MODULE 1: TRUST · SESSION 3 OF 3

# Sustain

*Earning and Sustaining Trust Over Time*

The Leader's Growth Path | In Love With Learning

Module 1 Callback

## Two Tools You Already Have

Session 1

### The Commitment Filter

Is it within my control? Will I follow through when it gets hard? What exactly am I promising?

Session 2

### The Repair Sequence

Name what broke. Own the cost. Attach a specific action.

**Today's question:**

*How do you keep trust when your circle of responsibility grows bigger than you can easily manage?*

Session Skill

**Sustaining Trust at Scale**

Keeping trust as your circle of responsibility grows — without overcommitting, going silent, or playing favorites.

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

**Recognize the three ways trust fails at scale, and apply a set of rules that keep your commitments visible, proportional, and honest across every relationship that depends on you.**

*This is the session that turns trust from a one-on-one skill into a leadership skill.*

Understanding

## The Scale Problem

Trust with one person is hard enough. Trust with many is a different kind of challenge.

### One Person

You can remember what you promised. You can see when it matters. You can repair it face to face.

### Many People

Promises overlap. Time runs short. Some people are louder than others. The quiet ones get forgotten first.

**The leadership question:** How do you keep commitments visible and fair when you cannot give every person the same amount of attention?

Understanding

**Three Ways Trust Fails at Scale**

1 **Overcommit**

*Say yes to everyone, deliver fully to no one*

2 **Go Silent**

*Stop communicating when things get hard — people fill the silence with doubt*

3 **Play Favorites**

*Give the loudest or closest people your best — the rest get leftovers*

*Most leaders do not fail because they stop caring. They fail because they do not have a system for caring at scale.*

Framework

**The Three-Lens Method — Applied to Sustaining**

Same three lenses. This time we ask: how did they keep trust going when the pressure to drop it was enormous?

## Action

What specific, repeated actions did they take to stay trustworthy across many relationships?

*Not one-time gestures. Daily habits.*

## Cost

What did sustaining those commitments cost them — in time, comfort, or personal advantage?

*Sustaining always has a price.*

## Change

What was different because they sustained trust instead of letting it erode?

*What would have been lost?*

Story 1

# Nehru and Independent India

1947–1964 · India under Jawaharlal Nehru

When India became independent in 1947, Nehru inherited leadership of over 300 million people speaking dozens of languages, divided by religion, caste, and region. No single leader could personally reach them all.

Nehru sustained trust through visible, repeated systems. He wrote a personal letter to every state chief minister — every two weeks, for 17 years. He held open office hours that any citizen could attend. He made decisions in public, explained his reasoning, and accepted criticism openly.

He did not try to be everywhere. He built habits that made his commitments trackable across a nation.

**THE CHALLENGE**

300 million people, dozens of languages, deep divisions — one leader

**THE SUSTAIN**

Biweekly letters, open office hours, public decision-making — for 17 years

Observation 1

**What Made Nehru's Trust Sustainable?**

## Action

Biweekly letters to every chief minister. Open office hours for citizens. Public decision-making with stated reasoning.

## Cost

17 years of consistent effort. Time that could have gone to other priorities. Vulnerability to public criticism.

## Change

A young democracy held together across deep divisions. State leaders felt heard. Citizens had a channel to their leader.

**Key pattern:** Nehru did not try to do everything for everyone. He built repeatable systems that made his commitments visible and trackable.

Story 2

# Shackleton and the Endurance Crew

1914–1916 · Antarctica

When Shackleton's ship was crushed by Antarctic ice, he was responsible for 27 men with no way to call for help. Every decision he made was visible to everyone. There was nowhere to hide.

Shackleton sustained trust through fairness: he ate the same rations, slept in the same conditions, and rotated the worst duties equally. He never made a promise he could not keep. When he had to leave most of the crew on Elephant Island to sail 800 miles for rescue, he told them exactly what he would do and when.

He came back for every single one of them.

**THE CHALLENGE**

27 men stranded on ice, no rescue, every action visible to all

**THE SUSTAIN**

Equal treatment, no empty promises, and he came back for everyone

Observation 2

**What Made Shackleton's Trust Hold?**

## Action

Same rations. Same sleeping conditions. Rotating the worst duties. Only making promises he could keep. Coming back.

## Cost

Personal comfort, authority perks, and the risk of an 800-mile open-ocean voyage to reach rescue.

## Change

All 27 men survived. Not one was lost. The crew followed his decisions even under unbearable conditions.

**Key pattern:** Shackleton never asked anyone to endure something he would not endure himself. Equal treatment sustained trust under impossible pressure.

Story 3

# Dolley Madison and the Burning Capital

August 1814 · Washington, D.C.

When the British army marched on Washington in 1814, President Madison was away with the troops. Dolley Madison was left at the White House with one decision: flee, or stay and protect what mattered.

She stayed until the last safe moment. She organized the rescue of the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington, critical government documents, and the White House silver — keeping her commitments to multiple groups at once: her household staff, the government, the nation's heritage.

Then she evacuated everyone safely. She sustained trust under pressure by doing what she said she would do, for every person counting on her, until the building was literally burning.

**THE CHALLENGE**

Enemy army approaching, multiple groups counting on her, no time

**THE SUSTAIN**

Served every group — staff, government, heritage — before saving herself

Observation 3

**What Made Dolley Madison's Trust Work?**

## Action

Stayed when she could have fled. Secured documents, the portrait, and silver. Evacuated every staff member before leaving herself.

## Cost

Her personal safety. Time she could have used to protect her own belongings. The risk of being captured by an advancing army.

## Change

Irreplaceable artifacts survived. Every staff member got out. The nation kept its symbols of continuity through a crisis.

**Key pattern:** When multiple groups count on you, sustaining trust means none of them gets abandoned — especially under pressure.

Pattern

## Spot the Pattern

Three leaders. Three different scales. One shared pattern in sustaining trust.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Nehru** | Built repeatable systems — letters, office hours, public reasoning — that made commitments visible across a nation. |
| **Shackleton** | Treated everyone equally — same rations, same duties, no special treatment — and only promised what he could deliver. |
| **Dolley Madison** | Served every group counting on her — staff, government, heritage — before serving herself, under extreme time pressure. |

*Sustaining trust means: make it visible, keep it fair, and do not abandon anyone you committed to.*

Session Skill

**The Sustainability Principle**

Three rules for keeping trust when your circle grows.

1

### Make It Visible

People cannot trust what they cannot see. Communicate what you are doing, why, and when — before they have to ask.

2

### Keep It Fair

Everyone who depends on you gets your honest effort. The quiet ones, the easy-going ones, the ones who do not complain — they count the same.

3

### Do Not Abandon

When pressure rises, the instinct is to triage. Sustaining trust means no one you committed to gets dropped.

*These are not about being perfect. They are about being someone people can count on even when things get hard.*

Application

## Your Circles of Trust

Think about the people who count on you right now. Not one person — all of them.

### Inner Circle

Family, closest friends — people you see every day

*What commitment do they count on that you have not said out loud?*

### Middle Circle

Teammates, classmates, church group — people who depend on you regularly

*Who in this group are you most likely to go silent on?*

### Outer Circle

Neighbors, acquaintances — people who count on you occasionally

*Have you made a commitment here you have already forgotten?*

**For each circle: Is your trust visible, fair, and present?**

Application

**The Trust Account — The Long Game**

### The Compound Effect

Small, consistent deposits — showing up, following through, communicating honestly — compound over time. A year of kept commitments builds a balance that can survive a bad week.

### The Erosion Effect

Small, unnoticed withdrawals — going silent, forgetting the quiet people, letting commitments slide — erode slowly. By the time you notice, the balance may be gone.

### Research Connection

Organizational trust research consistently finds that trust is built slowly and lost quickly. But the leaders who sustain it longest share one trait: they treat trust as something that requires daily maintenance, not a one-time achievement.

*Trust is not a trophy you earn once. It is a garden you tend every day.*

Module 1 Synthesis

**Trust: The Complete Picture**

Three sessions. Three skills. One foundation every leader needs.

S1 **Build It**
The Commitment Filter — make specific promises you can keep

S2 **Repair It**
The Repair Sequence — name, own, act when you break one

S3 **Sustain It**
The Sustainability Principle — visible, fair, nobody abandoned

Trust is not one skill. It is three: building, repairing, and sustaining. A leader who can do all three is someone others will follow — not because they have to, but because they choose to.

Your Challenge

## The Two-Week Challenge

### One System to Build

Choose one circle of trust and build one repeatable habit that makes your commitments visible — a weekly check-in, a shared update, a standing promise you keep without being asked.

### One Quiet Person to Reach

Identify someone in your life who counts on you but never asks for attention. Reach out to them this week — not because they asked, but because you noticed.

### Sample Journal Prompts

*"Who am I most likely to go silent on when things get busy?"*

*"Did I keep my commitments visible today, or did someone have to ask?"*

*"Which of the three trust skills — build, repair, sustain — do I need most right now?"*

**Build it with specific commitments.**
**Repair it with specific action.**
**Sustain it — visible, fair, and present.**

*That is what it means to be someone others trust.*

Next: Module 2 — Integrity, the Leader's Compass