

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Taking a Hop of Trust

And now, some trivia for you: What do these three anecdotes have in common?

Maria has succeeded in lots of things before—making it through college, landing a job, getting promoted, maintaining friendships, teaching herself to fix her own car. But whenever she thinks about starting that side business she's always dreamed about, she feels so certain that it will fail.

Steve's girlfriend has been there for him consistently for several years, sticking with him through quite a few rough patches. Whenever they talk about their relationship, though, he panics inside, afraid that she's trying to break up with him. Even when she reassures him that she loves him and is committed to him, he can't quite believe her.

Mahesh has had plenty of answered prayers over the years in a number of areas: health, family relationships, overcoming difficult challenges, protection in dangerous situations. His deepest desire, though, is to have a family, and Match.com is just not coming through. He can't believe that God would care about this longing, though, so he can't bring himself to pray about it.

Answer: Each of these people struggles with trust. Could be regarding themselves, other people, or God, but it all boils down to a trust problem. And they are not alone! We live in a wonky world where trusting appropriately can be pretty tricky. But the lack of trust is a big problem for these three. It's preventing Maria from trying something that could bring her a lot of joy and help her life to feel more meaningful. It's keeping Steve from soaking in the peace and strength his girlfriend is pouring into him and it's wearing her out trying to convince someone who won't believe her. Eventually, that exhaustion and frustration probably will drive her away. Mahesh is missing the peace of not being alone in his longing. No matter what happens in his future, he's missing out on the comfort that Someone cares for him and his deepest longings. There may have been good reasons for all three not to trust, at some point, but now, it's stealing life from them. So let's figure out how to get out of this mess.

How Trust is Supposed to Work

Ideally, trust would work something like this. We encounter a new person or experience that hasn't harmed us yet, so we give it, say, 5 trust points. We're not going to let the new person baby sit our kids right off the bat (that would take at least 25 trust points), but we might ask them to make sure no one takes our table while we head to the coffee shop restroom. Gradually, we have more encounters with the new person. We tell them something neutral and they respond well (+1 point). We set up a coffee date and they arrive on time or call if they are late (+1 point). We share something we're a little embarrassed about and they make us feel worse about it (-1 point), but then they call to apologize later (+1 point). And on it goes.

Eventually, we hit the end of the trust points that we can collect through pleasant chit chat, cocktail parties, and skeet shooting—safe experiences that let us test others' trustworthiness in ways that will not hurt us very much if they don't come through. Hypothetically, let's say the max

we can get in safe experiences is 50 points. So what happens when a crisis occurs that invites us to rely on someone to an extent that we hadn't before? We need a ride to the hospital at 3 AM and we can't reach any of our long-term friends (60 points required). Or, we've never told anyone about the abuse that happened to us and the pressure from being alone with it is getting so bad that we know we'll literally go crazy unless we tell someone (100 points required).

That's when we have to take what I would call the "hop of trust." It's not exactly a "leap of faith," as some people think of it, where we have nothing substantial to base our trust on and we just throw caution to the wind and do it anyway. No, we have *some* trust points established already. We/others/God have come through before and gained trust points, maybe even a lot of them. It's just fewer than the number required for us to proceed with so much confidence that it wouldn't feel like a risk at all. So certainly, a "hop" risk is required, but it starts by standing on trust that's been built solidly before. We trust a 50 point friend with a 60 point task. If they come through, they're now at the 60 point level. If a 70 point crisis came up next time, we'd probably pick that friend to hop with, rather than a 25 point friend.

So if that's how trust is built—gradual risks over time, followed by larger risks in crisis—what went wrong with our three examples? They are refusing to hop, even though in each situation, they should have enough trust points built up in themselves, others, or God to make the hop definitely worth the risk. Probably, they had some severe or some frequent experiences along the way where they hopped and people they thought they could trust fell through. This may have hurt so much that they consciously or unconsciously vowed never to hop again. The problem is that they are now in places where it would make sense to hop. It would be good, rewarding, and not that much of a risk from an outside perspective. It would be wiser to risk than not to risk.

How Trust Gets Repaired

Unfortunately for the hop-o-phobics among us, trust wounds can *only* be repaired by choosing new people or situations that are more trustworthy than past ones, deciding to take trust risks with them despite the anxiety caused, and then having a different experience where these new people or situations come through. Even then, it doesn't get fixed overnight. This process has got to be repeated until our mind can un-learn the old lesson that trust hops always end in nasty falls. After 3-5 years of this (so sorry, those are the facts!), trust won't feel so hard. It will start feeling natural to take trust hops, as it should have from the beginning.

What would that look like for our three examples? After people keep asking Maria why she doesn't start her business when she'd be so good at it, she starts asking herself that question, too. She discovers an old failure that has been haunting her and then notices the ways that this new situation is different from that time: she's not a kid anymore, she has skills she didn't have then, it's a good time of life to try something new, her support system will be there for her financially and emotionally if something goes wrong. So she braces herself, ignores her sweaty palms and dry mouth, and dials the number of her business owner friend to talk about what's involved in starting a business. After each step she takes toward the business, she treats herself to a long bath with a good magazine to calm her horrible anxiety. But each time, after a break, she keeps doing the next hard thing because she can't stand the thought that that old failure would prevent her from living her life fully.

Steve finally tells his girlfriend, "A part of me knows that you really do love me, and a part of me just can't *feel* like that could be true. I know that drives you crazy and I think the part of me that can't feel your love for me actually *is* crazy. How can I start letting you in?" She says, "When I

say that I love you and that I'm committed to you, I want you to answer each time that you believe me and that you trust me, even if you don't feel like it." So Steve, despite all his fear, practices doing that. He doesn't succeed every time, of course, but after a long time, he does find himself beginning to believe his words in spite of himself. Occasionally, he even feels like she really does love him and maybe she's not crazy for doing so.

Mahesh decides that if God is God-like at all, it's probably silly to think God doesn't know about Mahesh's longings already. He decides he's going to be really honest about what he wants and also about his fears that God isn't there or isn't really good enough to care about him. It's not easy, of course. Because what would it mean if God really knew what Mahesh wanted and *then* didn't come through? But Mahesh is comforted by the fact that at least he's not hiding things anymore. He feels a little less alone.

So what would that look like for you? Where in your life have you become hop-o-phobic? Where have you seen people or situations come through sufficiently that risking going to the next level with them would really make sense, though you keep holding back?

I would encourage you to try one small hop of trust this week, maybe several if you are up for it. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Speak the words "I love you" to a family member you haven't said that to in awhile.
- Trust yourself to try something new that you've been putting off.
- Tell God the truth.
- When someone says you did a good job, look them in the eyes and say, "Thank you, I really appreciate that."
- Share something a *little* more personal than usual with a chit-chat level friend.
- Smile at a stranger in the check-out line, rather than looking at the floor.
- Tell the person who is closest to you that you not only love them, you need them, too.

If you or someone you know would like help with practicing trust, feel free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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