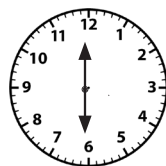




# High trust leadership:



**6.00pm Monday, November 2 2020  
until 11.15am Wednesday, November 4**

**Background Note and Agenda for our 51st Leadership Conversation**

Society of Leadership Fellows, St George's House, Windsor Castle

## **This Leadership Conversation builds on our Authenticity & trust in leadership theme**

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The quote below is from Chapter Two (page 24). A link to the whole report is on the final page of this Background Paper.

*"Be very clear with yourself about whose trust matters to you the most. Who are the people with whom you most share your higher purpose in your professional life? So much can be gained from working at developing exceptionally high levels of mutual trust with them.*

*Beyond this core group, perhaps the knack is to expect more modest levels of trust among these people you do business with occasionally. However much trust you might achieve in your relationships with others, please don't diminish the fundamental importance of your trust in yourself as a leader."*

## Our mission from 6.00pm on November 2nd:



**To enquire into the link between high trust leadership and sustainable organisational performance using our experience of the past year as the crucible for our learning - identifying any key pitfalls to be avoided as well as key priorities for becoming higher trust, higher performing leaders**

Trust – both given and received from our leaders - has been a massive issue for some time in both our organisations and in our wider society, with trust surveys trending relentlessly lower. The Covid pandemic however required us to ‘let go and trust’ in ways we have not seen for a long time in our society and organisations. Our conversations with leaders at all levels across many organisations during the early phase of Covid came up time and time again with examples of people stepping up, taking initiative, giving people the benefit of the doubt and practically helping each other without any expectation of return. ‘The energy release was phenomenal’ was how one Fellow described it in our recent Zoom conversation, ‘Leading in These Times’. Yet this spike in trust seems to have been followed by a growing disillusionment as people have got tired and organisations have reverted to old patterns as they seek to restore control.

So in a way the pandemic seems to have highlighted even more starkly this question of whether and how high trust leadership leads to increased organisational effectiveness and higher performance.

This conversation will therefore be an opportunity to reflect on our experience of leading over the past year or so and to examine how our own attitudes and learning have evolved concerning trust in leadership.

### We will ask:

- How has trust waxed and waned during our journey through the Covid crisis, and why? What is this telling us as leaders? When do we sense we got it right? When wrong?
- What are the subtle ways in which we as leaders have, both intentionally and unintentionally, strengthened or undermined trust inside our organisations through the Covid experience? What do we learn from this?
- What are the subtle ways in which we as leaders have, both intentionally and unintentionally, strengthened or undermined trust inside our organisations through the Covid experience? What do we learn from this?
- Is it right to equate higher levels of trust with higher levels of performance? For those of us who assume this to be true, almost as an act of faith, we will ask that we challenge this assumption in the spirit of our guiding principles
- What does our experiences as leaders in recent times tell us about the relationship between effective performance and high trust leadership?
- In what ways can high trust leadership result in dips in effectiveness, too? Where we have seen this happening in ways that were unintended, what corrective action - if any - have we taken?
- What do we each see as our top priorities for creating a culture in which higher levels of trust and sustainable higher levels of performance reinforce each other?

# The three stages to our Conversation

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## 1 "This is me!"

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We put stage one under this heading because early on we want to encourage you to **share a story** that helps us understand better where you are coming from as a leader.

To help us achieve strong connections across our group, please be up for sharing something about yourself in a way that helps others gain some sense of the sort of leader that you are.

## 2 "Tell us more"

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Stage two is under this heading because we hope that by now we will all want to mobilise the power of questioning to draw each other out.

We want to **get behind each other's stories** as we think through how the levels of trust that we invest in others affects their performance within teams, and what changes we might need to make in our leadership style to drive up performance to higher levels.

## 3 "Yes I can!"

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Our third and final stage is about each of us **stepping into a really empowered place** where we have a greater sense of all that we can make possible as high trust, high performing leaders.

**For every breakthrough in thinking that we achieve during this third stage, we will be able to identify its origins in the stories that we have each shared and the curiosity that others have shown in response.**

# "This is me!"

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After agreeing our Guiding Principles for this Conversation, we will explore our opening questions in small groups.

Our thinking at the moment is that we should ask:

- For those of us who see ourselves as high trust leaders, how do we think our trust in those around us has helped them step up into new levels of effectiveness? What was our learning in doing this?
- Are there any ways in which our trust in others has sometimes unintentionally got in the way of them improving their performance?
- If any of us are reluctant to call ourselves high trust leaders, may we please draw this out - and hear more?

Our aim will be to encourage you to share your stories, so that we're talking not about the theory of trust but our **experiences** of it, including those that we have found rather more challenging than we expected.

*"Telling the team that I really trusted them made a huge difference. People stepped up and went for it with a new sense of energy and confidence."*

*"When I was first told to trust the team, I shouldn't have backed off so quickly. From then on, any difficult questions were bounced back on the basis that I should trust them more!"*



# "Tell us more"

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There should come a stage soon after 10.00am on Tuesday when we have all shared a story about ourselves, and learnt some more about those real situations where high trust leadership has helped to improve performance - as well, perhaps, as some where it has rather got in the way.

Between now and mid-afternoon we want to work through:



## Benefits

*What we would like to see as the **greatest benefits** of high trust leadership for business performance, building on some of the stories that we have already shared*



## Risks

*What we see as the **greatest risks** associated with high trust leadership, that need to be flagged up early on. Probably the most obvious risk is the danger of new barriers being placed in the way of effective challenge and scrutiny on the grounds that this is somehow at odds with one being a trusting leader.*

As we go through this stage we will be conscious of the levels of trust that we are achieving among ourselves as a group. This is so vital to us giving quality time to some of those more difficult aspects of high trust working that need to come to the fore now if we are to achieve the breakthroughs that we are looking for in the third part of the Conversation.

We hope that beforehand you will have a chance to skim the second Chapter of Authenticity & trust in leadership, which sets out six challenges linked to the desire of many of us to be seen as trustworthy leaders. (A link is on the final page.)

It is our keenness to be trusted more by others that is at the heart of some compromises that many of us make and subsequently regret once we have experienced the "law of unintended consequence"!

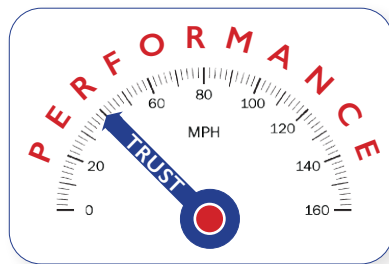
# "Yes I can!"

In this third stage of the Conversation, from 4.00pm on Tuesday through to our finish time of 11.15 on the Wednesday morning, we will draw out the key insights and lessons from the first two stages to provide the basis for a wide range of resolves and action points.

We see this very much as our "stretch zone", when we hope to push ourselves as hard as we can so that we each come up with our own **personalised strategy** for building on those relationships that are truly high trust to improve the performance of our organisation.

## The most challenging insight - for YOU

We will start by asking what you see as the most challenging



insight from our discussions that makes you question how you have viewed trust in your key relationships as a leader, and its importance to the overall levels of performance that you are seeking to achieve.

## Bridging the gap

Depending upon the answers that we all give to this question, we should have a good idea of **how big** we see the gap as being between **where we are now** in terms of building high trust, high performing organisations, and where we would **like to be**.

Once we have a sense of the size of this gap, we would like to ask what we each see as our **top two or three priorities** for bridging this gap through developing the trust dimension to our most important relationships at work.

This will take us into a discussion about **how** we intend to go about renegotiating with ourselves some of **our key habits and behaviours** as leaders.

## Whose trust matters to you the most?

We expect that during the Wednesday morning we will have engaged to some degree with this challenge in Chapter two of Authenticity & trust in leadership.

We hope that we will return to this issue during this third stage of the Conversation.

What matters is not so much how we answer the question as the fact that we **make a point of asking it of ourselves**, and perhaps do so every few months on the basis that our answer might well evolve over time.

## Should we have a differentiated approach?

This question naturally takes us on to the wider issue of how much we should differentiate between the levels of trust that we invest in different relationships at work.



We explored this somewhat in our most recent Conversation on leading with integrity (page 49) when we were drawn to the idea of seeing ourselves as having **lower boundaries** in relationships where we can take the integrity and trustworthiness of others for granted, and consciously higher boundaries where we feel that their level of integrity and trustworthiness is less reliable.

This was very similar to the approach that we took in our Conversation on authenticity in leadership, when we argued that "*authenticity offers a window into our true self*", which isn't something that we shouldn't be too casual about offering to anyone who wants to take a look.

Perhaps there is an issue here about the incredible **specialness** of high trust working being diminished in some people's eyes when they feel it is being offered too freely.

Maybe they would value the offer of high trust working that much more if we make clear that it is dependent on **how open and self-critical** they are prepared to be when discussing their performance.



## High trust, high performance working

You will see from the agenda that we have limited time together on the Wednesday morning, so we really do want to concentrate on what you each expect to take away from this Conversation.

One thing is for sure, which is that we should have a lot of ideas swirling around among us about how best to define high trust, high performance working in ways that are truly collaborative and sustainable.



If you have time to read it, it would be so helpful if you could look at the third Chapter of "From good to exceptional" (a link is on the final page), where we explore 10 insights that are critical to top performance.

Please feel able to take one or more of these insights and combine them with our own thinking from yesterday. It is really exciting to witness how our ideas sometimes surge forward during the final hour or so of a Conversation. With such a powerful theme before us, we hope that we will achieve some powerful breakthroughs during this time on November 4th.

With the agenda that we have for this Conversation, we are sure that our final lap will be especially rich and creative.

**Trust us!**

"Yes we can!"



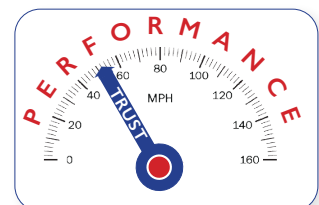
# Agenda

## Monday, November 2nd 2020

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|----------------|---|
| <b>2.30pm+</b> | You are welcome to check into your room in St George's House  |
| <b>4.30pm</b>  | Tea in No. 25 The Cloisters for those joining Evensong in the Chapel  |
| <b>5.05pm</b>  | Evensong ( <i>optional</i> )  |
| <b>5.50pm</b>  | <i>Vicars' Hall.</i> Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <i>This is me!</i> We take an agreed question into small groups and then share our personal answers with the wider group. |
| <b>7.15pm</b>  | Free time/ drinks in the Sitting Room of No. 25 The Cloisters   |
| <b>7.45pm</b>  | Working dinner in the House Dining Room   |
| <b>9.00pm</b>  | We go back to No. 25 for after dinner drinks  |

## Tuesday, November 3rd

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|----------------|---|
| <b>7.45am</b>  | Breakfast is served in the House Dining Room  |
| <b>8.45am</b>  | We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall   |
| <b>10.00am</b> | (approx.) We move on to Stage 2: <i>Tell us more</i>  |
| <b>11.00am</b> | Personal reflection time  |
| <b>11.30am</b> | We draw out key messages from our reflection time and take a challenge into another round of small groups |
| <b>1.00pm</b>  | A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups                       |



# Agenda

## Tuesday, November 3rd *continued*

**1.55pm** Team photo on the West steps of the Chapel then back together in the Vicars' Hall

**3.15pm** Personal reflection time until 4.00pm

**4.00pm** Tea and refreshments, then we move on to Stage 3: *Yes I can!* As we go through this stretch stage, we encourage cross-group feedback. We also make a point of focusing our energies on any Fellows who feel stuck in some way and would appreciate additional group support to enable them to move forward in their thinking

**5.45pm** Refreshments, then resume the Conversation at 6.00pm

**7.15pm** Free time drinks in the Sitting Room of No. 25 The Cloisters

**7.45pm** Dinner is served in the Dining Room

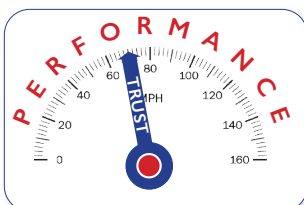
**9.00pm** We go back to the Sitting Room for after dinner drinks.

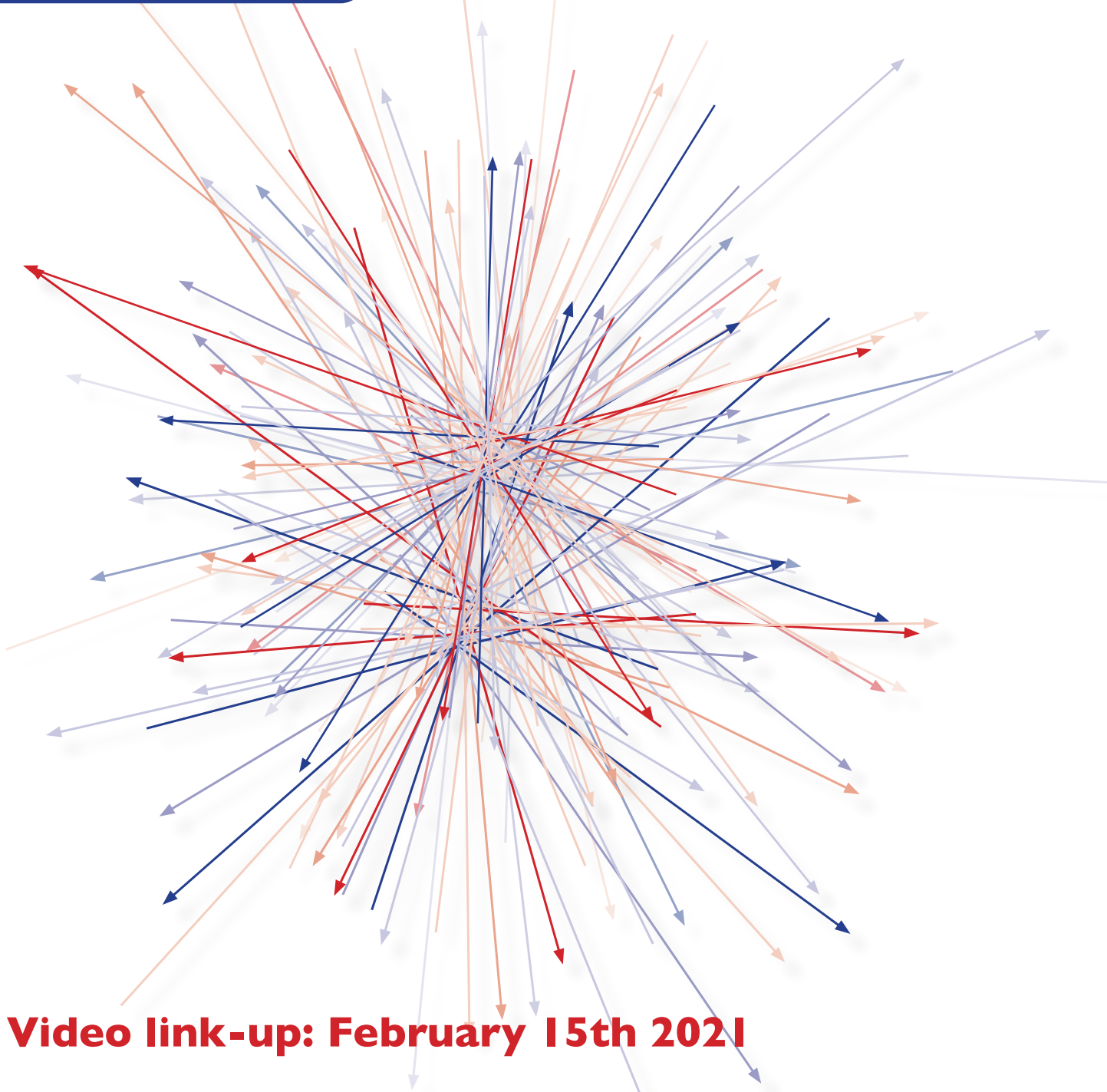
## Wednesday, November 4th

**7.30am** Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom, because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave it in the Sitting Room or bring it down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation

**8.30am** *Vicars' Hall.* We start again promptly, and invite any personal insights that draw on our discussions the previous evening before agreeing our challenge for the final round of small groups. When we return from groups, we make sure that there is time for everyone to share your key insights and draw more from the wisdom of others through "personal leadership walks into the future"

**11.15am** Close of the Conversation





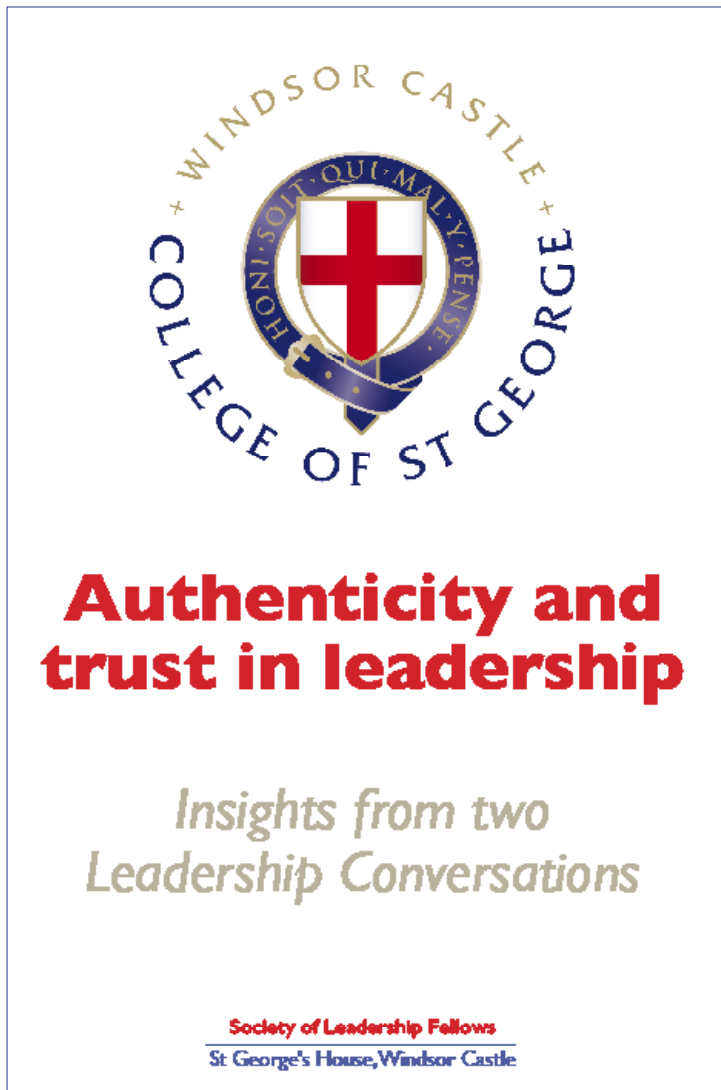
## **Video link-up: February 15th 2021**

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will also arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in February to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time is for Fellows to share a brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which ones you found the most challenging – and we then take it from there!

**Suggested time for Video Link-up:  
2.00 to 3.00pm on Monday February 15th 2021**

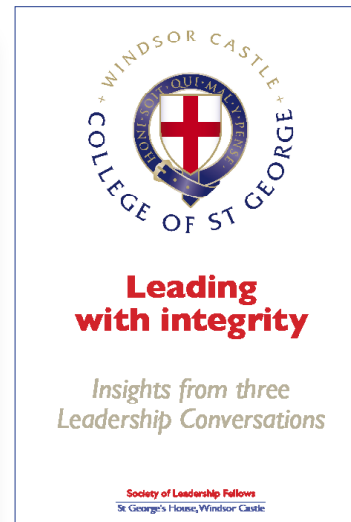
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**Authenticity and  
trust in leadership**

*Insights from two  
Leadership Conversations*

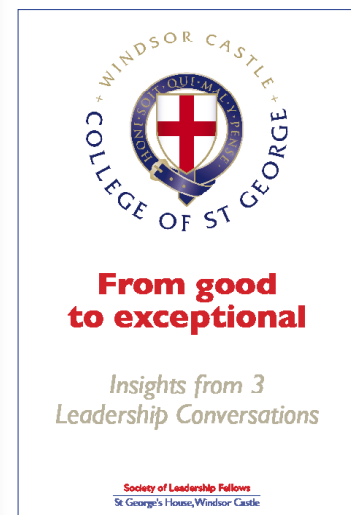
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**Leading  
with integrity**

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**From good  
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