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Monday, September 5, 2005

Rebuilding lost trust is difficult, but important

It takes more than counseling, especially when an act of infidelity has occurred.

By KRISTIE L. GUSTAFSON
ALBANY TIMES UNION

Trust. It takes a long time to build, but can be knocked down faster than a Jenga tower.

Take infidelity. There is the case of Jude Law and Sienna Miller, the engaged big screen couple who are re-establishing their coupling after Law cheated on Miller with the nanny to his two children. Or betrayal, when a trusted co-worker goes behind your back or divulges secrets.

"It's not just trust in the other person that has been breached," says Kerul Kassel, owner and founder of the Saint Cloud, Fla.-based New Leaf Systems. She offers coaching, workshops and presentations to help people work together in their business and personal lives.

"But if we can't trust the people we're close to, then we're really in trouble - for the rest of our lives."

But regaining trust is possible - and important, says Mike Paul, a self-proclaimed reputation-management expert based in New York City. His firm, MGP & Associates PR, works with businesses such as Verizon, Time Warner, Citigroup and the State University of New York, among others.

"Trust, honesty, humility, transparency and accountability are the building blocks of a positive reputation," Paul says. "Trust is the foundation of any relationship."

People rebuild that crumbled foundation every day, especially when it comes to romantic relationships, as with Law and Miller, Hugh Grant and Elizabeth Hurley (after his romp with a prostitute), Bill and Hillary Clinton and NBA all-star Kobe Bryant and his wife, Vanessa.

Breaking trust in a romantic partnership elicits more hurt and heartbreak than a betrayal from a friend or co-worker, says Ann Zak, professor of psychology at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, N.Y. It is hardest to re-establish trust after a betrayal in a romantic pairing.

In the Law and Miller case, the "Alfie" star (who cheated on his first wife, Sadie Frost, with Miller) apologized publicly and profusely. She said she absolutely would never forgive him.

Now rumors have them seeking counseling, getting back together. "Public apologies may appear to work for celebrities like

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Jude Law and Hugh Grant," says Ruth Houston, author of "Is He Cheating on You? 829 Telltale Signs." "But it takes more than that to rebuild trust - especially when one partner has betrayed another with an act of infidelity."

Zak says research, based on theorist's John Holmes' study "Trust in Close Relationships," shows regaining trust - for both sides and no matter the betrayal - happens in three stages:

•**Predictability:** "You learn they'll pick you up when they say they will, or they like this part of a TV show. Oftentimes, in the (aftermath) of infidelity, the cheater will spend more time with their partner to show they are predictable." Illustrating a pattern and a state of familiarity helps create a feeling of reassurance.

•**Dependability:** "Not only do I know you like brown bread with breakfast at 8, I know I can rely on you to keep a promise and you won't betray a confidence. I can share feelings of self-doubt and you won't make fun of me. It's a little more than being predictable."

•**Faith:** "Faith in the future of your relationship. No matter what happens, your partner will be there for you." Couples will set goals for the future, and work toward them together. Discussion of starting a family is a good example of that, Zak says.

While predictability, dependability and faith may not occur sequentially (although they typically do), these established phases can provide a concrete way for people to identify improvement and move forward, according to Zak.

But there's more, says Kassel. It really comes down to how forgiving the other person is. Some people trust again with nary a hesitation.

"Allowing to trust again also depends on a person's past experiences," Kassel says.

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