

Establishing Credibility

Inspiring Trust in Others



Ensure that you build credibility on firm foundations.

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Would you attend a training course run by someone with no experience of his subject? Would you buy from a sales professional who had previously let you down? Or, would you go "above and beyond" for a leader who didn't routinely keep her word?

Chances are, you'd answer "no" to all of these questions. If you're going to invest your time, energy, and enthusiasm with someone, you want that person to be credible and worthy of your trust.

But what is credibility? Why is it important? And, how can you build it?

In this article, we'll answer these questions, and we'll look at why being credible is so important for a successful career.

What is Credibility?

The root of the word "credibility" is "credo," which means "I believe" in Latin. Put simply, credibility is the feeling of trust and respect that you inspire in others.

No single thing creates credibility. Rather, a combination of things must be in place for you to establish it.

Why is Credibility Important?

Think about a time when you worked under a leader who had credibility. Chances are that she energized and excited her entire team. You knew that she would do the right things for the right reasons, and you trusted her judgment.

Credible leaders attract enthusiastic and committed followers, and people want to work for them. But credibility is important in many areas, not just in leadership roles.

For instance, sales professionals need credibility to be successful – people don't want to buy from someone they don't trust, or from a person who doesn't know about his product.

You also need credibility when you give presentations, deliver training, and sell your ideas.

How to Build Credibility

No matter what your role or position, credibility is something that you have to earn. It takes time, patience, and consistency to build it. Follow the tips below to establish credibility.

Build Character

If credibility were a pyramid, then your character and integrity would make up the foundation.

To **build character**, first identify the **core values** that you won't violate – people with strong character stand up for what they believe in, even when it goes against popular opinion. Spend time getting to know yourself and what you care about most, and be willing to defend your values and choices.

Integrity is also essential for credibility. You need to be known as someone who does the right things for the right reasons.

To preserve your integrity, think carefully about the choices and promises that you make, and never make a promise or commitment that you can't keep. When you make a mistake, own up to it immediately, and do whatever it takes to **correct it**.

You also need to be **authentic**. People who are authentic do what they say; there's no mystery about their intentions, or about how those intentions might translate to their actions. This is why it's important to know yourself inside and out, and to demonstrate authenticity in everything that you do.

Develop Expertise

The more expertise you have and can demonstrate, the greater your credibility.

To **build expertise**, choose a single area that is fundamentally important to your role, organization, or industry. This will help you focus your efforts and ensure that you don't become overwhelmed. For example, if you're in engineering, you could develop an expert knowledge of the materials that your products use, and you could then build out from this.

Also, make sure that you **stay up-to-date on your industry**. When you're informed about industry trends and developments, people will trust your judgment.

While your reputation for expertise is important, it's just as important to **protect it** and acknowledge what you don't know. When you guess, or operate in areas outside of your expertise without informing others, you run the risk of giving out false information, making bad decisions, and being shown to be wrong. This can undermine your **reputation for expertise**, and damage your credibility.

Tip:

Be careful in how you communicate your expertise; you don't want others to see you as arrogant or as a know-it-all. Stay humble about your accomplishments, and develop your **emotional intelligence**, so that you can communicate in a sensitive way.

Be Transparent

People trust what they can see. When you're open and honest, others don't have to guess what your motivations or intentions are.

Keep this in mind when you interact with your clients, team, or suppliers. You inspire trust when you talk openly about your intentions, values, and **goals**.

Also, keep the lines of communication open, especially when you have **bad news** to share.

Self-disclosure, when you reveal information about yourself to others, is an important part of transparency. For instance, **one study** found that college professors who shared personal information were perceived as more credible than those who didn't. (The **Johari Window** concept helps you think about how you can build trust with self-disclosure.)

Communicate Clearly

Your communication skills play an important role in your credibility. For example, people who listen attentively and make thoughtful, informed comments are often seen as more credible than those who don't listen well, or those who speak thoughtlessly.

Start by strengthening your **active listening skills**. When people are speaking, give them your full attention, and ask questions to clarify anything that you don't understand.

When communicating with others, speak clearly and confidently. Don't use industry **jargon** to make yourself sound more knowledgeable – instead, focus on eliminating **barriers to communication**, so that your listeners clearly understand your message. Also, don't exaggerate facts or stories; stick to the truth.

Be Professional

Have you ever worked with bosses, clients, or colleagues who were unprofessional? Perhaps they did a poor job controlling their emotions under stress. They might have disrespected others, failed to "do the detail," or made little effort with their appearance.

Professionalism is an important element in credibility because it shows others that you truly care about your relationships and your work.

To exhibit professionalism, **control your emotions at work**. Don't lash out at others when you're tired, stressed, or frustrated. When you're in an argument or negotiation, don't take others' comments or opinions personally. Do your best to remain objective, and keep emotion out of the discussion.

Come to work well-dressed. It might seem like a small matter, but how you present yourself says a lot about who you are and how you feel about yourself. When you dress in a professional and appropriate manner, you'll likely find that your self-confidence and self-respect get a boost as well.

Also, meet the deadlines that you've been set, always deliver high-quality work, and don't make excuses when you haven't performed well.

Key Points

You establish credibility when you inspire trust in others, and it's important to your success, no matter what role you're in. It's especially important if you're in a leadership role.

To build your credibility, demonstrate honesty and integrity in everything that you do.

Work on building expertise, be transparent, be professional, and communicate clearly.