FROM ASSHOLE TO ALLY



Why Ambitious Professionals Lose Trust and How to Earn It Back

R. Scott Armstrong

TRUSTCRAFT PRESS

From Asshole to Ally

Why Ambitious Professionals Lose Trust and How to Earn It Back

R. Scott Armstrong

TRUSTCRAFT PRESS

From Asshole to Ally

Why Ambitious Professionals Lose Trust and How to Earn It Back

Copyright © 2026 by R. Scott Armstrong
All rights reserved.

Published by Trustcraft Press, an imprint of Win The Question
trustcraftpress.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

ISBN 978-1-0679826-0-7 (ebook)

First edition

Contents

Part I: The Problem *5*
Introduction: Promoted Into It *5*
Chapter 1: It's Not About You 10
Chapter 1 Cheat Notes 20

Part II: The Four Skills *in the full book*
Chapter 2: Ask, Don't Answer
Chapter 3: Listen to Learn
Chapter 4: Practice Trust Framing
Chapter 5: Learn to Navigate Moments of Trust

Part III: Trust at Scale *in the full book*
Chapter 6: Pitching New Clients
Chapter 7: One Ally Isn't Enough
Chapter 8: Marketing Trust
Chapter 9: The Ally Long Game

Conclusion: What Luke Would See
Postscript: Why the Ally Advantage Grows in an AI World

The Rest of the Book 22
Bring This to Your Firm 23
Acknowledgments 24
Further Reading 26
Bibliography 28
About the Author 30
About Trustcraft Press 32

Part I: The Problem

Introduction

Promoted Into It

How a Nice Kid Became an Ambitious Asshole

I didn't wake up one day and decide to be an ambitious asshole. I got promoted into it.

I was young, working in advertising on accounts like AT&T, Miller Brewing, NASCAR, and Equal sweetener, paid enough to feel invincible and rewarded for acting like a shark. I learned fast that confidence wins. If I sounded certain, people relaxed. If people relaxed, I won meetings. If I won meetings, I got promoted. I was so focused on success that I would speed down agency hallways fast enough that a hilarious and insightful creative called me "Hustle and Jingle" because he could hear the change rattling in my pocket before he saw me coming.

When you get addicted to being the person with the answer, like I did, every conversation becomes a performance. I wasn't listening to understand. I was listening to reload. I waited for openings. I grabbed the wheel. I filled silences. I pushed things toward my preferred outcome and called it leadership. It looked like momentum. It felt like winning.

It was also exhausting for everyone in the room, including myself. I just couldn't see it yet.

I grew up in a small town called Midland, where ambition felt slightly out of place and your reputation was built person by person with each interaction. Everyone knew everyone, which meant everyone also knew everyone's business. My family was known for being hardworking, kind, and community-oriented.

My parents were ahead of their time. They didn't just tell us what to think. They asked us questions and listened to the answers. Around our dinner table, our ideas mattered. Being curious was normal. Being heard was expected. I enjoyed our family discussions and looked forward to dinner every evening. I didn't know it then, but I was being trained in the most important professional skill I would ever use: listening. Because of that, I was the kid who asked questions, not to show off, but because I wanted to know the answers. I thrived in school and loved learning.

That kid went away to college and continued to get rewarded for being smart, fast, and competitive. Then he went to work in advertising and got rewarded on a bigger scale. Somewhere along the way, amid the accumulation of promotions and titles, the small-town instinct to be curious and useful got replaced by a louder, more urgent need: to win.

My move to Y&R Advertising in Chicago changed everything.

I was sent there to lead new business, win Miller Brewing, and turn the business around. VP title. Big office. Bigger expense account. Even bigger stakes. I was

thirtysomething and thought I'd arrived. What I didn't understand was the cost.

The well-liked existing new-business team had been pushed out so I could come in as the ambitious newbie. From day one, there was resentment in every room. People were polite. They came to meetings. They worked on my pitches. But they never felt like my team. There were no real conversations, no lunch outings, no happy hours to decompress after long days. In my first six months in the Loop, I was never invited out for team drinks. Not once. And not only was I not part of the fun, but we weren't winning pitches.

In Toronto, I'd been part of something great. We had a strong new-business team, we were winning, I had a social life around my work, and I had bosses like Barrett Book and Andrew Bergstrom who softened my edges. Barrett, a very senior leader in our agency and one of my favorite bosses ever, did it by coaching me on the ad business. And Andrew, who I loved reporting to directly, did it by working with me more as a collaborative peer, ensuring I was part of his team. Chicago was different. Same ambition. Less cushion. And I was becoming more visibly asshole.

I told myself the team was slow to get on board. Inside me, though, the soundtrack was more insecure: *I have to prove they made the right call to bring me here. I have to win.*

Then it blew up.

I was waiting on my president's assistant to set up a prospect meeting with Miller Brewing. In my mind, this was the most important item on her list, obviously. When

it hadn't happened on my timeline, I lost it. I snapped at her in front of other people, demanding to know why it hadn't been done, as if her job existed mainly to clear my path.

The next day, my president, Kary McIlwain, called me into her office. She didn't yell or give me a long speech. She just said, very calmly, that I was acting like an asshole and now that I had yelled at her assistant, nobody wanted to help me.

It landed like a punch. Not because she was cruel, but because she was right.

I'd been promoted, given power, and handed a mandate to succeed. Somewhere along the way, I'd decided my urgency, my pressure, and my need to prove myself mattered more than the people around me did. I was trying to win meetings. I was losing trust. And I couldn't see it until Kary named it out loud.

I'll be forever grateful that she did. To name what's happening in someone else's behavior, calmly, without cruelty, without flinching, is itself an ally move, and I would not have learned the rest of this craft if she hadn't done it first.

This book is for ambitious professionals who make a living selling advice: consultants, lawyers, accountants, advisors, agency stars, and anyone who gets paid to walk into a room and see what others don't.

If your ideas are strong but trust still wobbles, this book is for you. If you've ever suspected you might be the problem in the room, this is for you. If you keep hearing

"you're smart but not quite ready for the next level" without clear direction on what's missing, it's definitely for you.

This isn't a book about being nicer. Ambition isn't the enemy here. I believe in ambition because it's powered me for most of my life. This is about tuning ambition so you can become the kind of professional who earns trust, lowers risk, and is useful when the stakes go up. Not less ambitious, but more trustworthy. More successful. Way better to work with.

What I've learned (slowly, expensively, and sometimes humiliatingly) is that if I could do one thing differently over my career I would:

Stop trying to win the answer. Start winning the question.

Learning to be an ally instead of an asshole isn't that hard. The need to do so is just not that obvious until you see it. This book is a collection of valuable best practices and experiences I've picked up over the past few decades, some cheats I use to put them into action, and some neuroscience that backs it all up.

The ideas in this book have helped me get back to being a guy who loves to help his clients win. These things shouldn't take you decades to figure out.

Let's go.

Chapter 1

It's Not About You

The Math That Changed Everything

Asshole behavior isn't unique to agency life. Think about the last time you dealt with an accountant, a lawyer, a consultant, an executive, or even your doctor and walked away thinking, *They're not listening. They just don't understand.*

None of this is a personal failing. It's default professional behavior. When researchers Kari A. Phillips, Naykky Singh Ospina, and colleagues recorded real doctor visits in a JGIM study, the doctors asked what was wrong in only about a third of them. When they did ask, they interrupted the patients two-thirds of the time, half of those within 11 seconds.[1] *Eleven seconds.* And in my experience it's just as bad across the boardroom table.

Most professionals aren't trying to be difficult to work with, though being difficult would be almost easier to deal with. They're trying to be helpful and worth promoting. They just constantly do it in a way that's self-defeating. Professionals are trained, both formally and informally, to sound smart, authoritative, and correct. They use their titles and expertise like a tower and then talk down to everyone from the top. This style of communication looks professional to them, but it often feels terrible to the person on the receiving end.

1. Naykky Singh Ospina et al., "Eliciting the Patient's Agenda—Secondary Analysis of Recorded Clinical Encounters," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 34 (2019): 36–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-018-4540-5.

That's how you become a professional asshole: not through malice, but through the slow accumulation of rewards for sounding certain, being fast, and performing confidence instead of earning trust.

If you're a mid-career professional, this might come up more subtly. You keep getting called smart and reliable, but you're not the first call for the real problems. You get invited to big meetings, but you don't shape the agenda. You deliver the work, but someone else gets the credit, the access, or the promotion. That's what stalled upside feels like. It looks fine on LinkedIn, but it feels like hitting an invisible ceiling.

That ceiling isn't intelligence. It's self-orientation. And one of the more expensive lessons I've had in spotting it was at Hewlett-Packard.

In the early 2000s, I was the general manager at a community management consultancy. Online community building was one of the hottest areas in marketing, and we were working to win an assignment with HP, specifically to build and manage an enterprise software user community.

On paper, it was a perfect fit. We had ideas, energy, and just enough early success to believe we knew what we were doing.

What we didn't have was any real understanding of what HP was actually dealing with.

HP was in the middle of yet another massive restructuring and was cutting over 24,000 jobs while the financial crisis froze every budget. I remember walking through their

huge Cupertino campus. Every other building was closed. In the ones still open, every other floor was dark. You could almost smell the fear in the hallways, the kind that settles into a place during restructuring.

Executives were ducking. Budgets were plunging. People were trying to keep their jobs.

And we walked in sure we had the answer.

We convinced our super-smart client contact to fund a research and consulting phase. Then we did exactly what self-oriented consultants do when they think credibility is everything: We locked ourselves in our office for months. We researched the market, built comprehensive rationales, developed a global implementation plan, and spent their entire budget producing a slick 53-page report.

Then we flew a large team to San Jose, marched into a conference room, and proudly presented the whole thing.

He was polite. He thanked us. He paid the invoice. Then he dodged our calls for months. No pilot. Nothing went live.

I ran into him years later and finally asked what had happened.

He told me that because of the restructuring, senior leaders were asking for one-page project outlines: literally green smiley faces for “go,” yellow faces for “needs analysis,” red faces for “not aligned with current priorities.” Our 53-page report missed the mark in scope, risk, budget, and format. He told me he was the only stakeholder who ever read the whole thing. There was

nothing he could do with it internally, so it died on the vine.

Then he said something that still stings: "You spent my budget building a report designed to prove you were smart consultants with big ideas, without spending enough time discovering what I needed to move the organization forward."

That hurt. It was also worth more than the entire project fee in what it taught me.

The most useful model I've found for understanding what went wrong comes from David H. Maister, Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford's *The Trusted Advisor*. Their trust equation is brutal in its simplicity:

$$\textbf{Trust} = \frac{\textbf{Credibility} + \textbf{Reliability} + \textbf{Intimacy}}{\textbf{Self-Orientation}}$$

- Credibility: Do you know what you are talking about?
- Reliability: Do you do what you said you'll do?
- Intimacy: Does the client feel safe with you? (In my workshops I swap Intimacy for Client Knowledge, because "does the client feel safe" is a result and "how well do you know their business" is a behavior you can practice.)
- Self-Orientation: Are you focused on yourself, or on others? (Personally, I like to call this *assholeness*.)[2]

2. David H. Maister, Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford, *The Trusted Advisor* (Free Press, 2000).

Everything sits on top of that denominator. On top of how self-oriented you are. Everything you do gets divided by how much you are acting like an asshole.

So the move is simple to say and brutal to live: Halve the denominator and trust doubles. You can't outsmart a denominator. A more impressive title, a thicker case study library, a more expensive suit: none of those things reduce the denominator. Only caring about the person across the table more than I care about how clever I look does that.

That is brutal math in the real world. And it was the breakthrough insight that helped me understand how I could do better.

The authors of *The Trusted Advisor* are real consultant's consultants. Their thinking is thorough, academic, and, if I'm honest, a bit hard to get through. After years of using their approach, here's what I've taken from it:

Self-orientation isn't just ego. It's a professional virus that infects everything. Every time I make the work a little too much about proving myself, trust takes a hit. Join a bigger firm. Feel the need to win the room and the need to be right. This "all about me" behavior is trust-eroding self-orientation that prevents me from getting to the next level.

I learned that I couldn't fix self-orientation with a quick patch. It had been growing for decades. In order to build more client trust, I had to see and then reduce the self-orientation that had helped me succeed through school and my early career.

Credibility, reliability, and intimacy become table stakes the more senior you get. The thing that separates a successful professional from an ambitious professional stuck in their career is reflective insight about self-orientation.

My HP story wasn't a capability failure. We had good ideas. Real expertise. Solid work. But our self-orientation was so high that none of it mattered. We had technically impressive, practically useless deliverables. That wasn't work that built trust; it was an expensive risk the client took and paid for.

It took losing more big pitches, and then losing my job, to finally slow me down.

The firing itself was fast. I knew it was coming and sat waiting in my office all day until the call from HR and my president finally came in. I'd watched it happen to other people. I had even done it to other people and privately assumed they'd earned it. The agency world was brutal that way. You were only as good as your last win. Now it was my turn, and I walked out certain the market would correct the mistake within a month.

The market had other plans.

I ran my job search the way I'd run new business. Hustle and Jingle, unemployed edition. I reached out to the recruiters I knew, the agency presidents I had previously ignored, and everyone else in the business and booked coffees, meetings, and even some interviews. I treated every coffee like a pitch and every interview like a room to win. I had answers ready before anyone asked a question. I brought certainty, attitude, and lots of "about me."

Nothing landed.

Weeks became months. The pressure at home was heavier than anything I'd carried in the office. Two kids with a third on the way. A crushing mortgage on a partially renovated home. A wife who had left the workforce to become a full-time mom, in a marriage I had underinvested in while operating in full asshole mode.

A year of silence does something useful to a professional who built his identity on winning: It removes the noise he was hiding in. No meetings to run. No pitches to prep. No hallway to hustle down. Just a guy at a kitchen table, his phone no longer ringing, slowly realizing that everything he knew how to do was some version of talking.

Finally, after I threw a fit in his office, a recruiter I knew told me the truth. I was overpriced for my title, overtitled for my experience, and, despite my earlier successes, my recent record was a string of expensive pitch losses. The part that hurt most: He described my reputation as hard to work with.

That was when Kary's words stopped sounding like feedback about Chicago and started sounding like a diagnosis. All that success had taught me how to lose. I took a long look at the loser in the mirror and started understanding where I'd gone wrong. For 15 years, I'd walked into every room, including the rooms where I was supposed to be getting hired, selling how smart I was. The interviews were the tell. I kept trying to win them, while the people across the table were looking for someone they could trust.

The job that finally ended the drought was at a little-known agency called the Hive. They had just been through a major restructuring, the team was shattered, and they hated traditional agency suits. But they were desperate too. They could afford to pay two-thirds of the salary I'd been making, which didn't cover my monthly nut but was more than the nothing I had been making after my severance ran out. I needed that job. It took me a year to be able to say that sentence. That job also turned out to be the inspiration for everything this book teaches. Humility got me through the door. Curiosity kept me there.

I'd have preferred a shorter route. Apparently, that wasn't on offer.

Reducing self-orientation looks simple from the outside. From the inside, every move is the opposite of what an ambitious professional has been rewarded for.

The asshole version of me in motion walks fast, talks fast, fills silences, opens with the deck, reaches for the rip video, and listens like a hunter. Nods while you talk, but you can see the next sentence is already loaded. He's ready to score a point. Sends a follow-up that says, "Great meeting!" and attaches a 53-page report that does not help with the client's question.

The ally version of me in motion walks in slower than the room expects. Looks around with a smile. Asks a question before starting to better understand the agenda. Has a marker in hand, and uses it to write down the client's words, not his own. Pauses where the asshole would speak. Says, "Let me test a frame with you. I might be off." Stays

quiet when the client gets close to the real thing they are worrying about. Stays relaxed when the room gets tense. Doesn't fill silence. Sends a follow-up email a few useful sentences long: Here's what I heard, in your language; here are a few different ways forward with honest trade-offs; here's what I think the next decision is. What did I miss?

The asshole version of me is what got promoted early. The ally version is what gets trusted and actually earns business now.

The rest of this book is the fix, and it is easier than you would expect: recognizing and minimizing self-orientation, learning the four trust skills, and scaling winning the question behaviors in your firm. One cultural signal that matters more than most leaders realize is how your team talks about clients when the clients aren't in the room. Asshole culture describes clients as obstacles and sources of unreasonable demands. Ally culture describes clients as people carrying real pressure and trying to do hard things inside complicated organizations.

The problem is the brutal math of trust. To earn more client trust, you need to recognize and then reduce your self-orientation.

The four skills are how you reduce self-orientation in practice:

1. Ask, don't answer.
2. Listen to learn.
3. Practice trust framing.
4. Learn to navigate moments of trust.

And the final part of the book tells how to make it happen at scale so you can grow your business:

- Pitching New Clients
- One Ally Isn't Enough
- Marketing Trust
- The Ally Long Game

A question for you before you get started on the rest of the book: In your last important client meeting, did you act more asshole or ally? What were some of the obvious signs that you were earning more trust?

The Brutal Math of Trust

$$\text{Trust} = \frac{\text{Credibility} + \text{Reliability} + \text{Client Knowledge}}{\text{Assholeness}}$$

← your competitive advantage

CREDIBILITY *Do I know what I'm talking about?*

✓ *Real expertise. Real stories. Facts.*

✗ *Theatrical expertise. Jargon. Name-drops.*

RELIABILITY *Do I do what I said I'd do?*

✓ *Small commitments kept, in writing, on time.*

✗ *Big promises. Slipped deadlines. Vague follow-through.*

CLIENT KNOWLEDGE *How well do I know the client?*

✓ *They tell me the political stuff.*

✗ *They tell me the official version.*

ASSHOLENESS *Am I focused on me, or on them?*

Halve it and trust doubles.

Double it and trust collapses.

QUICK SELF-AUDIT *before the next meeting:*

- ☐ *Whose problem am I about to solve, theirs or mine?*
- ☐ *What am I trying to prove?*
- ☐ *If I cut my assholeness in half, what would I do differently?*

Maister talks about client intimacy,

but I focus on client knowledge.

~~Asshole~~ → Ally

the operating system

SELF-ORIENTATION

Make it less about me.

1. ASK, DON'T ANSWER *ch 2*

Understand the conversation before trying to solve it.

2. LISTEN TO LEARN *ch 3*

Stay curious long enough to hear what actually matters.

3. PRACTICE TRUST FRAMING *ch 4*

Frame the problem in their words until they say "exactly."

4. NAVIGATE MOMENTS OF TRUST *ch 5*

Lean toward the client instead of self-protection.

ALLY BEHAVIOR

More useful. More trusted. Easier to work with.

I sit on my client's side, as their ally.

TRUST AT SCALE

Apply the same behaviors to:

- *pitches* *ch 6*
- *teams* *ch 7*
- *marketing* *ch 8*
- *long-term relationships* *ch 9*

Keep Reading

The Rest of the Book

You just got the why. The rest of the book is the how.

Chapter 1 gave you the math. Knowing the math won't change your next meeting. The skills will.

Part II: The Four Skills

Ask, Don't Answer. Why answering the wrong conversation costs you trust, and the pitch I lost before I got the work anyway. Chapter 2.

Listen to Learn. What a former FBI hostage negotiator taught me about out-listening the room. Chapter 3.

Practice Trust Framing. The four-line frame that gets clients saying "exactly." Chapter 4.

Navigate Moments of Trust. A storm, a grounded actor, a blown budget, and the moment I showed my client exactly whose side I was on. Chapter 5.

Part III: Trust at Scale

Pitching, teams, marketing, and your network. Eight months chasing Hyatt for nothing. The client we lost because I never coached ally work out loud.
Chapters 6 to 9.

Get the full book at winthequestion.com, plus 13 more cheat notes built for the ten minutes before your next client meeting.

Run a firm or lead a team? Drill these skills live with your people, on real client work. Turn the page.

Bring This to Your Firm

If this book changed how you think about your next client meeting, then the rest of the platform was built for the meeting after that. Here are three ways to bring this work into your firm, from a single session to ongoing coaching.

The Team Session

A working session for your leadership, practice group, or team. It examines trust as a math problem that helps you recognize self-orientation in action, drills the four skills live, and works through the framework with a real client situation. A great addition to your next team off-site, it's built for the team that wants to start practicing the skills, not just nodding at them.

Keynote

A talk for conferences, partner off-sites, and leadership retreats. It covers the brutal math of trust, demonstrates the self-orientation shift, and teaches the skills, with memorable and funny stories the book can't fully capture. Built for a room of professionals who already know they're smart and want to know how to get even better.

Coaching

Coaching one ally, one room at a time. For professionals who want to build ally culture into their firms' operating systems, focused on the specific moments where trust is being lost or won.

For booking, scope, or questions:
winthequestion.com · scott@winthequestion.com

Acknowledgments

This book exists because Kary McIlwain told me I was acting like an asshole, and she meant it. I'll be grateful for the rest of my career.

Luke Sklar showed me what listening looks like before I had a word for what he was doing. He drew the picture on the whiteboard until I could see it, more times than I deserved. The half of this book about helping clients see their own thinking is half Luke at minimum.

Nolin LeChasseur has been my business partner, the discovery to my go-go-go, and the patient counterweight to my worst instincts for almost 20 years. The principle of alignment in chapter 7 was earned over years of disagreeing well, in conference rooms, kitchens, and the occasional bar. I'm still learning from him.

The Brainrider team, past and present, taught me that ally culture is more than any one person can carry. All of you made the lessons in chapter 7 real before I had the words for them.

Some clients made this book possible by being honest with me, even when it cost them something to do it. My lead client at HP told me what was wrong with our 53-page report. A spirits company general manager looked at the Twister and gave me a generous version of the truth. And thousands of other client experiences served as my teachers.

To the dozens I haven't named, thank you for trusting me with the work, and for telling me when I got it wrong.

To the clients who taught me what wasn't in the win column, including the ones who stopped returning my calls before I understood why, this book carries your lessons too.

To my parents, who taught me at the dinner table that being curious was normal and being heard was expected: Most of what's good in this book started there.

To my people: Thank you for the patience, the honesty, and the years of asking the harder question. I'm still working on it all.

And to the reader who got this far. The book wasn't written for everyone. It was written for the ambitious professional who suspects they might be the problem in the room and is willing to do something about it. If that's you, I hope this proves useful by Monday morning.

R. Scott Armstrong, Creemore, 2026

Further Reading

- "Begin with Trust" by Frances X. Frei: The empathy-logic-authenticity triangle. The trust equation with a leadership lens. Short, sharp, worth the read.
- *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness* by Robert Waldinger and Marc Schulz: The happiest research book I know.
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol S. Dweck: The growth-versus-fixed-mindset distinction that underwrites the willingness to be wrong and keep learning. Twenty years old and still load-bearing.
- *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as If Your Life Depended on It* by Chris Voss and Tahl Raz: A former hostage negotiator on listening.
- *Supercommunicators: How to Unlock the Secret Language of Connection* by Charles Duhigg: The three-conversation framework (practical, emotional, identity) that anchors chapter 2. The single most useful insight in the recent communication literature. Read this if you read nothing else.
- *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know* by Adam Grant: The case for staying in the question, written by a Wharton professor for the kind of people who would rather hear it from a Wharton professor.
- *The Trusted Advisor* by David H. Maister, Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford: The book that made this book possible. The trust equation in chapter 1 is theirs. Dense, academic, super smart, and worth every page.

- *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performance Companies* by Paul J. Zak: The neuroscience underneath trust. Worth the chapter on oxytocin and the chemistry of safety; less essential elsewhere.

If this book got under your skin and you want to keep going:

- *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni: The mirror image of this book, written for the team rather than the individual. About what breaks inside organizations when trust isn't shared.

Bibliography

Camerer, Colin, George Loewenstein, and Martin Weber. "The Curse of Knowledge in Economic Settings: An Experimental Analysis." *Journal of Political Economy* 97, no. 5 (1989): 1232–54. https://doi.org/10.1086/261651.

Duhigg, Charles. *Supercommunicators: How to Unlock the Secret Language of Connection*. Random House, 2024.

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House, 2006.

Frei, Frances X., and Anne Morriss. "Begin with Trust." *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2020. https://hbr.org/2020/05/begin-with-trust.

Frei, Frances X., and Anne Morriss. *Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader's Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2020.

Grant, Adam. *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know*. Viking, 2021.

Maister, David H., Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford. *The Trusted Advisor*. Free Press, 2000.

Ospina, Naykky Singh, Kari A. Phillips, Rene Rodriguez-Gutierrez, et al. "Eliciting the Patient's Agenda—Secondary Analysis of Recorded Clinical Encounters." *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 34 (2019): 36–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-018-4540-5.

Voss, Chris, and Tahl Raz. *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as If Your Life Depended on It*. Harper Business, 2016.

Waldinger, Robert, and Marc Schulz. *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. Simon & Schuster, 2023.

Zak, Paul J. "The Neuroscience of Trust." *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 2017. https://hbr.org/2017/01/the-neuroscience-of-trust.

Zak, Paul J. *Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High-Performance Companies*. AMACOM, 2018.

About the Author

R. Scott Armstrong has spent 38 years learning what every ambitious professional eventually figures out the hard way: The work isn't actually about you.

He grew up in Midland, Ontario, where ambition felt out of sync and reputations got built person by person. He went to college, got rewarded for being smart and fast, then went into advertising and got rewarded harder. Along the way, he worked on AT&T, Miller Brewing, NASCAR, Equal sweetener, and Hewlett-Packard. He also ran agency hallways fast enough to earn the nickname "Hustle and Jingle" from a creative director who could hear his pocket change rattling before he came around the corner. He has lost pitches, blown up relationships, gotten fired, and once spent an entire client budget producing a 53-page report nobody read. He still has the Twister (the shiny, useless idea from chapter 2).

In 2010, he cofounded Brainrider with Nolin LeChasseur, building a B2B marketing services firm from a Toronto startup into a mini-multinational and then back to a small and smart client-focused practice. Along the way he learned, slowly, expensively, and sometimes humiliatingly, that the professionals clients trust are the ones who stop trying to win the answer and start winning the question.

He now teaches that craft through Win The Question: the platform, the keynote, the workshop, and the advisory practice. *From Asshole to Ally* is the field manual.

He lives at the end of a dirt road in Creemore, Ontario, where he trusts his neighbors and rides his motorcycle.

For workshops, keynotes, or advisory engagements: scott@winthequestion.com.

About Trustcraft Press

Trustcraft Press publishes field-tested books on the craft of professional trust.

Most business books explain what to think. Trustcraft Press books teach what to do, whether in the meeting that starts in nine minutes, with the client who isn't telling you what they need, or on the project where the work is fine but the relationship is wobbling.

The bar for a Trustcraft Press book: written by a working professional, anchored in real stories with real names, useful by Monday morning, and honest about what doesn't work as well as what does. No frameworks without failures. No theory without practice. No learning without the receipts.

Trustcraft Press is an imprint of Win The Question.

trustcraftpress.com

About Win The Question

Win The Question exists because the most expensive lessons in professional life, the ones that teach you to stop performing and start listening, to frame instead of tell, to stay in the question instead of racing to the answer, are also the ones almost nobody is taught directly. Most professionals learn them by failing at them, often for years, sometimes for decades.

Win The Question is the shorter route.

The book is the foundation. The keynote is the introduction. The workshop is the practice field. The advisory work is the personal coaching. Together, they make a complete craft for ambitious professionals, consultants, advisors, agency leaders, lawyers, accountants, and founders who want to be the ones clients want to work with, not just the smartest person in the room.

Stop trying to win the answer. Start winning the question.

winthequestion.com

“YOU’RE TOO DAMN SMART TO SUCCEED.”

Smart professionals lose trust by trying to look smart.

For ambitious professionals in agencies, consulting, accounting, and law, and the leaders who develop them.

You know your stuff. You deliver. You get invited to the big meetings. But you’re not yet shaping the agenda or growing deep client relationships. Someone else gets the access, the credit, or the promotion.

You don’t need to be smarter. You need to be trusted. And the math of client trust is brutal: everything you bring to a client gets divided by how much you make it about you. As technology makes expert answers cheap, what you bring counts for less and how you show up counts for more.

R. Scott Armstrong learned this the expensive way, with lots of stories about what not to do and how not to do it. The most important: his own president told him, calmly, that he was acting like an asshole. *From Asshole to Ally* is the field manual he wishes someone had handed him first.

Inside, you’ll learn how to win by earning more client trust, including:

- How to spot which conversation a client is having before you answer the wrong one
- The four-line frame that gets clients saying “exactly” to your proposals
- What to say when a client asks, “Why are you so much more expensive?”
- How to build a team clients trust when you’re not in the room

Plus 15 cheat notes to use before your next client meeting.

Stop trying to win the answer.
Start winning the question.

“Trust is something that sticks with you.”
Campbell Yelle, Vice-President, Origin Merchant Partners



R. Scott Armstrong cofounded Brainrider, a B2B marketing services firm, in 2010 and still runs it as CEO. Through Win The Question, he trains professional-services teams in the trust skills in this book. He lives at the end of a dirt road, somewhere way up north.

Trustcraft Press
winthequestion.com

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / CONSULTING
ISBN 978-1-0679826-0-7 (ebook)