

## **Five Keys to Credibility at Work**

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When asked about the definition of credibility, you might say, “I know it when I see it,”—like I know friendly or likeable. When pressed, however, do you really know the definition of credibility?

Don’t be fooled into thinking this is an academic or unimportant question. Credibility is positively correlated to success in every sphere of life. If you can’t define credibility or identify its elements, you can’t take advantage of opportunities to boost your credibility and your success.

Identifying the elements that make up credibility is important because a high score on one or two elements does not guarantee a high credibility rating. It’s the interplay between elements that matters. Once you know the elements and see your strengths and weakness, you can take positive steps to boost your credibility in the eyes of others.

#### **Credibility Element #1: Integrity**

A key element of credibility involves transparency, trustworthiness, and moral predictability. We feel good about people who embody the phrase, “what you see is what you get.”

From Webster’s perspective, integrity is the essential element. The dictionary definition of credibility is *the power to inspire belief*. Credibility implies a commitment to truth, fairness, and objectivity.

Don’t underestimate the importance of honesty and integrity in the workplace. People who have a track record of being objective and truthful are perceived as more credible than those who don’t. Companies who open their books to union representatives are more credible than those who don’t. Conclusions based on scientific or systematic inquiry are credible conclusions.

To boost your credibility on this element, take the following actions:

- Invest time in clarifying your values and examining your behavior in light of them
- Build a reputation for truthful and ethical behavior
- If you make a mistake, be truthful about it rather than cover it up

## **Credibility Element #2: Competence**

Experts enjoy a much higher degree of credibility than those who lack expertise. We trust experts to understand the scope of an issue or project, to know the right questions to ask, and to know how to find the answers to those questions.

Expertise comes from a blend of a person's education and experience. People with doctoral degrees in a field obviously have more credibility than those who lack a degree. At the same time, people who have "come up through the ranks" or have worked in diverse jobs within an industry are considered to be experts. These folks usually have more perceived expertise than new college graduates.

Expertise turns into competence when it is put to the test. A person earns her credibility by succeeding at assignments and projects over time. A track record of successfully applying knowledge and a willingness to continue learning increases credibility.

To boost your credibility on this element, take the following actions:

- Obtain a license to practice or a professional certification appropriate to your field
- Request high-visibility projects to establish a track record
- Ask to participate on task forces with key people in your organization so they can see your competence firsthand

## **Credibility Element #3: Sound Judgment**

As a good friend can be counted on to listen well and encourage you to make wise decisions, a credible person can be counted on to analyze complex situations, ask intelligent questions, and make good decisions. A person with sound judgment usually has both cognitive and intuitive gifts. This person takes a big-picture rather than a myopic view and a long-term rather than a short-term perspective.

A savvy CEO, for example, might have a track record of acquiring businesses or creating products just ahead of demand. This person has a track record of correctly anticipating future trends and preparing for them.

To boost your credibility on this element, take the following actions:

- Ask others for input into your decisions—especially regarding the impact on them
- Avoid snap judgments
- Stay current on the trends within your industry and company

## **Credibility Element #4: Relationally Sensitive**

People with high credibility know how to ask questions about our values and interests, to listen intently and with empathy, and to pull people together. These are the people with high emotional intelligence to balance the arrogance that sometimes comes with expertise.

Jay Conger, an expert on persuasion, puts it this way:

On the relationship side, people with high credibility have demonstrated—again, usually over time—that they can be trusted to listen and to work in the best interests of others. They have also consistently shown strong emotional character and integrity; that is, they are not known for mood extremes or inconsistent performance.

A person develops a track record in relationships in the same way he develops a track record in performance. If he becomes known for building commitment and cooperation, for being level-headed and fair, everyone will want him on their team.

To boost your credibility on this element, take the following actions:

- Demonstrate willingness to learn from others and from your own mistakes
- Demonstrate concern for others' values, goals, and objectives
- Take time to understand another's point of view before refuting or rejecting it

### **Credibility Element #5: Likeable**

Research studies consistently reveal that people respond positively to others whom they like. They trust them, they cooperate with them, they approve their proposals, and they buy from them. Mitch Anthony, author of *Selling with Emotional Intelligence*, puts it succinctly, "Likeability is as important as ability."

Emotional intelligence guru, Daniel Goleman, and co-authors Boyatzis and McKee, remind us of the importance of optimism and a lighthearted perspective in the workplace, asserting that leaders who have the ability to express enthusiasm and upbeat emotions attract other people.

Further, the authors remind us that a smile (friendliness) is contagious, drawing others to smile in response. A smile, however, can be faked. Laughter is too complex for faking, and, at a deep, non-verbal level, people know this. Accordingly, we trust (assign credibility to) people who laugh with us.

To boost your credibility on this element, take the following actions:

- Communicate optimistically by describing challenges rather than problems
- Go out of your way to be friendly, even if you aren't an extravert
- Practice finding the humor around you, especially in stressful situations
- Express gratitude privately, publicly and in writing.

## **Credibility is a Package Deal**

No single element described here can guarantee high perceived credibility. After all, an expert without integrity might be a dictator. A likeable person who lacks judgment will make stupid decisions.

People assign you a degree of credibility based on how they rate you on the interplay between the elements of credibility: integrity, expertise, sound judgment, relationship sensitivity, and likeability. Perceived credibility is a package deal.

Understanding the elements of credibility provides you with opportunities to boost your perceived credibility and your success. Review the elements and action steps in this article, and choose one action to work on at a time. With time and consistency, you can boost your credibility at work and in your community. You need to know the definition of credibility—and you need to care!

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