

Edward Snowden: Treasonous Traitor or Hero of the American People

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Abstract

What is trust? Define the meaning of trust and how it applies to a given situation. What is the situation? Define the situation and all the parties included, and provide a detailed description of each party's role. Was there an offense, and what was the purpose behind any actions taken by everyone involved? Explain the offense in detail, how it was done, how it affected the victim(s), and the consequences that ensued. What were some of the lasting effects of the offense? What were some of the immediate consequences and some of the longer-lasting effects following the offense? Were there others who may have played a role in the offense, and were there other victims? Identify and explain each party's position and role? Could the situation have been prevented? Explain what steps could have been taken to prevent the situation from happening? What things can be learned from this situation? Briefly explain in detail what lessons were learned from the situation. In conclusion, was the offender truly the antagonist, or the victim, or both, in the situation? Give a detailed explanation of why, or why not.

Keywords: cybersecurity, trust, NSA, WikiLeaks, surveillance, penalty, national security, espionage

What is trust?

In today's society, trust seems to be one of those things that are fleeting. With a highly polarized climate due to social unrest, social injustices, and economic downturns, the idea of trust seems to fall further and further into obscurity. But what is the actual definition of trust? According to Merriam-Webster, trust is an [assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something] or [to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of], to believe. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) Being that trust relies on both the giver and the receiver to join in an agreement of shared responsibility to fidelity, trust is one of the most fragile things and can easily be broken but hard to gain. In the words of the world-renown teacher of leadership principals, Sam Chand, it can be said that [all things move at the speed of trust]. On June 6, 2013, we will find out how easily that trust can be broken and the ramifications that may follow the breach.

What is the situation?

In the wake of the events that unfolded on September 11, 2001, and the War on Terror, the foundation of trust between the American people and the government would forever be changed following the WikiLeaks exposure of the NSA's (National Security Agency) surveillance program, as outlined in a series of documents provided by an unrevealed source. The NSA, a [U.S. intelligence agency within the Department of Defense that is responsible for cryptographic and communications intelligence and security], would find themselves at the

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center of a breach of information that would prove to be one of the most controversial leaks in American history and the world. The information published in the media was through a British newspaper outlet, located in the United Kingdom, called the Guardian. The documents provided to the Guardian would disclose a government program that surveilled telecommunication records, internet data, social media data, and connections on every citizen in the United States, regardless if they were suspected of a crime or not. The then high school dropout turned whistleblower, achieved his GED, and landed a job as a defense contractor, working for Dell and Booz Allen, Hamilton in Oahu, Hawaii. Later deciding to come forward, and reveal himself as the offender, is the man whom we have come to know today as Edward Snowden. Snowden would describe in detail how the government was tapping into servers of some of the largest technology companies we are all familiar with, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook, to name a few. In all, Snowden would reveal that there are a total of nine internet companies whose servers were being mined for citizen's data. (Editors, 2018)

Was there an offense?

In examining the severity of the situation, we have to agree that there is an offense; but where that blame lies is controversial. Motivated by the idea that he should make the American people aware that they are being surveilled without their knowledge, Edward Snowden decided to steal classified documents from his employer, then after asking for a leave of absence, defects to Hong Kong China, and shares highly sensitive information to with the Chinese government regarding the US' hacking of Chinese computers since 2009. (Ray, n.d.) This malfeasance resulted in Snowden being charged with espionage, a treasonous act, and therefore faces prosecution. What makes this But, to the contrary, many Americans would believe that the offender was the U.S. government and that Snowden's actions were honorable. Nevertheless, in

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the eyes of the American people, crimes have been committed, laws have been broken, and trust has been fractured both in Snowden, and the U.S. government. And though Snowden felt that he was just in his actions, a response from the government was required, and therefore moved the United States government to start processing an extraditing of him from China back to the states. Aware that he would face imprisonment, Snowden then defected to Russia, requesting asylum for his actions, where he remains to this day. And because of his high crimes, currently, Snowden is charged with the [theft of government property, unauthorized communication of national defense information, and willful communication of classified communication intelligence]. (Editors B., 2014)

What are some of the lasting effects of the offense?

Though we would like to believe that the only fallout from Snowden's actions is a breakage in trusting the government, there are possibilities of even greater consequences that have yet to materialize. In his disclosure to the Guardian, Snowden reveals that he has records of every employee who works for the NSA, including that of every undercover asset around the world. The greatest concern is that there is no way of telling if the Chinese or the Russian government has obtained that information from Snowden, either willingly or unwillingly. (Starr, Yan, & CNN, 2013) Because of his actions, the information that Snowden stole could very well put hundreds of U.S. agents in immediate danger. Another concern, to this day, is that any reconnaissance work that was underway was exposed and therefore signaled any potential threats to America's security to change their ways of communicating. Also, the immediate fallout, resulted in the US government having to declassify several documents to show transparency in the wake of the news that the government is spying on its citizens. This would soon be followed

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by many more allegations of government eavesdropping not only in America but around the world.

Were there others who may have played a role in the offense, and were there other victims?

Though there were no other conspirators involved in the theft, the revelation of the NSA involvement in eavesdropping on American citizens, under the pretext of the Patriot Act, did reveal that there were others who also play a significant role in the gathering of information and the illegal surveillance. The GCHQ (Government Communication Headquarters), the United Kingdom's version of the NSA, along with the NSA, is secretly said to have tapped 200 fiber optic cables of online companies, like Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo. This would provide the agency access to monitor 600 million communications a day. The Snowden exposure reveals that these agencies together completed this task through a surveillance program known as Prism. (Editors B., 2014) Though this may seem like the tip of the iceberg, later reveals that the agencies would use this technology to spy on prominent leaders and allies, such Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the internal computer networks in the offices in Washington and New York, at the and the 27-member bloc United Nations office. Surveillance would also include several countries, such as France, Italy, Greece, Japan, South Korea, and India. It would also include oil and energy firms, foreign visitors to Brazil, key persons in the Mexican cartel and drug wars, and the surveillance of 35 world leaders in conjunction with hacking computers in China. (Editors B., 2014)

Could the situation have been prevented?

When we think of prevention, there are several ways we can consider the managing of protecting very sensitive data. Of course, the typical thought of password protection comes to

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mind. But in this case, a different set of rules would apply. In the case of Edward Snowden, he was a contracted employee with the security clearance to access the information he stole. How do we safeguard intellectual property from an internal threat. One way to ensure the first line of defense is to prohibit sensitive and high confidential information from being downloadable. Another line defense would be to set up a group policy that prevents USBs or any other external media from being able to connect to devices that hold sensitive data. Thirdly, protocols could be set to email a superior when prohibited data is trying to be stored in a different location. And lastly, require a superior to provide a special code for any documents that are permitted to be downloadable. Now, though many safeguards could have been put in place to prevent this issue, the truth vulnerabilities may still exist and the fight to protect sensitive data is and will continue to be an ongoing battle.

What things can be learned from this situation?

In this matter, we can truly say that there is a lot that we can learn. We would like to believe that every person has the best intentions, but we must factor in the possibility that a person's moral compass may not be tuned to the same frequency. In regards to the Snowden case, this makes us reconsider the meaning of trust; how much of it should we give, and does that trust come with autonomy depending on the responsibility. From the perspective of the government, which is tasked with the responsibility to keep its citizens safe, the trust may come in the form of a restricted responsibility to all who work in it and live within its borders. And from the perspective of citizens, that trust may require and reassurance from its government that it will not treat them like its foreign enemies. Nevertheless, the two will have to work in tandem to achieve the right balance for protecting our national security. And though our government has a responsibility to do what is right by its people, its people have a right to be law-abiding, moral,

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participants in its democracy. Therefore, we must realize that protecting national our national security doesn't just lie with our government, but we all have a responsibility to do so as individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have to ask myself the question, was Edward Snowden truly an antagonist in this story or the victim? Or was the NSA the antagonist or the victim? Or were they both, in the situation? I can truly say that I am still a little conflicted with this situation due to the fact the I completed under the importance of protecting very sensitive information due to the consequence that may come if that information is leaked. As a citizen, I cringe at the thought that our government may be listening to every private and intimate conversation I may. That it can at any time access my computer or my bank account, or even my webcam. And that alone gives me pause and makes me want to commend Edward Snowden for exposing the secret. Because at least we're aware, even if we've suspected all the while. But, in contrast, I'm concerned that a defense contractor would take high secret and confidential information and would disclose it to the Chinese government, as well would hold information about all of our undercover assets around the world, potentially opening them up to being assassinated. For many, people see Edward Snowden as a hero, and many see him as a traitor, but he can also be considered a hypocrite. This can be seen in Snowden's call out the government for creating a system that allows them to intercept all its citizen's information, committing a serious violation of the law, all the while they are violating the American privacy act; Snowden steals the same sensitive data from the NSA and is therefore committing a serious violation of the law. (Editors U. T., 2013) I am not going to imagine that I know what Edward Snowden was thinking when he discovered that the government was secretly surveilling its citizen, yet he states that he pled an oath of

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service, and signed a nondisclosure agreement, doesn't help make a good case for what he has done, even though what he exposed was wrong, as we see in his statement, "a lot of people are confused, they think there's an oath of secrecy.", yet while saying "there is a secrecy agreement that you have to adhere to". (Editors N., 2019) Adversely, trust is now broken, leaving the relationship between our government and its citizens fractured and marred. Yet, due to the increasing growing threats in cybersecurity, and the growing need to secure our most valuable asset, our information, two questions continue to surface. What cost are we willing to pay for protection? And are we willing to give up a little of our freedom to have it? And though Edward Snowden may believe that his actions were a matter of principle. And that he believes that the government has granted themselves authority and power that is not theirs. (Edward Snowden: the whistleblower behind the NSA surveillance revelations, 2013) We must lean into these questions, which I'm sure that every American struggles with reconciling, acknowledge that freedom comes with a price and that many have paid that price with their lives.

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