

Misplaced Trust

Reasons why we are so prone to trust and thereby make mistakes:

- Trusting is indispensable for human beings (inter-)dependency forces us to trust others since the moment we are born).
- Mental biases:
 - We tend to automatically trust people who are similar to us in some dimensions – e.g.: we tend to trust people who are members of our own social group more than we trust outsiders or strangers.
 - Physical touch generates trust (e.g.: handshake!).
 - We tend to correlate observable cues such as facial characteristics, age, gender, race, etc. with underlying psychological traits (honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, etc.).
 - We tend to see what we want to see.

- We tend think that our own judgment (incl. our ability to identify trustworthiness) is better than average.
"In a negotiation class I teach, I routinely find that about 95% of MBA students place themselves in the upper half of the distribution when it comes to their ability to size up other people accurately, including how trustworthy their classmates are."
- We tend to underestimate the likelihood that bad things such as being victim of deception will happen to us.
- Virtually any indicator of trustworthiness can be manipulated or faked:
 - Smiling a lot
 - Maintaining strong eye contact
 - Occasionally touching the other person's hand or arm gently
 - Making reassuring claims ("I always like to put all my cards on the table")
 - Showing understanding, concern, compassion, etc.

Source: Roderick M. Kramer, *Rethinking Trust*, Harvard Business Review, June 2009