

Trust Skill 2 Competence

Competence is your knowledge and ability in a particular subject area. True competence comes from lifelong learning and experience. Competency exists on many levels. When we are observing someone from a distance, or when we are meeting them for the first time and our experience with them is very limited, we subconsciously perceive and assign them a certain competency level. These assumptions are usually based on external things, such as their title, their position, their height, how they dress, their demeanor, which kind of car they're driving, the décor of their home or office, how they talk, their tone of voice, how they carry themselves or even things like what kinds of electronic devices they use. These initial impressions are important, because they can influence whether or not someone will pursue working with you. But then you have to be sure you possess true competence—not just perceived competence. Can you really do what you say you can do? Can you deliver? Does your audience think you have the skills, the knowledge, and the resources? Whether or not you have this deeper level of competence becomes glaringly obvious as people interact and work with you.

One of the key ways to keep your competency on track is to be a lifetime learner. We consider others to be competent when we see them continually learning and advancing their training and education. I can remember going to buy computer products and discovering that I knew more about the product than the sales reps did (and I didn't know much). In an attempt to cover up their lack of knowledge, these ill-informed salespeople tried to bluff their way through my questions. If they had kept themselves educated about the product, the field, and the industry, then they would not have lost my trust in them as competent professionals—and they would not have lost a customer. Learn to become the best in your field. Demonstrate you know your area of expertise. You should know more about your subject than 99 percent of the population.

The following are some specific ways you can gain and strengthen your competence, both actual and perceived:

- Degree(s)
- Professional standing

- Affiliations with respected organizations
- Publications
- Referrals
- Endorsements
- Reputation
- External surroundings
- Definite opinions
- Testimonials
- Passion

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