

## FOREWORD

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On the day I started writing this foreword, I entered the United States from Canada to give two public lectures. It was a year to the day since my wife and I had returned to Canada, where we are citizens, after 16 years working and residing in the U.S. In many ways these had been wonderful years for us. After moving to the United States in our 50s, my wife and I wondered if we'd ever make new friends. But some of the best friends we have ever had are now American. With the superb support of Boston College and the generous endowment behind my Brennan Chair, I was able to experience and contribute great success in research projects, prize-winning books, teaching classes, and much more. And we were fortunate enough to experience all eight years of Barack Obama's presidency.

One of the most challenging aspects of America, though, is the simple act of getting in and out. And it was no different this time. As I presented my documents to the immigration officer, he looked at my file and scanned his computer.

"Do you still have a Green Card?" he asked, gruffly.

"No. I handed it in a year ago to this day at the border," I said.

I handed him a piece of paper. "Here's my Certificate of Abandonment," I said. It's a strange term to adopt for deciding to move

from a country and renounce employment and permanent residence rights. Abandonment suggests lack of responsibility or commitment; something a bit shameful, even callous or uncaring. In law, abandonment means “to cast away, leave or desert, as property or a child.” So that’s it. Leaving a country where you’ve lived and made a constructive contribution to the economy and society for 16 years is construed as being like leaving the country behind as if it were your child.

The language of leaving the United States is no less delicate than the language of arriving. Come to the United States to be a resident, and if you are not yet, or not at all, a full citizen, you will see your identity staring back at you from the page, as that of an “Alien.” Like some unwanted intruder from outer space, to gain entry you must answer a whole battery of questions including whether you have ever committed genocide. I wonder if anyone has ever answered “yes” to this question, or perhaps confessed, “Just a bit, but that was a long time ago now.” Everyone’s answer is going to be “no” (unless they can’t read the form, of course), but they still have to write it down and say it anyway. Otherwise, unless it is there in black and white, off they might go, liquidating an entire species before you know it.

The immigration officer turned back to me. “Why’d you leave?” he growled. For a moment, words like “Trump,” “Hell in a handbasket,” and various other phrases crossed my mind. But who am I to get on my high horse? After all, I was born and raised in, and am a citizen of, the land of Boris Johnson and Brexit! So, then I gave him the most diplomatic bit of the truth. “Grandchildren,” I replied. “Three of them. They all live in Ottawa.”

“Well, I guess that’s a good reason,” he conceded, and sent me on my way.

Entering or leaving the United States is a process that is shot through with low trust. You are under suspicion from the start. You are not welcomed or embraced for coming to join the land of the free and the home of the brave, to embrace life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Instead, you are presumed to be up to no good until proven otherwise. Everyone, practically, is an object

of suspicion. In 2021, we've seen a lot of it in the culture of U.S. law enforcement. And it also applies at security.

Now with good cause, in an age of global terrorism and hijacking, there is every reason to have airport security, metal detectors, body scans, and the like. The paraphernalia of security exists in airports almost everywhere. It's not the technology of security that distinguishes one nation or system from another, though, but how security officers behave. In most countries, they are professional, polite, systematic, and discreet. If you make a mistake, like leaving a Swiss Army knife in your bag (which I did once), it's assumed to be an oversight, one that any reasonable person could make. I well remember being behind a gentleman in Copenhagen who was asked to show the security officer the contents of a long, thin case. The officer unbuckled the end of the case and removed what turned out to be a large ceremonial antique sword. There were a few seconds of silence, then the officer quietly turned to the owner and said, "Perhaps you'd like to put that through as checked baggage, sir."

In the United States, though, you can hear security officers from the other side of the room, even before you turn the corner to line up. Like sergeants conducting a drill for a platoon of marine recruits, they are barking out orders to everyone within earshot. "You need to remove all liquids." "Liquids must be in a Ziploc bag." "Take out cell phones, laptops, and all electronic devices." "Remove your shoes and belts." "Take all metal objects out of your pockets." Suddenly, you are not a passenger, a citizen, a customer, or even a human being with basic dignity. You are a subordinate, like an adolescent in junior high school, someone who is obviously incompetent or intransigent and needs to have every instruction shouted out at top volume in order to comply.

This is a system of low trust, or even no trust. People cannot be trusted to remove the right items from their bag or take off the correct items of clothing at the right time in the right way. They must be given explicit instructions down to the last detail at full volume. No wonder America has more lawyers per capita than any other country. Unless everything is said or written down in

unmistakable letters explicitly, someone might sue you if anything goes wrong. So you'd better make sure everyone gets the message, over and over again. All this makes for an environment that actually increases tension, stress, and feelings of being unsafe, rather than the opposite.

How people deal with you at security checkpoints, or in state agencies where you may be getting a Social Security card or a driver's license, is a reflection of something about the entire society: its levels of trust.

Compared to other developed economies, the United States suffers from two closely connected extremes. It has one of the highest levels of economic inequality. It also has some of the lowest levels of trust in the developed world. In their best-selling books, *The Spirit Level* and *The Inner Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett show that high levels of economic inequality lead to a vast range of negative social outcomes. In places like the United States and U.K., growing economic inequality manifests itself in high rates of drug use and alcoholism, disturbing levels of depression and anxiety, health-threatening levels of eating disorders, distressing incidences of bullying in school and violent crime in the community, and low levels of trust. The Nordic countries and the Netherlands are the polar opposite of these trends. In fact, if you want to fulfill the American dream, don't go to America. It has one of the lowest rates of social mobility in the world. If you want high social mobility and the opportunity to be very successful, whatever kind of family you come from, your best chances of fulfilling the American dream are actually in Norway, the Netherlands, Canada, or—the focus of this book—Finland.

You can see these contrasts in many areas of life, but let's focus on just one: bicycles. Look down from any office block in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, or Utrecht, and you'll witness a vast sea of bicycles—some of them on the move, many parked in huge racks, hundreds at a time. The Dutch own more bicycles per capita than any other country in the world—almost twice the level of the runner-up, Denmark. Children, adults, families, workers,

students, people of all kinds are riding the streets in great numbers, miraculously not crashing into each other.

Yet practically none of them wear helmets. In America and even in Canada (which is a bit more American than it likes to think, sometimes), this is almost unthinkable. Not requiring your child to wear a helmet is a dereliction of parental responsibility. Often, it may even amount to breaking the law.

How is it that hospital emergency rooms in the Netherlands are not constantly filled with people who have broken their limbs or smashed their skulls, the result of riding recklessly without protection? Well, it's got something to do with the place of cycling within the society. In the Netherlands, cycling is an everyday activity. It is gentle and inclusive, something that anyone and everyone can do. Cycling is steady. Riders are outdoors, enjoying the weather, looking around and taking in the scenery, keeping fit and healthy, possibly chatting to a cyclist beside them, and doing all this as part of everyday life. There are no special clothes for cycling—you just ride to and from school or the office in the skirt or suit you'll be wearing that day. It's like walking or gentle jogging on wheels. There are cycle lanes and stoplights everywhere. Cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians all obey them, each looking out for the other in the shared space they occupy together. It's one of the reasons why the Netherlands is at the top of the world on many global indicators of happiness and well-being (and also trust, by the way).

In the United States, cycling to and from work is something few people do. It's treated like an extreme sport. Cyclists put their work clothes in a backpack and gear up for their biking experience in tight Lycra, streamlining their bodies, getting up a head of speed, and building up a sweat. They race to and from work, weaving in and out of traffic, cheating at the lights whenever they can, sneaking through on red, or going across sideways or even up the pavement so they don't have to stop. Motorists wave their fists at them in ire, and cyclists shout back when car drivers pull across their path or open a door without looking. The whole thing is aggressive, competitive, consumed with speed

and power. Each road user tries to steal the other's space. No one really trusts anybody else to be considerate, careful, or safe. In these societies, parents are right not to trust their children or anyone else to stay safe without the protection of a helmet. If you live in a competitive, nonsharing society, obsessed with speed and power, you'd be a fool to put your child or even yourself on a bike without proper protection.

Pasi Sahlberg and Timothy Walker's book provides immense insight into high-trust and low-trust societies and their educational systems. It's written through the eyes of a Finnish academic and policy specialist who has worked at a high level in the United States (and many other countries besides), and of an American teacher and writer who went the other way to teach in Finland. It's a book that looks at two countries from both sides, in two ways, and with extraordinary results. Ultimately, the authors say, one of the biggest differences between the two societies, and others like them, is in the nature and levels of trust—trust in children, adults, processes, public institutions, and professionals.

The central concern of their book is, of course, education. How do the two kinds of societies deal with trust in education? Before the 1980s, when inequality was lower and public institutions were strong, social mobility was greater, and communities pulled together more, trust may well have been stronger in both societies. It is not as if Americans have never had trust, but many, like Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, believe that they lost it. Indeed, our great American friends look back with sad nostalgia on the 1960s and '70s when levels of inequality were lower, social mobility was greater, and communities and trust were stronger. The reason for the collapse of trust in the United States (and U.K.) compared to many other countries, Sahlberg and Walker argue, has to do with the different ways that Nordic countries and Anglo-Saxon countries like the United States and U.K. dealt with the economic downturn of the 1980s.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, following the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, believed that the answer was to open up markets, roll back the state, pare back state support for the

vulnerable, replace manufacturing with finance and services, and foment active distrust in public institutions, especially public education, as just Big Government. Ronald Reagan likened alleged declines in educational standards to a war being waged against the nation. Margaret Thatcher put up deliberately misspelled posters saying the Labour Government wasn't "wurking." Beyond the 1980s, market competition between autonomous schools like charters and academies increased (even more under President Clinton and U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair), and as investment in public good declined, quality assurance was no longer invested in professionals and public institutions but in testing and accountability measures. More and more schools were identified as failing so that parents would abandon them for the new semiprivate academies and charter schools that made profits for their investors. Showing that Scandinavia is not immune to these forces, in the 1990s Sweden eventually followed and then suffered the biggest declines in international student assessment scores of all OECD countries in the 2000s.

At the same time, as Sahlberg and Walker show, Finland decided to go the other way. Short of money but recognizing that education would be the long-term answer to its economic troubles, Finland decided to stay away from large-scale standardized testing and abolished external inspection and accountability structures to boost much-needed professionalism among its schools and to save money that it could then invest in high-quality teachers and in the conditions that would enable them to work effectively together. The United States and U.K. disinvested trust in educational professionals and traditional public schools, while Finland did the opposite, and the results in their relative rankings on international achievement scores of educational performance are now plain to see.

But if it's easy to say we should trust people and professionals more, actually doing it is not nearly so self-evident. This is the real strength of this book, in the depth of its descriptive detail, showing just how trust is built in classrooms, schools, communities, and families.

In 2002, I wrote a journal article that has become one of the least cited of all the papers I have ever published. Hardly anyone knows it exists. The problem is the title. I called it “Teaching and Betrayal.” I thought the title was clever. But no one searches for the words “teaching” and “betrayal” together. If I had called it “Teaching and Trust,” the result probably would have been completely different. It’s a pity I didn’t foresee this, because betrayal is just as important as trust; even more so. Trust takes months or years to build. Betrayal can happen in an instant. Many betrayals are not deliberate acts of cruelty or manipulation but thoughtless acts of neglect due to concentrating on other priorities or becoming overwhelmed. A big part of building trust is avoiding betrayal, and my article gave some clues about how to do it.

In one of several articles reporting the results of interviews with 50 teachers about their emotional experiences of their work, I outlined how part of teachers’ emotional life was how they experienced trust, and its opposite, betrayal, especially among their colleagues and with their administrators. There were, I showed, three kinds of betrayal. *Competence betrayal* occurred when colleagues or administrators thought that teachers couldn’t do the job properly, and weren’t competent or qualified. *Contract betrayal* occurred when colleagues thought teachers didn’t follow through on what they agreed to do or didn’t pull their weight and try hard enough. *Communication betrayal* occurred when teachers or administrators said the wrong thing, failed to offer praise or positive feedback, or simply didn’t connect with their fellow professionals. The key insight of the essay’s analysis was not in identifying these three forms of betrayal, but in showing that most incidents of what administrators and colleagues thought was contract or competence betrayal (not putting in enough effort or doing things properly) was actually the result of communication betrayal—making judgments about people without really understanding their actions, motivations, or other issues, as people.

This book sets out some brilliant everyday examples of how to build communication trust. My favorite is Timothy Walker’s experience of the Finnish teacher’s staff lounge, where he felt guilty



at first because in America, with so much to do for the students, chatting away at leisure in the staff lounge several times a day would be regarded as a frivolous luxury and mainly a waste of valuable time. In Finland though, Tim came to realize, time spent with colleagues in this way was an investment, not a waste. It was time to build trust and understanding so that problems could be solved quickly together later on.

But trust is not all about communication and relationships. Sahlberg and Walker show how giving children ascending levels of trust depends on scaffolding degrees of trust—and risk—in their own lives, to travel independently through the neighborhood, manage their own time, and use sharp tools without close supervision. Trust is about building competence as well as relationships. This is not earned trust—giving trust only to a small elite of schools or professionals on the condition that they have achieved excellent results. Trust is not a privilege. It is, in a way, a human right—at least until that trust is seriously broken by cheating, theft, or violence.

Top-down accountability has secured us few successes in educational improvement in the United States or elsewhere. Instead of slowly building communication trust in communities, with professionals, and in public institutions, educational reform in several countries has become obsessed with exposing egregious incidents of manufactured contract and competence betrayal among allegedly lazy unionized teachers working in supposedly failing schools. The same is true of political and media climates that betray teachers by insulting them and attacking them, and by persuading parents to abandon them for other institutions that will profit from their resulting anxiety and despair. In the United States and U.K. especially, politicians, bureaucrats, and aggressive entrepreneurs have broken trust with the public and the teaching profession. And broken trust for a society is like a broken heart for an individual.

Teachers' work is often already heartbreaking enough given the challenges that many children face and the problems they bring with them to school. On top of this, teachers do not need

to be betrayed by leaders of systems of punitive accountability. The educational systems that made the most decisive and effective responses to COVID-19 were ones that treated teachers like trusted first responders for children—working swiftly together within a couple of days of school closures to contact families and children, especially the most vulnerable, to check in on them, help them feel supported, and figure out what resources they needed for learning. The least effective systems didn't trust teachers, worried about being sued in case they couldn't respond to every single child equally, and made teachers wait for two weeks and more before government and school district bureaucracies gave them permission to contact families.

This book shows that trusting our teachers is an essential ingredient of educational excellence and well-being—not so teachers can teach just as they wish, or be left completely alone, but so they can work together as qualified professionals for the children they come to understand and know best. Instead of manufacturing illusions of teachers and public schools that have betrayed us, it is time to follow the Finns and build trust, actively and deliberately, in the professionals and public institutions that serve us.

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