

Credibility in Communication Matters

By Dianna Booher

Delivering on promises. Being on time. Carrying out instructions by their intent not just their letter. Being trustworthy. Refraining from destructive gossip. Taking the extra effort to do things the right way. These seemingly insignificant and often unnoticed qualities add up to the significant issue of credibility.

Whether you're delivering a presentation before a board of directors or advising your staff, wrestling over a pressing issue at a board meeting or deciding where to hold the next company social, dealing with your most valued client or discussing fine points with a supplier—your credibility as a communicator, or lack of it, will decide your eventual success or failure.

Napoleon said, "In war, three-quarters turns on personal character and relations." Charles Reade echoed those sentiments, "Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap a destiny."

Nowhere is credibility more crucial than in business where decisions must be made confidently, people must be trusted completely, and work must be done correctly. What you say and how you say it, what you do and how you do it will determine your credibility—and your credibility will determine your associates, your tactics, and your future.

Credibility is a choice—*your* choice—and it can't be handed down, bartered, or bought. It must be developed day by day, decision by decision, action after action. Here are some steps in developing credibility that counts:

Be Concerned

People tend to trust people who show concern for them. When they bleed, they want to know others bleed with them. Even companies have to project concern over self-interest in troubled times.

During times of corporate crisis, be it mismanagement, personality conflicts, product defects, or outside concerns, companies and professionals with credibility are those who not only solve the problems fully and honestly but comfort those affected.

Be Competent

While compassion is admirable, leaders also have to get their facts right. That's why people flock to experts, star performers, wise decision-makers, and winners. People don't intentionally invest their money in poorly performing stocks; neither do they put their trust in people they doubt can deliver the goods.

Followers need to have faith in the competence and performance of those they look up to. They want to know those they put their trust in can win the game, finish the project successfully, or turn the company around.

Be Correct

Few people set out to be incorrect; it's just that when they have missing, incomplete, or unreliable information, they tend to make false assumptions or reason wrongly.

Because we test validity on important matters by considering the source, a track record of accuracy and reliability is critical.

It should be the guiding principle of all lawyers, legislators, researchers, trainers and business managers to first focus on getting the facts straight, giving current statistics, and providing *complete* information.

Be Consistent

We communicate by actions as well as words: by what we say and don't say, by which policies we enforce and don't enforce, by what we fund and don't fund, and by behavior we reward and punish.

To be credible, our words must match our policies, performance, principles, and plans over a period of time. The player who hits best over the course of the entire season, not just a few select weeks, wins the batting title.

Be Clear

Sometimes the better we understand something the worse job we do of explaining it; our familiarity makes us careless in describing it. It's difficult to remember when we didn't know something that has become second nature.

Meanings depend on context, tone, timing, personal experience, and reference points. Any imbalance or ambiguity can turn even the most innocent communication into a major misunderstanding.

A common culprit is exaggeration. Was the score a "blowout" or 28 to 12? Did you have to wait "forever" or half an hour? Was the caller "out of control" or defensive? Exaggeration makes great humor but destroys credibility.

Credibility is that unseen element that permeates your every action, word, and attitude. Leaders who have it gain loyal followers. Leaders who lack it will always be second-guessed and second rate.

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***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.