MODULE 1: TRUST · SESSION 2 OF 3

Rebuild

Rebuilding Trust After Breaking It

The Leader's Growth Path | In Love With Learning

Session 1 Callback

What We Built Last Time

Session 1: Trust — Building It Through Action

Trust is built through specific, kept commitments. We learned the Commitment Filter: Is it within my control? Will I follow through when it gets hard? What exactly am I promising?

Today's question:

What happens when you break a commitment — and how do you rebuild what was lost?

Session Skill

Repairing a Broken Commitment

Knowing how to build trust is not enough. Leaders also need to know how to rebuild it — with a specific action, not just an apology.

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

Name exactly what broke, take ownership without excuses, and attach a specific next action to your repair.

This is a skill you will use for the rest of your life — in friendships, families, teams, and leadership.

Understanding

Why Commitments Break

Commitments don't usually break because people are dishonest. They break for predictable reasons.

1 **Overcommitting**
Saying yes to more than you can actually do

2 **Underestimating the Cost**
Not counting what it will take when things get hard

3 **Avoiding Hard Truths**
Choosing silence over honesty when things change

None of these make someone a bad person. All of them damage trust.

Understanding

The Apology Trap

THE TRAP

"I'm sorry."

No ownership of what broke. No action attached. The other person hears words but sees no change. Trust stays withdrawn.

THE REPAIR

"I said I would finish my part by Friday and I didn't. Here is what I will do to fix it by Monday."

Names what broke. Takes ownership. Attaches a specific next action. Trust begins to rebuild.

Key insight: An apology without a specific action is just a request to feel better. A repair is an apology *plus* a commitment you can track.

Framework

The Three-Lens Method — Applied to Repair

You already know these lenses from Session 1. Today we turn them on what happens *after* trust breaks.

Action

What exactly did the person do — or fail to do — that broke the commitment?

Not feelings. Observable behavior.

Cost

What did the break cost the people who were counting on that commitment?

Time, opportunity, safety, belief.

Change

What specific, trackable action did the person take to repair the damage?

Not promises. Visible steps.

Story 1

King David and the Prophet Nathan

2 Samuel 11–12 · Ancient Israel, approximately 1000 BCE

King David broke trust in the worst way: he took another man's wife, Bathsheba, then arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle to cover it up.

The prophet Nathan confronted David with a parable about a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. David was furious: "That man deserves to die!" Nathan replied: "You are that man."

David said three words: "I have sinned." He accepted every consequence — loss, conflict, years of fracture — without trying to escape what he owed.

THE BREAK

Used power to take what was not his, then covered it up

THE REPAIR

Owned the wrong without excuse and accepted every consequence

Observation 1

What Made David's Response a Repair?

Action

David used his power to take Bathsheba and arranged Uriah's death. When confronted by Nathan, he said "I have sinned" — no qualifiers, no blame.

Cost

A man's life. A family destroyed. Years of conflict in David's own household. The consequences outlasted the apology by decades.

Change

David accepted every consequence without trying to minimize or escape them. He did not use his position to soften what he owed.

Discussion: David's repair did not undo the damage. It could not. What it did was stop the cover-up and accept the cost. Is that enough? When is it?

Story 2

Japan's Post-War Rebuilding

1945–1960s · Japan under Emperor Hirohito

After World War II, Japan faced a staggering trust deficit. The nation had waged aggressive war across Asia and the Pacific, causing millions of deaths and enormous destruction.

What followed was not just an apology. Japan adopted a constitution renouncing war, transformed its military into a self-defense force, and invested in rebuilding the economies of the nations it had harmed. Over decades it became one of the world's largest aid providers.

The repair was a generation of changed behavior — visible, measurable, sustained. Trust returned because actions matched words, year after year.

THE BREAK

Aggressive war causing millions of casualties across Asia and the Pacific

THE REPAIR

Decades of changed behavior: peace constitution, economic aid, sustained action

Observation 2

What Made Japan's Repair Different?

Action

Japan waged aggressive war across Asia and the Pacific, causing millions of deaths and destroying communities across multiple nations.

Cost

Millions of lives lost. Cities destroyed. An entire region's trust in Japan shattered. The cost was measured in generations, not months.

Change

A new peace constitution. A self-defense-only military. Decades of international development aid to the nations it harmed. Sustained, visible action.

Key pattern: The bigger the break, the longer and more visible the repair must be. A single apology cannot match a generational cost.

Story 3

Barbara Henry and Ruby Bridges

1960–1961 · William Frantz Elementary, New Orleans

When six-year-old Ruby Bridges walked into William Frantz Elementary in 1960, she was the only Black child in an all-white school. White parents pulled their children out. Every teacher refused to teach her — except one.

Barbara Henry taught Ruby as the only student in her classroom for an entire year. She showed up every day. She taught every lesson. She ate lunch with Ruby when no one else would sit with her.

She repaired a broken system by showing up — consistently, specifically, daily — for one child. That steadiness is what made it a repair.

THE BREAK

A school system refused to educate a child because of her race

THE REPAIR

One teacher showed up every day for a year — teaching, eating lunch, being present

Observation 3

What Made Barbara Henry's Repair Work?

Action

An entire school system broke its commitment to educate all children. Every other teacher in the building refused to teach Ruby Bridges.

Cost

A six-year-old child was isolated and threatened for trying to go to school. She walked through screaming crowds every morning.

Change

Barbara Henry showed up every day for a full school year. She taught every lesson. She ate lunch with Ruby. She never missed a day.

Key pattern: Repair does not require power or resources. It requires showing up — specifically, consistently, and for the person who was harmed.

Pattern

Spot the Pattern

Three very different breaks. Three very different scales. One shared pattern in every repair.

David	Named the wrong without excuse. Accepted every consequence. Did not use his power to escape what he owed.
Japan	Changed its constitution, rebuilt other nations, sustained new behavior for decades. Words matched actions year after year.
Barbara Henry	Showed up every day for one child. Taught every lesson. Never missed a day for an entire school year.

Every repair named what broke, owned the cost, and attached a specific, sustained action.

Session Skill

The Repair Sequence

Three steps. Every time. No shortcuts.

1 Name What Broke

Say exactly what you did or failed to do. No passive voice. "I said I would do X, and I did not."

2 Own the Cost

Acknowledge what it cost the other person — their time, trust, or plans. Do not explain why you broke it.

3 Attach a Specific Action

Name what you will do differently, by when. It must be trackable — not "I'll try harder."

This is not about feeling sorry. It is about doing something the other person can see and verify.

Application

Vague Apology vs. Specific Repair

VAGUE

"I'm sorry I let you down. It won't happen again."

No naming. No cost acknowledged. No trackable action.

SPECIFIC

"I told you I would review your essay by Wednesday and I didn't. You submitted without feedback. I will give you notes by 8 AM tomorrow."

Names the break. Owns the cost. Action with a deadline.

Practice the sequence with your own situation:

1. What exactly did I do or fail to do?
2. What did it cost the other person?
3. What specific action will I take, and by when?

Application

The Trust Account — Deposits After Withdrawals

Withdrawal

Every broken commitment is a withdrawal. The balance drops. The other person becomes more cautious, less willing to rely on you.

Repair Deposit

A specific repair — naming the break, owning the cost, and following through on a new action — is a deposit. It does not erase the withdrawal. It starts rebuilding the balance.

Research Connection

Trust-repair research consistently shows that trust rebuilt after a violation can become stronger than trust that was never broken — but only when the repair includes changed behavior, not just words. Psychologists call this the "trust recovery effect."

The question is not whether you will make withdrawals. You will. The question is whether you will make specific repair deposits — or just say sorry and hope.

Your Challenge

The Two-Week Challenge

One Repair to Make

Think of a commitment you have broken — to a friend, a family member, a teammate, yourself. Write out the full repair sequence:

- Name exactly what broke
- Own what it cost the other person
- Attach a specific action with a deadline

Then deliver the repair — out loud, to that person.

One Commitment to Keep

Make one new commitment using the filter from Session 1. Keep it for two weeks. Track whether you follow through — and if you break it, run the repair sequence.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is the habit of repair.

Sample Journal Prompts

"Did I break a commitment today? If so, what exactly broke, what did it cost, and what will I do?"
"Did I make a repair? Was the action specific enough to verify?"
"What is the hardest part of repair for me — naming, owning, or acting?"

When you break a commitment, ask:
What exactly broke?
What did it cost the other person?
What specific action will I take — and by when?

The goal is not to never break a commitment. It is to always repair one.

LOOKING AHEAD

Session 3: Earning and Sustaining Trust

We have learned to build trust and to rebuild it. Next, we bring both together — earning trust over time and sustaining it through the hard moments that test every leader.

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