

CREDIBILITY – OUR PASSPORT TO RESPECT AND ACHIEVEMENT!

BY WES FRIESEN

Recognized leadership experts James Kouzes and Barry Posner assert, “Credibility is the foundation of leadership” in their bestselling book *The Leadership Challenge*. Respected religious leader Rick Warren wrote, “The most essential quality for leadership is not perfection but credibility. People must be able to trust you.” Webster’s dictionary defines credibility as “the quality or power of inspiring belief.” Developing our credibility is a necessary ingredient to earn respect and pave the way for greater achievement for ourselves and our teams. Greater credibility leads to greater influence and management effectiveness and aids our efforts to justify resources and find support for our initiatives.

Credibility is built upon two twin pillars: character and competence. Both character and competence are important — and go together like peanut butter and jelly, or Laurel and Hardy (imagine one of those without the other!).

The following are 12 building blocks that will help develop our character and competence — and build credibility in the process.

Twelve Building Blocks for Developing Credibility

1. Walk the Talk. Multiple surveys have shown that people are looking for leaders with integrity and trustworthiness — those that live out strong personal values and ethics and always strive to do the right things. Senator Alan Simpson said, “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don’t have integrity, nothing else matters!” How true!

2. Be a Straight Shooter. The Bible speaks of “speaking the truth in love.” Being candid AND dignifying leads to people trusting what we say. Always telling the truth is important — one lie can sink us. Author Wes Fessler says, “Credibility is like glass. It is strong until it is broken, and then it is almost impossible to repair.”

3. Beat the Grapevine. It is better to over-communicate than to under-communicate. When we fail to communicate thoroughly, a vacuum is created — and that hole gets filled with the grapevine (rumor mill), which is invariably negative and often wrong. Surveys have shown that people prefer to hear news that affects them from their immediate manager. There is a tendency to avoid sharing negative news, but people respect hearing what is really going on (keeping in mind the Napoleon quote that the best leaders are “dealers in hope”).

4. Mess Up? Fess Up! We are all human and make mistakes. Credible people don’t lie or hide from their blunders but own up to it immediately and do what we can to correct it. Author Brian Koslow says it well: “The more you are willing to accept responsibility for your actions, the more credibility you will have.”

5. Show Respect to All. Credible leaders are respectful of others. We don’t tear others down or talk behind their backs, and we treat others positively like we would like to be treated positively. And I suggest that the most credible leaders are not status conscious but treat all people with respect. Ann Landers’ quote

speaks to this: “The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.” One of my favorite quotes is from the respected author and speaker Maya Angelou, who said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

6. Be Consistent. People around us will respond well when we are consistent in our behavior. Unpredictability can be disturbing. In an uncertain world, people understandably like things that they can count on — can they count on us to be consistent and stay calm even in stressful situations? If yes, we earn credibility. We also earn credibility when we consistently keep our word and meet the deadlines we have agreed to if possible.

7. No Excuses — Make It Happen. Michael Jordan once said, “Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.” Credible people are those that make it happen. Earn the reputation as a doer, not a talker. Follow the principle of “under promising and over delivering.” Look for creative and innovative ways to get the right things done and develop positive relationships with those that can help you get results.

8. Get Certified. As a long-time university professor, it’s probably not surprising for me to suggest completing that bachelor’s or master’s degree you may have intended to earn. Apart from a college degree, earning professional certifications is one of the most valuable means to develop greater competence AND earn credibility with others. Most industries have one or more professional certifications that we can earn to help us learn and enhance our professional credibility. Within the mail industry, both the Mail Systems Management Association (MSMA) and the United States Postal Service (USPS) have multiple certifications to consider pursuing (go to msmanational.org and usps.com for details).

9. Become a SME (Subject Matter Expert). Developing our personal expertise and willingly sharing it with others will earn us credibility. We can further develop our expertise by earning professional certifications, being active in trade associations (like MSMA and our local Postal Customer Council), thoroughly reading trade publications like this one,

attending conferences (like National Postal Forum and MAILCOM), and developing our own personal network of peers and industry leaders.

10. Deliver Results. For those of us in management roles, we are ultimately judged on our ability to deliver results. The quote from author Richie Norton applies: "Credibility comes from results. Everything else is just marketing." Our results are primarily based on the results of the teams we serve and help lead. I, and many others, have shared ways to help build high-performance teams. One extensive research project boils down developing high-performance teams into three keys: Develop a sense of fairness and equity; develop a sense of achievement; and develop a sense of camaraderie within the team.

11. Be a Fred. Author and motivational speaker Mark Sanborn wrote about the exceptional customer service provided by Fred the postal carrier in *The Fred Factor*. Going the extra mile and providing exceptional customer service will earn us and our team's lasting credibility

and success. Napoleon Hill was right when he said, "One of the most important principles of success is developing the habit of going the extra mile." And Sam Walton addressed the importance of customer service when he said, "There is only one boss — the customer. If we don't take care of our customers, someone else will."

12. Promote Our Team's Accomplishments. We want to be known as servant leaders that focus the spotlight on our team's achievements, not self-serving leaders known to look out for number one. Kouzes explains: "Leaders strengthen credibility by demonstrating that they are not in it for themselves, instead they have the interests of the institution, department, or team and its constituents at heart. Being a servant may not be what many leaders had in mind when they chose to take responsibility for the vision and direction of their organization or team — but serving others is the most glorious and rewarding of all leadership tasks." When leaders sincerely lift up our teams in the eyes of others, we ourselves are elevated in the minds of our teams and

outsiders. We can promote our team's accomplishments through internal company communication channels (e.g. intra-net; company newsletter articles); open houses and tours; promotional team brochures, blogs, and websites; and through our local PCC and MSMA chapters.

Leadership guru John Maxwell says, "Credibility is the leader's currency. With it, he or she is solvent; without it, he or she is bankrupt." Let's intentionally work at building our credibility. For being a person of credibility is very rewarding — for us and our teams. Good luck to you on your credibility journey! ■

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