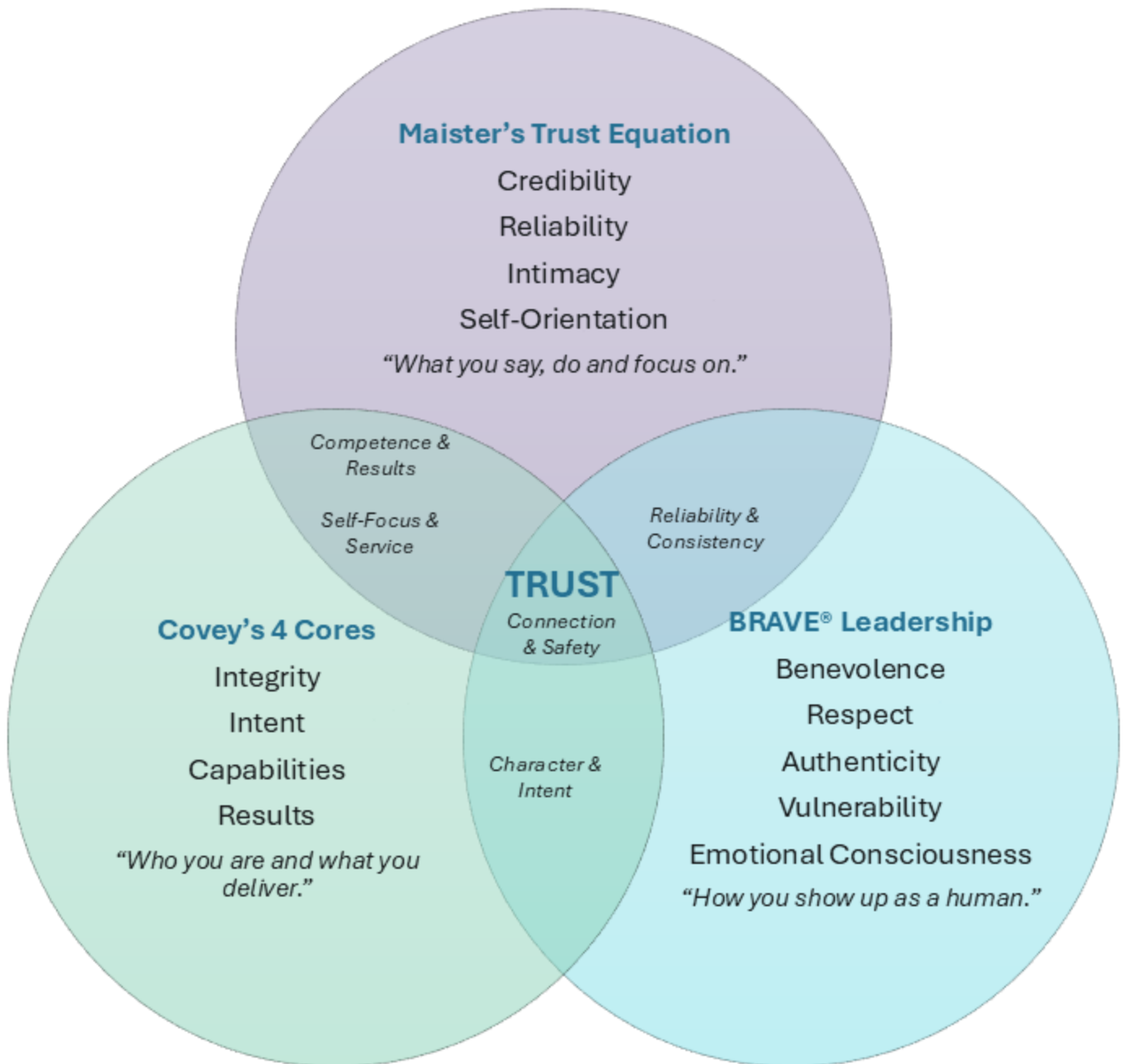
Traditional leadership training often focuses only on competence or results.

But sustainable **trust** requires aligning Character, Competence, Reliability, Connection, and Self-Focus.

That's why I created the **BRAVE Trust Builder** combining decades of research from renowned experts like **David Maister** and **Stephen M.R. Covey** with the **BRAVE** Leadership Model to help leaders create trust deliberately and sustainably.

Cindy Benning

The BRAVE® Trust Framework



References:

Maister et al., *The Trusted Advisor* (2000). Covey, *The Speed of Trust* (2006). Benning, *Being BRAVE: A Journey of Self-Discovery into Leadership* (2022).

PILLAR 1



**CHARACTER &
INTENT**

People don't trust your title. They trust your motives.

You can have decades of experience, but if your team doesn't believe you're acting in their best interests, credibility dissolves.

This is the heart of trust: the quiet question every person asks themselves:

"Does my leader actually care about me?"

When Character & Intent are strong, teams feel safe to bring their whole selves. When they're shaky, people hedge, hide, or check out.

Why It Matters:

Integrity builds confidence. Benevolence builds loyalty.

How to Demonstrate It:

Be transparent about your motives.

Admit mistakes without excuses.

Let your actions align with your words.

Reflection Questions:

Where am I fully authentic, and where do I hold back?

Do people know my intentions, or are they guessing?

Try this:

At your next team conversation, share why you care about the work you do, and why you care about them. Then, ask:

"What would you like more of from me?"

You might be surprised by the answers.

PILLAR 2



**COMPETENCE &
RESULTS**

Trust thrives when people see your competence in motion.

People need to see you deliver. They need to know you can navigate complexity, solve problems, and keep the promises you make.

Competence doesn't mean knowing everything. It means showing you're willing to learn, adapt, and grow. It's easy to assume your team sees your efforts. But the reality is that **uncertainty grows in silence**.

Why It Matters:

Teams look for evidence that you know what you're doing and can deliver.

How to Demonstrate It:

Share examples of past successes.

Invest in continual learning.

Deliver on commitments **consistently**.

Reflection Questions:

What strengths do I bring to my team's challenges?

Where can I develop my capabilities further?

Try this:

Pick one commitment you've made recently, big or small, and close the loop. Follow up, share progress, or admit where you're stuck.

PILLAR 3



**RELIABILITY &
CONSISTENCY**

Reliability is the part of trust that feels almost invisible, until it isn't.

It shows up in the small things: showing up when you say you will, delivering the update you promised, responding when people need you.

When reliability slips, even unintentionally, teams start to protect themselves. They stop assuming you'll follow through.

That's when the invisible distance grows.

Why It Matters:

Reliability reduces anxiety and reinforces psychological safety.

How to Demonstrate It:

Keep promises, even small ones.

Respect others' time and contributions.

Communicate proactively if things change.

Reflection Questions:

When have I failed to follow through?

How can I be more consistent in my commitments?

Try this:

Choose one recurring commitment, like weekly check-ins or status updates, and make it your non-negotiable. Show up, every time.

PILLAR 4



**CONNECTION &
SAFETY**

People don't share what they don't feel safe to share.

In regulated environments, it's easy for people to go silent. To say "it's fine" when it isn't. To avoid risking conflict or criticism.

But connection isn't a luxury—it's the foundation of trust.

If you want your team to be honest with you, you have to go first.

Why It Matters:

Psychological safety is the foundation of innovation and collaboration.

How to Demonstrate It:

Share your own challenges and uncertainties.

Listen without judgment.

Show empathy for others' experiences.

Reflection Questions:

How safe do my team members feel expressing concerns?

Where can I model more openness?

Try this:

At your next meeting, ask:

"What are we not talking about that we probably should be?"

Then pause. Let the silence be. When someone speaks up, thank them—no matter what they say.

PILLAR 5



**SELF-FOCUS &
SERVICE**

Even when you mean well, people will sense when your focus is on yourself.

When you talk more than you listen.
When you take credit without realizing it.
When your needs quietly edge out theirs.

It's human. It doesn't make you a bad leader. But it does make trust fragile.

Why It Matters:

Teams thrive when leaders put collective interests first.

How to Demonstrate It:

Celebrate others' contributions.
Be present in conversations.
Serve before seeking recognition.

Reflection Questions:

Where am I more focused on myself than the team?
How can I demonstrate servant leadership today?

Try this:

Before your next one-on-one, ask yourself:
"How can I make this conversation 100% about them?"
Then do it. You'll be amazed at what surfaces when you put your own agenda aside.

HERE'S WHAT TO DO NEXT

If you're feeling a bit of discomfort right now, that's good. That's the awareness you've been waiting for.

Here's how to turn it into action:

- Pick one Pillar where you feel least confident.
- Make a small, visible commitment to improve it.
- Tell your team what you're working on and invite them to hold you accountable.

Trust doesn't rebuild itself.

But one small step today can change everything tomorrow.



Trust doesn't build
itself. But you're not
just anybody, are
you?