

Year.

Everyone deserves a little couch-time.



Quarterly Leadership Series

Building Trust Through Open Communication

Presented by
Douglas E Noll, JD, MA

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

**Douglas E Noll, JD,
MA**

- Lawyer and Peacemaker
- Author and Professor
- Internationally-Recognized Mediator
- Mobius Executive Leadership
- California Lawyer of the Year
- Best Lawyer In America Lawyer of the Year
- Co-Founder, Prison of Peace Project
- Encore Fellow since 2014



Why Trust Matters

- Trust is the foundation of effective leadership
- Without trust, communication becomes guarded and transactional
- Trust turns compliance into commitment



Definition of Trust

Trust = Confident
reliance on another's
integrity, competence,
and care

Built through
consistent honesty,
empathy, and
reliability

The
Paradox of
Trust

Trust is fragile when
forced, resilient
when earned

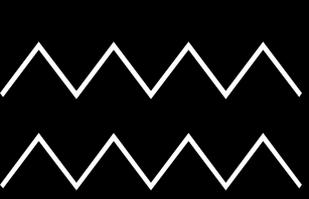
Requires
vulnerability and
courage

Emotional
vs
Cognitive
Trust

Cognitive trust = belief in
reliability

Emotional trust = feeling
of safety and care

Leaders build both
through open
communication



Physiology of Trust



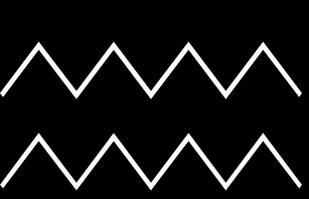
Paul Zak's Oxytocin Research:



- Oxytocin promotes bonding, empathy, and generosity



- Released when people feel seen, safe, and valued



Amygdala and Prefrontal Cortex



Emotional safety
quiets the amygdala
(fear center)



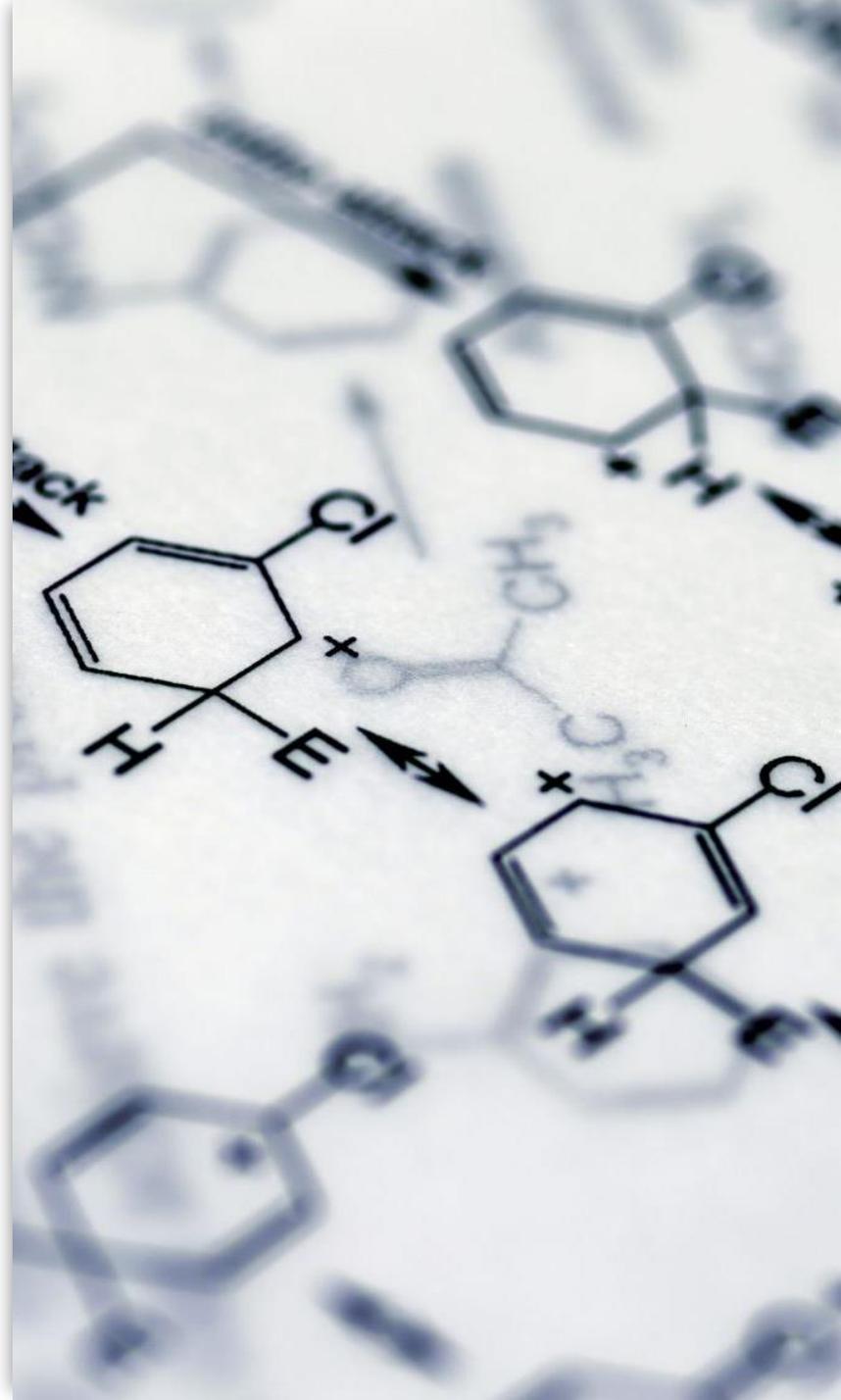
Empathic
communication
activates the
prefrontal cortex



Calm brains think
clearly and
cooperate

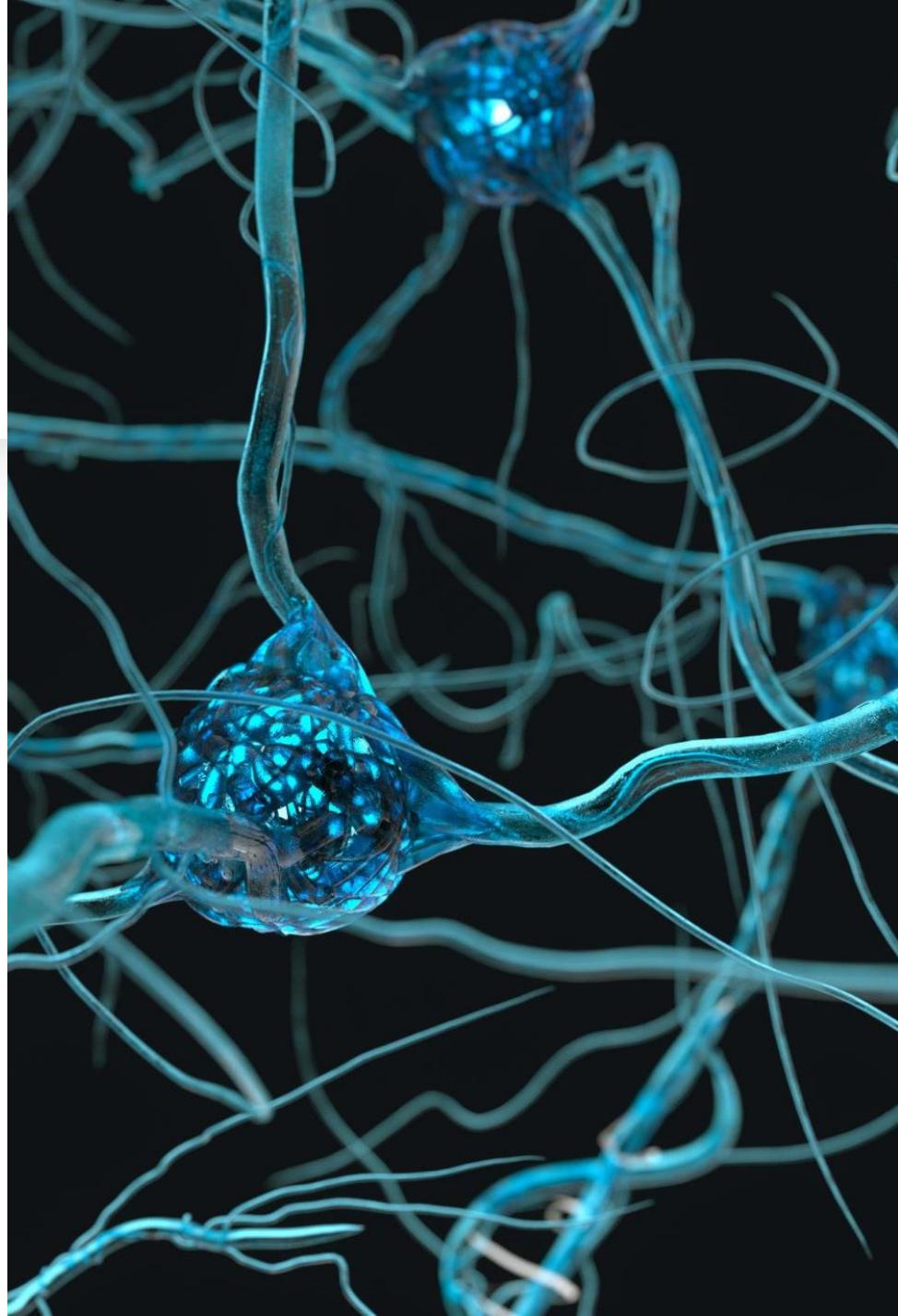
The Cortisol Effect

- Stress hormones (cortisol) inhibit trust
- High cortisol = defensiveness, suspicion
- Leaders must regulate emotional tone

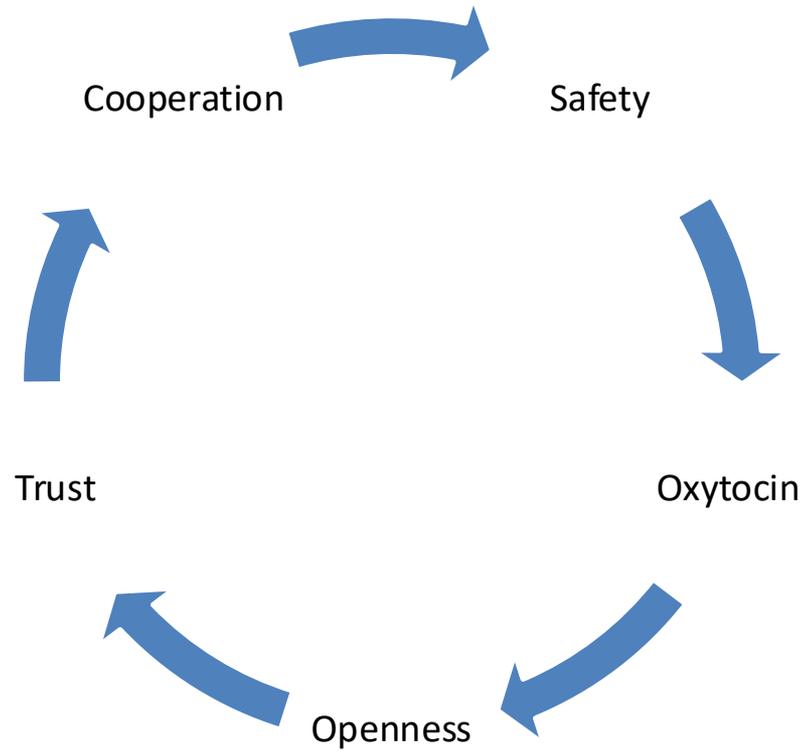


Mirror Neurons and Connection

- Mirror neurons synchronize emotional states
- Calm leaders literally calm others
- Affect labeling creates neural attunement



Trust Neuro Loop





Emotional Safety Defined



The belief that one can speak truth without fear of punishment or humiliation

Without it, creativity and honesty disappear

Why Safety Precedes Trust

People do not
trust unless they
feel safe first

Emotional safety
is the soil in
which trust grows



Project Aristotle



Google's study:
psychological safety was
the #1 factor of effective
teams

Teams with high safety
showed higher
performance,
innovation, and
retention

Creating Emotional Safety

Admit
uncertainty



Model
vulnerability



Reflect
emotions, not
judgments

Reflection Prompt

Think: Recall a time when you felt safe to speak your truth

Ask: What did that leader do to make it safe?

Deep
Listening
Builds Trust

Listening regulates
the speaker's
nervous system

People calm down
when they feel
heard

The IRR Framework

Ignore – Read – Reflect:

1 Ignore the words

2 Read the emotions

3 Reflect the emotions
briefly



Reactive VS Reflective



Reactive: 'Calm down, you're overreacting'



Reflective: 'You're frustrated and disappointed'



The second instantly builds safety

Physiological Synchrony

Deep listening
increases vagal tone
and heart rate
coherence

Shared calm deepens
mutual trust

Empathy → Safety → Trust



- When emotions are validated, oxytocin is released
- The brain encodes safety → cooperation → trust

Open Communication Behaviors

Transparency
about intent

Curiosity
instead of
certainty

Validation
before
solution

Repairing Broken Trust

Acknowledge
harm



Reflect the
emotion

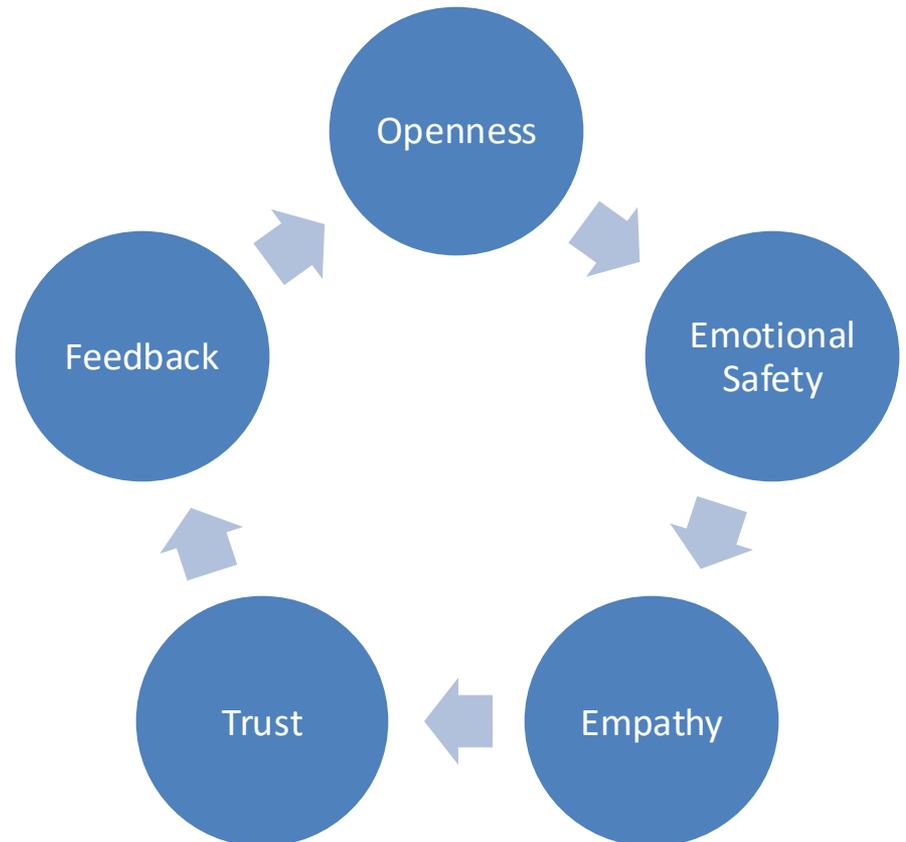


Ask for input



Commit to
change

Diagram — The Trust Loop Model





Takeaways

- Trust is a biological state, not a verbal promise
- Emotional safety precedes trust
- Listening others into existence builds unshakable connection
- Safety precedes strategy Listening precedes trust

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BUILDING TRUST

THROUGH OPEN COMMUNICATION

TRUST IN THE BRAIN

CORTISOL: STRESS

OXYTOCIN: COMFORT

COGNITIVE TRUST

EMOTIONAL TRUST

- Cortisol is often referred to as the stress hormone and is linked to feelings of tension, defensiveness, and reduced trust.
- Oxytocin is often called the comfort hormone because it fuels connection creating feelings of bonding, trust, and generosity
- Is a belief in someone or something's reliability. "I believe you're reliable and competent."
- Is a feeling of safety and care. "I feel good around you. Cared for and understood."

REMEMBER...

"Emotional safety is the soil in which trust grows." - **Douglas E. Noll JD, MA**

Great leaders know that **trust fuels collaboration, creativity, and commitment.** These core principles can help you communicate more openly and build trust that lasts.

Why Trust Matters

- Trust is the foundation of effective leadership.
- Without trust, communication becomes guarded and transactional.
- Trust turns basic compliance into genuine commitment.

How Trust Forms

- Built through honesty, empathy, and consistency.
- Emotional safety must come before trust; people need to feel safe to speak their truth.

What Builds Emotional Safety

- Transparency about your intentions
- Curiosity instead of certainty
- Validation before problem-solving
- Modeling vulnerability (admitting uncertainty, sharing your own emotions appropriately)

