THE TRIBE THAT DISCOVERED

TRUST

HOW TRUST IS CREATED, PROPAGATED, LOST AND REGAINED IN COMMERCIAL INTERACTIONS

DAVID AMERLAND
The Tribe That Discovered Trust
How trust is created lost and regained in commercial interactions

David Amerland
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“Trust Agents are digital natives using the web to be genuine and to humanize their business. They are interested in people (prospective customers, employees, colleagues, and more) and they have realized that these tools that enable more unique, robust communication also allow more business opportunities for everyone”.

- Trust Agents
About the Author

David Amerland is the author of nine best-selling books on search, social media and marketing, including *Google Semantic Search*, *SEO Help* and *The Social Media Mind*.

His involvement with the Web goes back to the days when the number of websites in existence could fit in a printed 80-page directory and SEO consisted of keyword stuffing and pixel-wide hidden text.

Since those less enlightened days he has worked with blue-chip multinationals and individual entrepreneurs alike helping them craft SEO and social media marketing strategies that work with their internal cultures and deliver value to their target audience.

He writes for Forbes, HP UK, Social Media Today, and blogs on his own website, davidamerland.com. When he is not writing or surfing the Web he spends time giving speeches on how social media is changing everything.
Dedication

Every person needs an anchor. I am no different. There are two Ns in my life and in their own way each helps keep me sane and grounded, at least while they are looking. To them both I am beholden.

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Every book I write makes me conscious of just how many people exactly it takes to help me do something only I can do. The list is long for this one too. Heidi Bouman has to be first not just because without her keeping order in the Cloudwars community I would not have been able to concentrate but because she also managed to keep track of every single Unicorn! Full kudos to John Kellden whose sensemaking has always made sense and who has been instrumental in unleashing more thoughts than most people I know. Iblis Bane needs a mention, not least because he made me realize that trust has nothing to do with a name and a picture. A special thanks to Bruce Marko, who gets what trust is about and Ron Serina, whose conversations are always enjoyable. In putting this book together I drew from my own well of ideas but I could not have plumbed those depths so well had I not known Vincent Messina who really needs to be experienced over time to be appreciated. I am more grateful than I could ever let you know to all those I cannot mention in the companies I work with. Your generous sharing of data, ideas and stories of success and failure helped me shape a book that’s relevant to what we are trying to achieve in the 21st century. A special mention must be made to Jared Hamilton, CEO at DrivingSales for generously sharing original research in the automobile industry, there are few organizations that get just how important trust is in closing the gap between a brand and its customers and these guys really get it. The illustration included in the first chapter of the third section of this book is directly from their research. There are two more people I am going to single out this time. One is Oleg Moskalensky whose conversation, ideas and above all friendship always make me feel more worthy than I have a right to be. The other one is Farinaz Parsay whose candor is always captivating. This list is not exhaustive by any means and there are many more I have not singled out. You’re on G+ and we talk often. To you all I am particularly grateful and you know who you are. Finally thanks to Samantha Wales for putting up with my last minute changes and my tardiness in returning the edits. As always, many more eyes than just mine have looked at this manuscript and suggested changes and corrections. The mistakes that might persist, are down to yours truly.
Introduction

The world has changed. Technology is driving a large part of that change but it is not the reason for the change itself. Technology, of itself, continues to do what it has always done: in the first instance it provides an amplification of our physical capabilities that changes the physical restrictions the world imposes upon us. Then, as it matures, it picks up and amplifies the invisible things inside our heads, the space where our thoughts, desires and hopes swirl. In doing so it begins to merge the impact of both function and form. It breaches the traditional barriers that contain us and brings what’s inside our heads outside and vice versa.

That’s when it really challenges us because it forces us to try and understand the things we have never really thought about. The things we tend to take for granted: Trust and trustworthiness, truth and truthfulness, honesty and reputation. Being good as opposed to being bad. As it becomes embedded into our lives technology becomes invisible, but its effects are still felt.

The world, we say, has become more transparent. It’s technology that has made it so. Social media platforms have changed the way we communicate with one another and they’ve changed the way we receive information from those who traditionally have been the gatekeepers of power in our world. They have changed the way we find romantic partners, jobs and friends. They’ve changed the way we form communities and create modern tribes.

The devices in our pockets have become so powerful and capable that we barely think about what they do. We just know that they are there. Capable of bringing people together, across countries, ethnicities, timezones and language barriers.

That’s the paradox about technology. In the early days when you’re struggling to get it to do what you want it to do, it’s all about the technology. When that is taken care of however. When devices just work. When data flows everywhere, unbidden, unstoppable, with the barest of friction. When information conforms to the vision famously formalized by Stewart Brand and actually is free because the cost of sharing it is so low as to be virtually zero. Then technology disappears entirely. What is important when this happens is what has always been important: Human relationships.

That’s when we begin to realize that while things are still the same some things have changed. We form relationships when we have no choice because we physically have to exist. We have to have a shape and a form and it needs
a place to live in and another place to work and both of these places are surrounded by other shapes and forms, similar to ours with which we need to find ways to get along.

In the digital domain however we always have a choice. We choose to be online and we choose to do specific things when there. We choose the people we talk to and decide just how we want to be known and what we really want to be.

While all this may sound as artifice, it’s anything but. We cannot start to create anything we are unfamiliar with. Most of us find it hard to impersonate a member of the opposite sex and we are far more familiar with them than we are with any other concept.

What we are and what we become in a world where we send the digital equivalent of an astral projection of ourselves is directly rooted in who we are and what we believe in, it stems from the bricks and mortar world that first gave us birth and taught us about the principles we find important.

That’s how we begin to gradually think more analytically about how we go about constructing a more faithful ‘us’ – a better digital avatar than even our flesh and blood selves. All too often, in the ‘real world’ where mental bandwidth is restricted by biology and things happen in a more localized, immediate way, we give in to the hormonal tides that wash our biological systems. Emotions such as anger, fear and disgust take over faster than we can control our actions and we frequently react in ways that lock us into stereotypical ways of engagement and interaction.

In the digital domain however we are a little bit different. More augmented. More connected. Our emotions are tempered by distance and time. Our knowledge is enhanced by the people we know and the things they do. Some of our interactions happen asynchronously. Much of our engagement happens publicly. And we are always amplified in our capacity by the power of search whose learned retrieval of information makes our arguments deeper and our responses more balanced.

In the digital domain everything is a multi-layered construct, built carefully and painstakingly. Invested in heavily and usually after some thought. Because the technology that connects us is invisible and ubiquitous we learn to analyze the connections we make and understand the value of engagement and interaction.

We learn how reputations are built and authority is created. We see how trust is born, shared, propagated, lost and regained. Rather than stripping us
of our humanity our digital selves strip our humanity from its unthinking, instinctive reactions and force us to become more thoughtful in our actions. More considerate in our choices. More reaching in our ambitions and further seeing in our planning.

Many of us, by degrees, become a little better in the flesh and blood, bricks and mortar world, because we have been exposed to kindness and intelligence as well as pain and stupidity in our online existence.

Our digital selves, in return, constantly evolve. Our understanding of the dynamics of networks and the digital realm is increasing all the time. Our stores of data get richer and our reams of analysis get deeper and we learn more and more what works and what doesn’t, and why.

In writing a book on Trust, how it’s born, how it’s propagated and why, I faced a dilemma: how to show the human element in a book that’s devoted to looking at a very human, very fundamental quality in a very cold, analytical and data-driven way.

More than that, I wanted to show how by understanding how trust works, what it is and how to gain it we can actually become more honest instead of less so. Of course, as with every other human activity it is true that knowing how something works we can try to emulate it, taking on its characteristics, applying its components even when we neither feel nor deserve what it depicts.

If it was that easy to fake trust we’d be doing it already. It’s true that in any short-term, isolated moment trustworthiness can be faked quite successfully. The real world has a much higher level of data density than the digital one. Just meeting someone at a party, for example, allows us to gauge the way they dress, listen to the way they speak, determine their level of education and social status, assess their importance – and decide whether we like them or not, without even exchanging a single word with them.

In the real world we can be tricked by conmen and fooled by people whose intent is to fool us. But not for long. Not all the time. And not all of us. The online world is more porous, transparent and connected than the offline one. Pretending to be something there when you’re not becomes even harder.

Stripped of many of the things that are part of who you are in the offline world, online everything you do is informed even more of who you are and what you want to achieve than in the offline one. There are always more eyes on us than we think. If there is no alignment of our core values and our online persona then our online responses will be inconsistent, our online
presence will raise red flags and we will soon find ourselves isolated, cut-off, struggling with a reputation that is the antithesis of what we were trying to build.

Does the online world make us automatically more honest? No, but as it is shaping up, its increased level of interconnectivity, transparency and relational analysis, is making it harder for us to be dishonest.

Much of what we experience as ‘bad’ behavior is the result of human economic behavioral tendencies, our hardwired impulse to look for shortcuts in everything. By definition a shortcut is a path that gives us the same outcome as a much longer one thereby saving us a lot of energy and effort.

We live in the age of the semantic web. Semantic search is constantly mining relationships and ascribing interaction values to people, organizations and things. Semantic technologies are constantly surfacing information looking for trustworthy sources to use as a benchmark.

In the connected age we live in it is important to understand that in order to get anywhere a fictitious entity needs to go into as much trouble and spend as much time and effort as a real one. There is no shortcut. So you may as well do the right thing from the beginning.

Trying to solve my dilemma on humanity I came upon the idea of a tale. We have used narratives, always, to teach ourselves the things we mustn’t forget. The things that are important to us. My idea of a tribe came from many conversations with friends and colleagues. With my fictional creation I was able to hide in their belief system, their interactions and engagement with a potential enemy all the human foibles that mark the relationships we form.

The story of trust is one of technology – that much is made abundantly clear in the second section of this book. But it is a quintessentially human story too. The first part is what makes this evident. And it is most probably from that part that some of the most important lessons will come.

Good luck.

David,

Athens
The Tribe
Once upon a time there was a tribe living at the edge of the world. It was not a very big tribe but the world was not very big and in it, this tribe was a very successful one. Because the tribe lived in a very tough territory it had very little competition. Over the years, it managed to build a reputation for producing tough fighting men, always ready for a scrap and that meant that other tribes left it alone.

If things had remained as they were the tribe could have gone on for a very long time, living off the land and hunting and foraging, maintaining its reputation by turning up now and then at solstice festivals when all the tribes would gather for the young warriors to measure themselves up against each other and the young girls to find husbands. But things very rarely remain the same.

The world changes fast. Word was that tribes in other parts were banding together. Growing larger. Because they no longer had to wait for the solstice festivals each year for the girls to find husbands they grew faster still. The young warriors in their midst no longer had to fight to prove themselves worthy. With a steady supply of women the warriors in other tribes looked for other skills that would help them prove themselves. Besides, once married being a warrior was not sufficient to keep a young wife happy. You needed to have a real job, a career of sorts even.

So, some of the former warriors became farmers and produced more and more food, enough not just to feed their own large and growing tribes but also a surplus which they could now trade with other tribes. Trade brought them the need for ledgers to record everything in, and ledgers brought them the need for learning and learning started languages as they realized the value of the knowledge hidden inside the heads of people in other tribes.

Languages brought diplomacy and diplomacy brought fresh contact and more trade and more marriages and more people and fewer warrior and more farmers. Farming however is a slow, steady business. You just don’t go from producing no food to producing a surplus in a day, or even a year.

The needs that arose from the strain on resources as the size of these tribes grew also gave rise to ingenuity and innovation. New ways of doing old things were found and this provided farmers and their tribes with fresh ways to use resources and they grew and grew and grew in size until the old ways of the past where tribes would meet and ritually fight so their young warriors could gain experience in fighting and gain reputation and
find women and have families so the tribe could prosper, appeared useless, inefficient and strangely barbaric and were eventually abandoned. Trade now ruled supreme.

That was how things were in the middle of the world.

At the edge of the world however, news traveled slowly. A hunter would meet an old friend from another tribe out hunting, and they would exchange news. There would be a trader who would make the arduous journey to the edge and bring with him examples of wonderful inventions the tribe had never heard of.

The rumors of what was happening did not seem to affect them. The words of the traders who occasionally found them appeared insubstantial, forgotten the moment the trader was out of sight.

Life at the edge of the world, it was felt, could go on forever.
Chapter 1

Contact
Pugna was the leader. As a leader he was strong and brave and he always led from the front. Obeo and Hiemo were in line behind him. Fugae brought up the rear. The tribe had a troupe of four because this was the optimal unit for survival. Big enough to produce two pairs. Small enough to move quickly. Fast enough to be able to get out of trouble if necessary and large enough to be able to deal with most situations.

The edge of the world was a tough place. Only the tough survived long there. The tribe Pugna, Obeo, Hiemo and Fugae came from was the toughest. The troupe had simple orders: scout the territory, find new hunting grounds, make sure they are secure.

For as long as anyone could remember this is what the tribe did. It established its territory. It defended it. Incrementally it got more territory. It defended that. It was not a strategy of great growth. It was a carefully planned approach that preserved the tribe’s resources. More territory meant more people needed to defend it. More territory meant the tribe might attract more enemies. The tribe only got more territory when it felt it was strong enough to do so.

“This is how we survive.” The Elders frequently said. “We plan our growth. We move only when we have the fighting men to defend new territory.”

That was the first Rule. The Directive carved upon the tribe Commands Totem.

**SONS BEGET TERRITORY. THROUGH SONS WE GROW**

It was the first thing everyone saw when gazing upon it during Tribal Time when the tribe bonded over its shared history and accumulated wisdom. The lessons graven upon the Commands Totem were important to them. Young men, not yet warriors, gazed upon them and felt they understood where they were and what they were supposed to do. Older men, grizzled by the years, looked upon them and got a sense of the tribe’s strength, a meaning of the passage of the years and the waning of their own strength.

The carvings on the Commands Totem were the distilled knowledge of the years. They, like everything else, helped the tribe survive. The Elders who ruled the tribe considered the Commands Totem to be their instrument. A visible expression not just of their authority but of the tribe’s system of governance. They had, over the years, taken everything that happened to
the tribe and everything the tribe did and analyzed it and boiled it down to nine key commands. These commands had become the heart of the tribe. The way it led its existence, made decisions and conducted business with other tribes.

Because of the Commands Totem and its carvings there were no misunderstandings. Everyone knew where they stood. Everyone understood what was expected of them.

Now that far away from that Totem, Pugna raised his arm and with a simple gesture stopped the troupe. They had come to the end of their journey. In front of them stood a dense wall of trees. The tribe’s lands had shrubs and grass, but few trees. The rough, flat terrain made hunting a skill that required patience and the ability to use camouflage, speed and dexterity with a large number of hunting weapons.

The tribe’s sons were amongst the best hunters in the world. Surviving in an inhospitable terrain that made hunting difficult they were also great fighters. Fierce, independent, capable of improvising on the spot. Hunting was an activity that made them feel alive: strong, powerful, one with nature, masters of their world.

The steppes and grasslands they hunted in, however were very different to the territory they were in right now. Pugna stood still, carefully surveying the thick wall of trees that rose before him. It would make visibility difficult, he thought. When you can’t see what’s round a bend in a path until you are practically upon it, it must be hard to react.

He suspected that the trees would make it easy for game to escape. The animals could weave in and out of the trunks of the great trees, some would probably climb up high on the trees themselves and disappear in the forest canopy overhead. He knew that the change in terrain negated many of his troupe’s strengths and made them all weak, even vulnerable.

Change always works against us, he thought. It would have been great if the steppes could go on forever and ever, stretching from one edge of the world to the other. Then the tribe would simply expand, slowly and methodically. It would use its strength to incrementally gain and defend territory and anyone it did not beat it would simply turn into satellite tribes, paying fealty to it. This talk had been had more than once around the camp fires, late at night. This wall of trees was a problem. Pugna thought he could try to find a way around it, see just how big this forest was, but it would
take time. Time he wasn’t sure they had. His troupe had been sent on this because they were fast.

Going through them though constituted a risk. He thought carefully about that, weighing the odds. Leaders had to make choices. This was the second command on the tribe’s Commands Totem. A troupe had a leader for a reason.

**LEADERS ARE OUR STRENGTH**

Leaders were the ones who made the decision, pointed the way, set the direction. When you lead, you were always under pressure. “We are going to enter the forest,” Pugna said to his troupe. “Everything we encounter there is a potential threat to us.” He watched their faces as the implications of his words sunk in. “We need to be on our guard.”

The troupe understood that once they entered the forest many of their natural advantages would be lost. They would have to rely on each other even more, hoping that by staying alert together they would be able to see any threat long before it became a danger to them.

Silently, as one, the four men entered the forest. The world of the trees they entered was nothing like the steppes they’d left behind. The light inside the forest was different. Filtered through the canopy of leaves high overhead it was way darker and almost tinged with streaks of yellow. There were deep shadows here and patches of bright sunlight where there was the odd break in the canopy, high above their heads.

There appeared to be paths through the forest but where each led and what really lay ahead was hidden from them. The trunks of the massive trees around them hid the paths’ end, made it difficult to decide which direction to take. From where he stood Pugna thought that one direction looked as good as another. How can leaders lead when there is no clear visibility to the paths they choose, thought Pugna.

It was not a thought he had the answer to. On the steppes you saw all paths. You made your decision based upon knowledge you possessed and the objectives you set. The third command on the tribe’s Commands Totem made that clear:

**LEADERS WEIGH ALL PATHS AVAILABLE**
But here you had to make decisions based upon the unknowable. He was stuck. A good leader ought to be able to make good decisions. Decisions are based on knowing where to go. When you cannot know, how can you be a good leader? Pugna held the thought in his mind, knowing that the others were waiting for him to tell them what to do.

“We go this way,” he said and pointed towards one of the paths opening up in front of them. When you do not know anything all paths are equally probable, he thought to himself.

In their new environment they made their way through the trees, carefully checking where they walked, their eyes and ears alert for any signs of danger. The path was narrow, thick vegetation rose on either side and they traveled in single file: Pugna, in front. Obeo, next behind him. Hiemo, next and finally Fugae, bringing up the rear.

They went on like this for more than an hour until they came upon a clearing. There were trees and vegetation, again on the other side. More paths to choose from. Pugna was busy thinking about how far they had traveled and whether the path he’d chosen had been a good one and he almost missed it, but Obeo, standing next to him didn’t.

“People!” he hissed and because they had been bred and raised to hunt in the steppes where your prey is swift and success in the hunt demands cooperation, the troupe moved like one. They flattened themselves to the ground, removing themselves from view. Then, completely hidden for the moment they inched slowly forward, hiding behind the tall blades of grass in front of them.

Obeo had been right. On the other side of the clearing there was indeed, movement. The vegetation, between the trees was rustling and all of them could clearly see the points of spears like their own, held aloft, peering above it.

Presently there was a little more movement and the barely visible outline of a person wearing a massive headdress appeared, half-hidden behind one of the large tree trunks.

“Who goes there?” The person said. There was what appeared to be more movement in the trees behind him.
Pugna and his men froze. It may well be that they had not been seen. That the people across the clearing were only testing to see if anyone was around. He motioned with one hand for total silence.
Chapter 2

Perception
The world is not what it is. It is what we think it is. Every warrior of the tribe learnt this lesson the hard way. Combat presented a fluid situation. There were too many variables in the dynamic to make accurate predictions. Unexpected conditions could conspire to overturn an expected outcome. Tiny mistakes could lead to bigger ones, overturn expectations. The best warriors could be bested if they failed to believe in themselves. But self-belief and confidence always present a problem. Fail to take into account your opponent and self-belief in itself will not save you.

The thoughts we have are only the beginning. The combat ground is a testing ground. What we know has to change when the situation requires it. Nothing is ever left to blind chance.

These were hard lessons driven home by one unarmed combat match after another. And then learnt again by the mock battles the tribe’s warriors routinely engaged in. Pitting one group against another. Evenly matched adversaries in terms of strength and speed and skill. Winners had to be smarter not just fitter.

Pugna was the product of this approach. They all were. In a group were they were all excellent fighters he got to lead because of his tactical brilliance. The same brilliance that was now being put to work as they all lay immobile amongst the trees, hidden by tall blades of grass, looking across the forest clearing and the place the voice had come from. There were obvious choices laid out before him. Pugna weighed each one with care.

He could remain quiet. The men on the other side would then come out of the clearing and Pugna and his troop would have the element of surprise. The things is there was no telling just how many men were on the other side of the clearing. There could be a lot more than they could fight off. There may be others nearby. These could be just the tip of a larger force. The uncertainties here were too great to leave to chance.

He looked at his men lying in the grass with him.

We could run, suggested Fugae. They have not seen us. We could go back to the village. Return with a much larger force.
Or we could just face them down, suggested Obeo. They don’t know how many we are. We could feign we’re a much larger force ourselves.

Hiemo kept quiet. Waiting until Pugna’s gaze fell upon him. Wait it out, he said. If we stay here, quietly, we will see exactly how many there are and what they are like and we can decide then.

These were all credible choices, thought Pugna. Each made sense. Only one though was the best one. He went about assessing them the way he went about assessing anything: by weighing the risks. They were there because the tribe needed new territory. They needed to expand and had to scout. To go back and come back with a larger force of fighting men as Fugae had suggested, would waste time, allow the people on the other side of the clearing to do whatever they wanted. By the time the larger force had come back the situation would have changed and what, Pugna, thought if the people on the other side were also scouts? What if by the time a larger force came back they had gone? What then?

It was a waste of energy and resources that solved nothing and moved nothing forward. He discarded the option as non-viable.

There were more choices beyond fighting. The world is not what it is. It is what we think it is. What I think it now is what it will be, thought Pugna. He knew he was right in the sense that his actions would determine the outcome by precipitating the fluidity of the situation. In that sense every action would be right, but that was philosophical. Pugna had been tasked to get results. Outcomes determined real values: who lived, who died. What resources became available for the rest.

His mind made up he turned to his troupe. “Here are the choices,” he said, explaining his reasoning for them all to understand. “We can fight, but we have no idea how many there are, or what they want.”

“They want to kill us. They’re armed.” said Fugae, ignoring the fact that not to be armed in these parts was madness.

Pugna ignored the interruption, continued: “We can run, but then things will be unchallenged. We will have gained nothing, our mission will be
lost and we will lose precious time.” Everything else was a combination of these two. He took them through the odds. Watched them nervously fidget.

“There is something else we can do.” He said, “as risky as everything else but with a higher possibility of success.”

He carefully explained his plan to them. They would establish contact with the people on the other side without revealing themselves. If anything, they would work to create the impression that they were way more than four and much better armed. They would need to establish who the men on the other side were, how many. What they wanted. Once they had all the information they needed they would then make a better decision.

If things did not work out then Fugae and Obeo would have to run back. Go to the tribe. Get assistance. Pugna and Hiemo would stay behind. Run a diversion. Hold the attackers back as long as possible. Buy some time. If they could, then they too would run back. If not. Well. Everyone knew scouting was a risky business.

“It’s really risky,” Fugae volunteered at last. “What if we’re injured? What if they are so many they can overrun us quickly?”

“We will give nothing away,” said Pugna. “If they’re not sure how many we are or even where we are exactly, they will find it hard to attack with accuracy which means they are unlikely to decide to do so. If things go wrong we only need to buy a little time. That we can do.”

They all fell quiet after that. Each one contemplating the role they would have to play in the coming scenario. Intuitively they understood that Pugna’s move was the best choice available to them. Tactically it decreased the risks and increased the potential of a positive outcome, even if things went wrong. They knew, as a leader, he was chosen, exactly for this kind of thinking.

They all knew what the Command Totem said:
LEADERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE.
NO LEADER ASKS MORE THAN HE IS PREPARED TO GIVE HIMSELF.

Pugna laid out the basic strategy for them. They would position themselves far enough apart to present a broad face to the men on the other side of the clearing. One that would make them appear like a much larger force. One of them would take all four spears, arrange them near him to make it look like there was a group of them on that side. The others would be responsible for generating telltale signs of a much bigger force. It may not work perfectly, Pugna thought, but it would create sufficient uncertainty to make the option of a fight, a difficult decision for the other side.

Once the plan was in motion they trusted each other to do their part. Pugna took the center of their layout. It gave him a better view of the clearing and, beyond it, the trees where the unknown enemy lay. We can only successfully pull this off if we work as one, he thought. The training of his men had been thorough. The daily contact and war games had taught each of them to focus on what they had to do, allow the others to do the same. In the tribe everyone carried their weight, did their job.

In this they were true professionals. The activity provided a relief from the pressure of having to workout the improbabilities of uncertain situations. They all concentrated on carrying out their tasks.

Pugna, in the meantime, kept a careful eye across the clearing, checking out the place from which the voice had come. They could, he reasoned, if they were really aggressive and really clever send part of their force to try and get around them, circumvent the clearing and sneak up on them from behind.

Logical as it was, right now that was the least likely option however. He knew that the other force did not yet know how many of them they were facing. To weaken themselves by splitting up like that was tactical suicide. It made it difficult for them to hold a frontal assault and made it even less likely of their flanking force surviving if they were, in turn, caught out or ambushed.
No, he thought. The other force is not moving a muscle until they truly know how many of us there are. It amazed him to see the pivotal role information played in a fight. After all, they trained all their lives to fight. Fighting is what kept the tribe strong, yet without information no warrior really wanted to fight if there was an alternative. There were just too many uncertainties.

Time seemed to slow down for them all. At one point Pugna saw a number of spears peak over the covering foliage on the other side of the clearing. Low-hanging tree branches rustled. The tall blades of grass seemed to stir.

“We know you’re there.” Came the voice again. As strong and confident as before. “Show yourselves!”

Pugna waited. His men were already in action. Obeo was already creating the impression on their flank of a large armed group. Fugae and Hiemo allowed themselves to appear careless. They moved grass leaves, touched branches themselves. From across the clearing the entire front facing them would appear to be coming to life, Pugna thought. Inwardly he smiled.

“Who are you?” he asked and immediately moved to get to another place. He was aware that giving away his position like this made him vulnerable. Made them all vulnerable by association. Carefully he peered across the clearing again.

Against the intense greenery of the backdrop he fancied he saw a plumed headdress for a moment. It then disappeared. “We are the tribe of the South. The tribe called Fortis.” Said the voice. “We are here to explore, make the world larger.”

Pugna had never heard of a tribe called Fortis but then again he was not one for tribal names. He did not go to trading posts much. Did not care for too much contact with outsiders. His main concern, always, was the quality of his tribe’s fighting men. His own ability in the field.
“We mean you no harm.” The voice continued. “Show yourselves and let us talk.”

Pugna said nothing. His men continued their task, making it appear that they were a much larger force than they were. The fact that the strangers were so quick to talk, did not appear to change position after each exchange worried him. It was either a signal of strength on their part or inexperience. Either of these was dangerous: a strong opponent would eventually make their move, overwhelm them. An inexperienced one would make unexpected and probably irrational moves, precipitate their hand. Lead to an unwanted escalation.

He thought about both options, not entirely discarding the notion that there could also be that he was facing the volatile situation of a larger, more powerful and yet inexperienced force. The worst of all worlds. Life outside the tribe and its territories was never short of interesting, he thought.

He decided to probe them a little. “Show yourselves, first!” he yelled.

He counted the possibilities. If they did it would tell him a lot. He would be able to see them, weigh up who they were and what they wanted on a personal level. Right now all the information he had was impersonal. He knew the risks of that. They all did:

PEOPLE TRUMP INFORMATION
CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

There was silence from the other side. Pugna thought that they would be weighing the options.

The day grew longer and no more words were exchanged between Pugna and his troupe and the unknown force of people on the other side of the clearing. But that did not mean things did not happen. As the day drew on and the sun moved across the sky Pugna noticed that there were more and more appearances of spear tips from the other side. Quietly he crawled to where Obeo was busy rearranging the spears, tips held aloft. He agreed with him to become a little more energetic, make it appear
there were more than a group or two of them.

Similarly, Fugae and Hiemo stepped up their activity. The noise level from their side rose a notch. The side of the forest facing the clearing and the tribe called Fortis came to life. Rustlings, calls, the occasional noise of gear moving as wood struck wood, or a metal spear tip touched a tree. Many feet sounded to be marching.

There was a response from the other side. Pugna thought he heard voices. The branches rustled even more. He fancied he saw a headdress or two peer from across but in the falling gloom he could no longer be sure. At least we are engaging, he thought. Each response told him something he now needed to understand.

As darkness fell the noise level coming from the other side rose a little. Pugna found it a little astonishing until he recognized the sounds for what they were: fires being lit. Food being cooked. How many were there across the clearing he wondered again?

He couldn’t risk their lighting fires in the forest. They were too few of them to keep an eye on them and should things go wrong the forest burning would not help them. He decided on a different strategy, however. He instructed Obeo and Fugae to cut down suitable branches, find out hollowed out trunks. The noise they made was sufficient to make it sound like there were at least a score of them, maybe more.

Once they had found what he asked them each had an improvised drum. The hollowed out trunks they used made a deep, resonant sound when struck. Every member of the tribe was versed in the language of the drums. All through the night, while their possible opponents cooked food and ate and drunk, Pugna and his men made sure their drums never slept.

If we keep them awake they will feel the pressure, he reasoned. It did mean that he and his men would also end up staying up all night, but the tribe’s people were used to that too. No hardship was enough to deter them from anything. Functioning while being sleep deprived was something they learnt while very young.
Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Went the language of the drums, putting sounds in groups together and splitting them apart.

*We are the tribe of the North.* The drums said, *we nor fear nor run from war. We are the tribe of the North. We are them men who win wars.*

The message was repeated on and on and on. Pugna knew that the rhythm was known. Even if no one could put a name to their tribe that drum call came every time their tribe won a mock battle, every time their tribe was in a competitive engagement. The drum call was part of their reputation, the thing that made them stand out from anyone. They played it in advance as they approached a trading outpost or a village. And they played it every time they were victorious, and their tribe was victorious often.

Their tribe had a reputation and Pugna was now calling it in.

Steady and unwavering their drummed message played throughout the night. They deliberately changed logs after a while, each of them getting to use a slightly different drum, make a slightly different sound. As the sound traveled upwards it bounced off and through branches and foliage, was added to by the rustle of leaves and the flutter of feathers until, from the side of the forest of the tribe called Fortis looking across the clearing in a darkness broken only by the glow from campfires and the odd firefly it really seemed as if the whole jungle was alive and a small army was hiding, waiting for them, there.

Meanwhile, on Pugna’s side of the forest a strange thing was happening. Pugna, Fugae, Obeo and Hiemo beat lustily upon their makeshift drums. Arms conditioned by fighting banged away all night. They swapped drums and drummed and drummed and smiled crazily in the dark until the sleeplessness and the banging and the tension of the day melded into something else.

*We are invincible.* They would drum from time to time along with their message to the tribe across the clearing. *We never falter.* And because they were tired and sleepless and yet drummed on, the words made them
smile crazily. They would catch each other’s eyes glinting in the dark and they would nod and their lips would pull back exposing wide smiles until in their minds the fear and the uncertainty began to melt away.

This was their element. They had been trained to fight from birth and intimidation was a game they knew how to play well. The long hours stopped being their concern and fatigue in their arms stopped being an issue.

When the first light broke and the darkness of the forest melted into gray shadows they looked at each other, seeing dark hollowed out eyes, skin gray from fatigue, glistening with sweat. It was the determination inside them however that suddenly made them special. Their eyes, deep inside their sockets now all told the same story.

They were prepared to make a stand. Stop the people from across the clearing, make them pay dearly for each step they took. The passage of the night had forced them to strip away everything but what they were really good at and though the task might really be impossible, the situation truly hopeless, they were now ready to face their enemy and die if necessary.
Activities

The Trust Workbook
Tribal Trust

In Pugna’s tribe the rule of law came down through the Elders. They distilled it into a code of nine commands that created a framework everyone could work with. The commands acted as guidelines through which leaders could make better choices. A leader chosen to command could be trusted to understand the guidelines well enough to apply them to the parameters of the mission he was tasked with.

1. Explain how, in your organization, do you achieve the same thing?
2. Do you have the same sense of belonging to a tribe? What are the characteristics that make this happen? (Include items such as branding elements in your answer)
3. Do you trust the judgment of those who lead in your organization?

Throughout the story of the Tribe That Discovered Trust, Pugna made his thought processes transparent to his men, asking their opinion, involving them in the decision making process and explaining his plan and his thoughts to them.

1. Detail the processes that include you in the decision making process in your organization
2. Describe how communication takes place in your organization (top down, memos, meetings, formally/informally etc)
3. Now describe how that style of communication makes you feel (do you feel listened to? Included? Ignored?)
4. How do you decide when to trust those you work with? Detail your own thinking process
5. Explain what you do when you find yourself not trusting in the judgment of someone in a position of power in your organization but know that you still need to follow their directions
6. How do you think trust could be made easier to establish in your organization?
7. Describe the ideal set up that would make it easier for you to trust the people you work with. Also explain what should happen when trust is broken.
The story of *The Tribe That Discovered Trust* is split into four chapters, each of them represents a trust-building step.

**Contact**

In Chapter I – Contact is first made with the tribe called Fortis.

1. Does the immediate contact made live up to expectations in the context of what is happening in their world? If you’ve answered “yes”, detail all the elements that you think actually add up to it and help it make sense. If you’ve answered “no” explain your reasons and give a breakdown of all the different elements that you think do not live up to expectation.

2. Detail what would happen if you have an initial contact with someone that defies everything you expect to see or hear. Would it help you build trust in them faster or slower? Explain the role played by context in your answer.

3. In Chapter I – Pugna recalls the three first Rules from his tribe’s Commands Totem. Explain the significance or meaning of each one in the context of the story and then explain their meaning in terms of what you do in your organization: How does it grow? What are its limiting principles? What stops it from being bigger and more successful? How do leaders lead in it? How does everyone else around them think they lead?

4. What are the trappings of leadership where you work? Detail them all – different office space/uniforms/perks etc. Explain how these trappings make you feel about the people you work with and whether they add or detract from any feelings of trust you may have towards them.

5. Are leaders in your organization communicative and approachable? If not, detail how that makes you feel and what effect it has on you when things do not go according to plan.

6. Despite Pugna leading the troupe, their small number makes it possible to have a flat command structure. Pugna is dressed as they are and carries the same equipment. Do you have anything approaching that in your organization? If you did what do you think the challenges would be in making it work? Detail everything you can think of including the disruption caused by the need for additional training.

7. In Chapter I, despite their precautions Pugna’s troupe was caught by
surprise at the clearing. They were in new territory, dealing with a lot of new issues. First, detail how your organization deals with new situations on unfamiliar ground. Second, how do you assess Pugna’s decision in that moment? What processes does your organization have in place for assessing and then dealing with the unexpected?

8. Do you think Pugna exercised his authority well in that first chapter? Is there anything you would suggest he might have done differently that would have made a difference? Give reasons for your answer.

9. If you were to look at the system of governance of Pugna’s tribe how would you describe it? (i.e. Authoritarian, Democratic, etc) How do you think that affected the way events unfolded in this part of the story? State clear reasons establishing cause and effect.

10. Beyond everything covered here, what did you learn in the first Chapter of Pugna’s story?

Perception

In Chapter II much of what happens in the story depends upon the perception of Pugna and his men of the people at the other side of the clearing.

1. In your own words explain how you think perception works. How does it affect the way a brand is received by its public? How do you think the awareness of that perception then affects the way a brand behaves?

2. In most cases perception precedes action that arises from an awareness of that perception. This appears to be a chicken and egg question, however actions that arise out of perception suggest that perception is created first, by something other than the immediate action. What do you think that is? List all the things you believe create a perception (gossip, past experiences, reputation etc…) Now look at Chapter II carefully and tick all the elements that you think are present in the perception that leads to the actions of Pugna and his troupe.

3. Do you think that Pugna and his troupe acted correctly in the way they did in the clearing in Chapter II? Would have done something differently had you been in their shoes? What and why?

4. Armed with your knowledge of the impact perception has on conduct and on building trust in general list all the ways you could do things
differently in your business in order to challenge perception and have different outcomes.

5. Looking at your business critically both in terms of its reputation and in terms of all the different parts of it (website, advertising, the ways you communicate, etc) explain in detail how each of these feeds into perception. Assess each element individually and check to see if they all align or if some give a different perception to what you expect, for instance is your website copy friendly and informal yet your terms of use or your FAQs are full of legalese and come across as very formal and maybe, even, forbidding?

6. Detail how your perception of your potential audience affects your communication decisions and even your business decisions.

7. If you need to change the perception that is created about your business detail all the steps you would need to take to achieve that.

8. Does everyone in your organization understand how perception is formed the same way?

9. Does everyone in your organization contribute equally to creating the expected perception of your business?

10. Does anything need to change in your current mode of communication, both internally and externally in order to help you better align the values you hold with your marketing messages?

Assessment

In Chapter III everything that happens hinges on the quality and accuracy of Pugna’s assessment of the situation and his evaluation of the Fortis tribe.

1. Identify three moments when Pugna and his men showed human frailty or sensibilities. Explain how, had these moments been handled differently, they would have resulted in different outcomes. Explain what these outcomes might have been and give full justification for your explanation.

2. Detail the process you have in place in your organization that helps you assess external situations, as they occur so that you can formulate the appropriate response.

3. Do you think that the speed at which a situation is assessed plays a pivotal role to how it evolves? Had Pugna and his troupe reacted faster
and tried to resolve everything in half the time would anything have happened differently?

4. A lot of the assessment in any situation takes place in the absence of real data. Explain what happens when you assess a situation without really knowing anything about it. Be detailed with your explanation and back it up with examples.

5. Do you agree with Pugna’s approach in analyzing the situation he found himself, and his men, in? How would you have done things differently. Why?

6. What criteria do you think are being used by those who are your intended audience to establish whether your business is trustworthy or not?

7. Do you have a detailed analysis of the assessment a first time customer would do of your business? If not, create a ten-point check of the things they will see if they first come across your online or offline business. Grade each from 1-10 with 10 being the top mark which would convince completely and 1 being the lowest which simply would not. Now, also create ten steps which you would ideally want your first-time customer to see which would convince them that yours is the business they want to be associated with.

8. In Chapter III the assessment of the situation and the Fortis tribe carried out by Pugna was different from that of his men. Explain why you think that was.

9. Explain the effect the mutual throwing of the spears had on you. What did you think would happen at that point of the story? Why? Explain why you think Pugna, reacting instinctively retaliated so quickly and so proportionally?

10. If you had been the leader of the troupe in Pugna’s place what would you have done? Why?

Connection

In the final chapter of the story things seem to happen very quickly.

1. Detail all the points of contact that happened between Pugna’s troupe and the Fortis tribe. Ascribe a specific value from 1 to 10 to each one with 1 being the lowest point in terms of importance to the story and
10 the highest. Give full explanations why you thought that point was important.

2. Detail all the safeguards that exist in your organization that prevent rush decisions from being taken.

3. Explain how you go about getting real data about any situation in which you need to make a decision.

4. Was there a flaw with Pugna’s decision to collect more information about the Fortis tribe? Explain where you think the flaws were and how you would have done things differently in his shoes, and why.

5. Has there been any trust established with the Fortis tribe up to this point? Explain your answer, justify your point of view using quotes from the story and detail the dynamic behind them.

6. What in your opinion changed Pugna’s attitude towards the Fortis tribe? What was it that he saw before his men?

7. Detail how your organization gets its humanity across and delivers the message that there are real people behind it?

8. Explain in detail what it is that you do to show that you really care about your business. Then explain in detail what you do to show you really care about your customers. How is this communicated to your target audience?

9. Do you agree with Pugna’s assessment of the situation in the final chapter of the story? If you disagree explain your reasons why and then explain what alternative plan of action you would then put in place.

10. Having read the story of the tribe that discovered trust what do you think you have learnt that you did not already know? What would you now do differently in your own communication and marketing?

**The Trust Dynamic**

In your own words how would you describe the journey of trust that Pugna and his men undertook in their contact and conduct with the Fortis tribe?

If you were to separate it into three distinct stages what names would you give it and what characteristics would each stage have?
Be detailed with your answers. Provide evidence and excerpts from the story to back up what you say. Be prepared, if necessary, to supply extra examples from your own experience.

How would you describe the trust that exists amongst Pugna and his men? Again, give evidence for your answer and supply examples, both from the story and from your own experience, if necessary, to help back it up.
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What does the word “Trust” mean?

How does the clustering of perceptions that surround a word everyone uses differently affect what we do in our personal, commercial and entrepreneurial lives?

Scholars and practitioners widely acknowledge trust’s importance:

- Trust makes cooperative endeavors happen
- Trust is a key to positive interpersonal relationships
- Trust becomes even more central and critical during periods of uncertainty due to organizational crisis
- Trust is a central component in effective working relationships

Because trust is considered so vital, it has been studied extensively and we now have the data necessary to see how it works. How it can be created. How it is propagated across social networks. How it can be lost when things go dreadfully wrong and then how it can be regained.

If you work on the web. If you run any kind of business. If you’re a business leader. If you’re putting together any kind of tribe. If you’re interested in how to make your working relationships work more smoothly and your business function more effectively, this book will help.

David Amerland begins this book with an allegorical tale from which practical lessons are drawn and then dives deep into what makes trust happen and how we can use it to improve our business, professional and private lives.

David Amerland has authored several best-selling books on SEO and social media including: The Social Media Mind, Google Semantic Search and SEO Help. He has helped companies successfully develop an online presence in four countries and has presented to leading business groups throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. He helped Studio B develop a search optimization process for Microsoft. He contributes regularly to Forbes, Social Media Today and blogs at davidamerland.com

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