

Increase the Likeability Factor to Make Your Message Matter

By Dianna Booher

To be heard, you have to make people like you. You need to create chemistry—with your staff as a manager, with your team as a project leader, with your boss, with your customer, with your strategic partners. People believe people they like. That's not a news bulletin. Great communicators develop The Likeability Factor—your personality and the “chemistry” you create between yourself and others.

Just as many roads lead to success in the workplace, many different personalities attract followers. But the following traits seem universally to attract people and open their minds and hearts.

Be Vulnerable; Show Your Humanity

In speaker training 101, people learn to tell failure stories before success stories. Generally, audiences have more in common with those who struggle than those who succeed in life.

If you worry about whether your teen will graduate from high school without getting involved with the wrong group, say so. If your father-in-law drove you nuts during the holiday weekend, it's okay to mention to your colleagues on Monday morning that you might not have been the storybook spouse.

If you lose a customer, regret it rather than excuse it.

If you miss a deadline, repair the damage and catch up.

If you miss a payment, make it, with interest.

If you make a mistake, own it and correct it.

If you misjudge someone, apologize and make amends.

People respond to humans much more favorably than machines. When you communicate with colleagues, never fear to let them see your humanity.

Be Courteous—Remember to Kick the Copier

Day in and day out, it's the small things that kill our spirit: The sales rep who empties his cold coffee and leaves the splatters all over the sink. The manager who uses the last drop of lotion and doesn't refill the container. The analyst who walks away from the printer, leaving the red light flashing “paper jam.” The boss who walks into the reserved conference room in the middle of a meeting and bumps everybody out for an “urgent” strategic planning meeting. The person who cuts in line at the cafeteria cash register. The guy who answers his cell phone and tries to carry on a conversation out loud in the middle of a meeting.

So even the smallest courtesies kindle a fire that ignites chemistry and builds kinship. The courtesy of saying “hello” when you come into the office after being away. The courtesy of letting people know when you’re going to be away for an extended period. The courtesy of honoring policies about reserving rooms, spaces, and equipment for activities. The courtesy of a simple “please,” “thank you,” and “you’re welcome” for small favors.

Share a Sense of Humor

No matter whether people agree or disagree with George W. Bush’s political positions, they typically admire his self-deprecating humor. At one of the Washington correspondents dinners, that ability to poke fun at himself seemed to be the primary thing the media responded to favorably.

Bush said at the lectern, “I always enjoy these events. But why couldn’t I have dinner with the 36 percent of the people who like me?”

At one such event, Bush even brought along his “double,” comedian Steve Bridges, to make fun of his frequent mispronunciations: The double modeled for him one of his most difficult words to pronounce correctly: “Nu—cle—ar proliferation...nu—cle—ar proliferation. Nu—cle—ar proliferation.” Then Bush tried it, “Nu-cle—ar probolieration.” The crowd went wild.

Self-deprecating humor can open hearts and minds to make people receptive to ideas in ways words alone cannot.

Show Humility

Power can be seductive. Praise pushes people’s buttons, elevating peer pressure to feel important. And just as suddenly as lightning strikes, an act of arrogance can destroy an otherwise credible communicator. Refusing to acknowledge people when they speak to you. Failure to respond to people’s suggestions. Haughty body language. Time spent only with those of your “rank and ilk” at a social gathering. An amused smirk in response to an idea expressed in a meeting. An upward roll of the eyes meant to discredit someone’s comment in the hallway. A talk jam-packed with jargon meant to confuse rather than clarify. Insistence that things must be said one way and one way only.

Credible communicators show humility in innumerable ways:

- They let others “showcase” by delivering key messages instead of always having to be “on stage” themselves.
- They let others feel important by “interpreting,” “passing on,” and “applying” their goals and initiatives.
- They get input from others—and consider that input worthy of a response. (They don’t ask for input “just for drill” if they don’t plan to consider it.)
- They excite others by asking for their help, cooperation, and buy-in.

- They share the limelight by telling stories about star performers.
- They share leadership roles by telling success stories of other leaders.
- They communicate awareness and appreciation of the efforts and results of other people.

Certainly, credibility involves a balancing act between establishing a noteworthy track record and fading away into the furniture. People do want to know that you know what you're talking about. But arrogance antagonizes them. Expertise tinged with a touch of humility goes down far better.

Your look, language, and likeable personality will have a huge impact on whether people accept what you say. If your message isn't sinking in, ...if you're not getting the action you want, ... maybe you should take it, well, ... personally.

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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.*