



## **METHODS FOR STRENGTHENING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE**

Talking paper for the

**BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY**

to the

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Building Trust in Government***

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*In preparing this talking paper, we consulted with a group of thinking partners who have served in government positions. The ideas in this paper derive from our interviews with Ambassador Chowdhury (Bangladesh), Dennis Kucinich (USA), Robin Ludwig (USA), Juan Carlos Murillo (Mexico), Jay Naidoo (South Africa), Steve Naraine (Guyana), Victor Pertou (Australia), and Cassan Uteem (Mauritius).*

When a people elects someone to represent their interests in government, they are saying, in effect, “I trust this one to speak on my behalf, to weigh the issues of our nation with me in mind, to decide on a course of action that acknowledges our shared ethical and cultural values. However, as obvious as this bond of trust appears, the crisis in trust in government at this time is epidemic. What are the practical considerations at the heart of the bond of trust between those who govern and those who have placed their trust in that government?”

The first dimension of trust is to trust oneself. The second dimension is to trust others. Trust is the glue that holds together relationships, communities, and societies. Trust has a powerful capacity to connect us with other people, assuring us that we are all in this together. Embedded in trust is an imperative to tell the truth. When one does not tell the truth, one undermines trust; one breaks the bonds that unite us. To understand the nature of trust is to know that everything inevitably is revealed and so it is useless to lie. Truth cannot be crushed to the ground, it will rise again. Therefore truth is like a polestar, and trust is the way to reach that star.

## **Methods for Strengthening Public Trust and Confidence:**

***Behave responsibly:*** Trustworthy behaviour is conditioned by a sense of responsibility. It is important that when someone is put in a position of leadership he/she understands that “I have a responsibility to honour.” People have placed their trust in that person and have trusted them with the responsibility of undertaking certain objectives and of delivering certain outcomes. This sense of responsibility is demonstrated by the way they live their own lives, and it is through this that they are able to generate respect and trust from the people. In other words, the way they conduct and live their lives publicly and privately should be at a level and standard that generates public trust. To be open and transparent are factors that maintain trust.

***Tell the truth:*** Only through quiet contemplation of how things are, and coming into connection with the truth that stands behind every idea, every law, every discussion, every interaction, can we come to a point of being able to express ourselves in a way that is consistent with our highest potential. There is currently a lack of honesty in a lot of leaders. The people do not know what the leaders mean when they say things. They may not tell the truth. They may lie to the people or tell only part of the truth. There is a real crisis in confidence created because of what the people are hearing from their leaders. Honesty means intellectual honesty as well. Dishonesty ultimately weakens the position of leaders. Telling the truth depends on the moral courage of a leader. When they take a difficult stand, what was it based on? What was the thinking that went on behind the decision? Leaders must be able to explain the decisions made and be accountable to the people for the outcomes of those decisions. Truth is about taking principled stands and having constant and honest communication.

***Remain open to different ideas:*** A leader must remain open to different ideas. Given the complexity of the times and the situations, he or she must have a willingness to try and to synthesize rather than simply reject what they don't think is going to work, or what they don't want to hear. By listening to different ideas, a leader may attract others who can contribute to a better result than that which may have been achieved alone. A leader builds confidence when he or she listens to different perspectives and finds a common ground from which to pull out elements from different people.

***Reconcile legitimate priorities with moral dimensions:*** If we think in terms of polarities, then we are always locked into the imperative of compromise – even when it does not serve the situation. If we think holistically, we understand that a broader range of possibilities exists simultaneously. In order to make sure the creation of policies proceeds in a way that is beneficial to the greatest good, the leader needs to maintain the focus of discussion on serving the greatest good, minimizing the pattern of automatic opposition. There should be no separation in our thinking. If we are integrated in our thinking, then moral considerations are not separated from other considerations. Everything that we express must have behind it some higher conditions and expressions of morality. The higher expressions come from the imperatives of our own humanity.

***Wield power with compassion:*** Compassion is a very important component of power. Without compassion, power becomes arrogant. Arrogance is the end of all power. It is

important for a person in power to have compassion, knowing full well that he or she is powerful and to use this power for the good of the people, making sure the best interest of the people is served. Compassion should be at the core of the power structure. If the leader serves with true compassion, the leadership teams and leadership structures will resonate with the quality of compassion.

***Listen carefully:*** Listen to the different points of view and look for what could be built out of that, so that everyone can hear their points of view in the solutions and can move towards progress. One of the best things about a good leader is that he/she always sets aside time and space to listen to everybody. The attitude is: “let’s get it out and let’s hear it”. A crucial step in maintaining the people’s confidence is for the leader to provide the space for people to air their different views, allowing the leader to stay in touch with their different opinions. Too often leaders take only the counsel of their main advisors and then attempt to get everyone to agree with that counsel. There is a real danger posed when a leader stops listening to the people: without continuous and authentic contact with the people being served, politicians too often set in motion a system that moves under its own power, no longer working for the people it was intended to serve. The leader needs to be in regular contact with the people and to listen to them directly, and not through layers of channels.

***See the legitimacy of the other:*** Politicians should not be motivated only by the love and respect of people for him, but by his love and respect for the people. Leaders should not expect others to do what they do not do themselves. They need to work tirelessly to give voice to the people’s wishes, helping to bring about the changes they really want and creating the best conditions possible for them.

To give voice to what the people want, it is important to understand their frame of reference. Our frame of reference is the portal through which we walk to have a discussion. When the leader is in rapport with the other person, he or she connects with them on a deeper level, the level of the inner spirit, seeing the legitimacy of each being.

***Create trusting relationships:*** Popular contact is necessary to build trust. This could be an enormous challenge because of the multi-functioned job of many public officials. The burden of responsibilities of the leader often prevents him or her from maintaining the direct contact so critical to building trusting relationships. For trusting relationships to be meaningful, politicians need to be with the people in their good times, and in their bad times. They need to be beside the people in their difficulties.

One important aspect of trusting relationships is the need to focus and be aware of the limited time a government has to make changes. A leader, who only has six years in office, will not be able to achieve the highest marks in all areas. It is better for him or her to choose one or two issues that have priority for the people and to focus on those. To maintain this focus, the strong leader will select a team and inspire them to work for the people. The leader will define the skills, abilities, and moral principles he or she wants to inject into the team and ask them to pledge to a code of ethics.

The leader will need to remind his or her team that their work is affecting the lives of millions and ask them to reflect on the legacy they want to leave and how their decisions will be judged by history!

***Bear in mind the most important issues on the global agenda:*** Leaders must ask what would the most vulnerable, the most deprived need? They should not only think of those who are already doing well, but of those who are the most vulnerable in the nation.

Governments should consider how the broader objectives – the economic and social benefits – could reach the maximum number of people within the existing dynamics of the nation. They must then work to distribute economic and social growth across all sectors of society.

Governments should especially ask how the younger generation can have the opportunity to grow up in a way in that not only allows them to become more productive as economic units, but also to be very good human beings who further the nation's objectives of peace, tolerance, and understanding.

Governments should facilitate the realization among people everywhere that we are one. They must act to preserve the global habitat, as this is where we work out our collective destiny. Leaders must practice peace in their everyday lives, interacting peacefully with others, and thus receiving peaceful responses in return. Leaders must remain convinced that war is not inevitable, but rather that peace is inevitable.



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