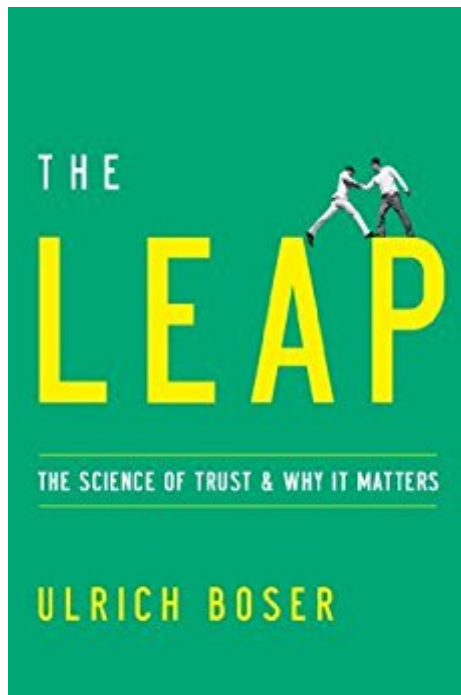


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The Leap: The Science Of Trust And Why It Matters



Synopsis

We're not supposed to trust others. Look at the headlines. Read the blogs. Study the survey data. It seems that everyone is wary, that everyone is just looking out for themselves. But a sense of social trust and togetherness can be restored. In *The Leap*, best-selling author Ulrich Boser shows how the emerging research on trust can improve our lives, rebuild our economy, and strengthen society. As part of this engaging and deeply reported narrative, Boser visits a radio soap opera in Rwanda that aims to restore the country's broken trust, profiles the man who brought honesty to one of the most corrupt cities in Latin America, and explains how a college dropout managed to con his way into American high society. Boser even goes skydiving to see if the experience will increase his levels of oxytocin, the so-called "trust hormone." A powerful mix of hard science and compelling storytelling, *The Leap* explores how we trust, why we trust, and what we can all do to deepen social trust. The book includes insightful policy recommendations along with surprising new data on the state of social trust in America today.

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Customer Reviews

If you like books by authors such as Malcolm Gladwell (*Tipping Point*, *Outliers*) or Steven Levitt

(Freakonomics) you will like this book. I think of these as "science lite" books, an outline of current research in fields like psychology or economics sprinkled with antidotes and a bit of history. It is pretty easy reading, and you will learn something while being entertained. This book does a good job of usually providing references to the actual research. But sometimes the author presents an idea and glosses over the science. For example, he maintains that two research studies show that there is an inverse relationship between political trust and homicide rates. The implication given in the book is that this relationship is causal. However, it could easily be correlational. For example, in elementary schools on average reading ability increases with shoe size, those with bigger shoes tend to read at a higher level. So can we conclude that kids with big feet are smarter? Nope, a little thinking and one realizes that older kids have bigger feet, and older kids usually read better than younger kids. That relationship (shoe size and reading ability) may be statistically significant, but it masks an underlying variable of age. It is a correlational relationship, not a causal one. Unfortunately here (at least in the advanced reader copy) he does not provide the references to the actual research, so I was unable to look up the source material. And two studies are not enough for a conclusion. So, you need to have a little skepticism about some of the conclusions. However, I did find the book thought provoking, especially the chapter on politics and trust.

As another reviewer says, *The Leap* is a mix of academia and journalism, and I'd say it's heavier on the journalism side. I read a lot of popular psychology books, and I was pleased to find that *The Leap* isn't just a rehash of the same stories these authors use over and over. The content was new and novel, although it could go deeper and broader, and I'm somewhat partial to an academic, analytical approach. It's a slim, readable book (you could even take it on an airplane) that introduces readers to the physiology of trust (i.e., oxytocin) and suggests that trust has evolved as a crucial ingredient of social relationships. We're hardwired to be social and it's hard to build a social network without trust. Perhaps the most important part of the book is the explanation of context that creates trust. The con man who called himself "Clark Rockefeller" had finely-honed social skills that let him pass himself off as a member of the Rockefeller family. People who met him commented on his attentiveness. Similar, Elie Wiesel bonded socially with Bernie Madoff, leading to a disastrous investment in the millions of dollars. The Abu Ghraib prison scandal was made possible because the actors, such as the unfortunate Lynndie England, completely trusted the situation. Thus while Boser makes a compelling argument for the importance of trust, he also seems to be demonstrating the need for us to be aware of situations that are manipulated to create our trust. He talks about people with Williams syndrome, whose brains are hardwired so they tend to be entirely too trusting of

everyone they meet. Yet some people without this syndrome will be swayed by context.

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