

TRUST FORCE

Why trust-driven teams
perform better – and
keep winning over time



THOMAS BURÉNIUS

TRUSTFORCE

T R U S T F O R C E

*Why Trust-Driven Teams Perform Better – and Keep
Winning Over Time*

T H O M A S B U R É N I U S

Trustforce

Copyright © 2026 Thomas Burénus. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the author, except for brief quotations in reviews.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

Published by Crescens Press, Gävle, Sweden, 2026

ISBN 978-91-992488-3-7 (paperback)

ISBN 978-91-992488-5-1 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-91-992488-4-4 (e-book)

Contents

Author's Note	7
---------------	---

PART ONE

Where Trust Comes From

01	Can I Trust You?	15
02	Where I Learned It	29
03	The Six Cs of Trust	45

PART TWO

Trust in Practice

04	Making It Safe to Tell the Truth	67
05	The Season	85
06	Ownership You Can See	107
07	What Trust Does to Performance	123

PART THREE

Where Trust Is Tested

08	Leading Through Change	139
09	Where Trust Ends	151

PART FOUR

The Leader Within

10	Leading Without Armor	165
11	The Inner Work	177
12	Trust Cannot Be Demanded	191

BACK MATTER

	Exercises for Your Team	205
	Notes and References	229

Author's Note

I didn't write this book because I wanted to teach leadership. I wrote it because I needed to understand it. For years I carried a question I couldn't let go of: why do some teams grow into something remarkable, while others, with the same people and the same resources, never get off the ground?

I have watched people with real potential go quiet. I have watched good ideas die because nobody dared to say them out loud. And I have watched teams grow in ways that still move me when I think about them, because someone chose to build safety first and structure second. Each time, what separated the two kinds of team was trust, and the kind I mean is the harder, more human one that never ends up painted on a wall: being willing to be seen, to be wrong, and to need other people.

I haven't always managed that myself, and that is probably what I regret most. There were times I pushed too hard, moved too fast, protected results instead of people, or acted before I had really listened. For a long time I believed leadership meant standing out in front, being strong and knowing the way.

The most important things I have learned didn't come from success. They came from doubt, from the weight of responsibility, and from moments when someone I respected looked at me and said one of these things:

"I don't think you're listening right now."

"I need you here."

"I want to follow you, but I have to understand why."

“Growth starts in moments like those, when someone tells the truth and the relationship survives it.”

Growth starts in moments like those, when someone tells the truth and the relationship survives it. I believe in leadership that is more human than heroic. It doesn't have to be ashamed of being soft, and its courage comes less from strength than from being whole, doubts and mistakes included. Across all my years of leading people, I have seen the same thing again and again: when people trust each other, they share more, dare more, carry more and grow more. Over time they also perform better than anyone expected, because they want to and not because they have to.

Where these stories come from

The book draws on about two decades of leading teams. I started behind a grill kiosk and moved on through retail, live events, a couple of years as a Statoil station manager and a large logistics operation at IKEA. I ran dance schools through a pandemic, and today I lead the operation at a large park in Sweden. I have chosen not to name the park, and I have changed details where I needed to protect people. I name people only with their permission.

I am a practitioner. Where my experience lines up with research, I say so and point you to the source in the notes at the back. Where it doesn't, I tell you it is my experience and nothing more.

The book started as something much smaller. A few years ago I began trying to sum up what almost twenty years of leading people had taught me, for my own sake more than anyone else's. I wanted words for what I had seen work again and again, and for the things I need to remind myself of when everyday life gets messy. Some of those words became six that all begin with the same letter, and I have come to call them the Six Cs of Trust. Those notes kept growing, and somewhere along the way they turned into this book. I have worked

the text through with the help of digital tools and an editor, but the experiences, ideas and convictions in it are my own.

How to read it

The first three chapters describe where my convictions come from and the model I built from them, the Six Cs of Trust. Chapters 4 to 7 are about practice: psychological safety, what happened when we built trust with hundreds of seasonal employees, ownership, and what trust actually does to performance. Chapters 8 and 9 test the idea in the places where it is hardest, during change and at the edges where trust is not enough on its own. The last three chapters turn inward, to the leader's own ego, doubt and stamina, and finish with the lesson that started it all for me: trust can't be demanded. Each chapter ends with a few things to try and some questions to sit with, and a toolkit at the back collects the exercises so you can use them with your own team. Read the questions slowly. They are the part of the book I would most like you to take with you.

I hope you recognize something of yourself in these pages. Most of all, I hope this book helps you build a team where people feel safe enough to be themselves, and where together they can create something none of them could have built alone.

Welcome.

Thomas



Figure 1. A map of the book.