

Trust Skill 4 Credibility

When the Persuasion Institute polled respondents to see which one of the Five Cs they thought was most important, 44 percent said credibility. And interestingly, despite its importance, respondents felt it was established only 11.4 percent of the time. Why the dismal rating? It's harder to gain credibility nowadays than it ever was in the past. Most consumers are fairly sophisticated and have grown cynical with all the exaggerated and unsubstantiated hype that is thrown at them. People who have been burned in the past develop thick skins against almost every persuasive message they are exposed to.

How do you overcome this lack of credibility? Here are several ideas great persuaders use to boost their credibility:

1. In this very skeptical world your prospect is looking for a weakness. If you don't give them some type of weakness (personal or product), they will assign a weakness for you. Great persuaders increase credibility by revealing an apparent weakness and turning that perceived weakness into a desired benefit.

2. Credibility is enhanced by every minute of preparation. Great persuaders never "wing it" or leave anything to chance. If your audience ever feels you should know the answer but don't, you have lost credibility. Plan, rehearse and polish your presentation. Always research your audience.

3. Your audience is going to judge you in the first thirty seconds. How do you really look? How are you really coming across? Can you maintain eye contact? Is your appearance professional, polished, and what your audience expects.

4. When you enter a low-credibility situation or when your audience does not know you, borrow the credibility from someone else. Who can endorse or recommend you? Who can introduce you that already has credibility with your audience? Learn to always ask and get testimonials from happy current clients.

5. One of the quickest ways to lose your credibility is to badmouth the competition. You don't have to resort to pulling down others to enhance your own product or service. If you can't persuade based on the quality of your product or service, it is time to change careers. If the consumer needs to be legitimately warned about the competition, provide ways for them to find out for themselves.

6. Pepper your presentation with credible facts, figures, statistics, or studies to reinforce your message. Never assume your audience thinks you are credible without using outside resources. Always remember to cite your sources. Your audience will always believe someone else before they will start to believe you.

7. Find ways to reveal your qualifications without coming across as a braggart. You need to reveal (or display) your expertise, qualifications, education, and experience so you will come across as the expert. The moment your audience accepts you as the expert, you have their undivided attention. Reveal to your audience why you are the expert and why you have earned the right to persuade about your product, service or idea.

You have to be careful in how you explain and exhibit your credibility. If you launch into a laundry list of your accomplishments or of your education and titles, you might be perceived as a self-centered. Take advantage of less direct or less self-proclaiming ways to show your audience how competent you are. For example, you can hang your degrees on the wall, have someone else give a brief bio, or have someone else offer his recommendation of you. You can borrow credibility from others using a testimonial or statement from them. Credibility can also be defined as “having expertise, trustworthiness, goodwill, dynamism, extroversion, sociability, composure, or expertise.”

Trust builds with dependability. Do you have a track record? Are you a person of your word? When you make an appointment, are you there on time? When you commit to doing something for someone, does it get done as promised? Do you think they will forget—well they don't? They usually just won't bring it up. When you make a promise, do you make sure it is kept, or are you full of excuses and alibis. Be reliable and follow

through with all your promises. Credibility is “the single biggest variable under the speaker’s control during the presentation.”

Another way to boost your credibility is to present yourself in a calm, organized, and authoritative manner. Being overly emotional or flustered throws your credibility out the window. Consider the most highly successful attorneys or CEOs. No matter how rushed or pressured they are, you don’t ever see them running into the room, slamming their stuff down on the table, and throwing themselves into their chairs. No! They are absolutely composed at all times. That’s because they must always convey an air of authority and control. Jury studies show that lawyers who appear well organized are thought of as being more thorough and better prepared than their disorganized counterparts, which of course increases their credibility.⁹

If your prospects are doing any of the following, check your credibility:

- Calling to complain
- Failing to give you repeat business
- Exhibiting no loyalty
- Needing outside testimonials
- Needing references
- Not returning calls
- Canceling appointments

Another way to boost credibility is to be honest about your product’s weaknesses and how it compares with the competition. Your audience is looking for a weakness, so give them one. If you don’t give them a weakness, they will assign one to you or your product. Or your audience might think what you have to offer is too good to be true. Revealing a weakness tends to make people view you as more honest and trustworthy than those who try to cover up a product’s faults. Great persuaders can even turn weaknesses into selling points. Think of the following examples:

Avis™ – We are #2 and we try harder.

Listerine™ – The taste you hate twice a day.

7-UP™ – The Un-cola.

L’Oreal™ – Because I’m worth it.

VW™ Bug – VW will stay ugly longer.

Dr. Pepper – Not a cola.

Heinz Ketchup – So thick it pours slowly.

Smucker's – They make fun of their name.

When you’re able to turn weaknesses into positives, your audience is going to appreciate that you have been open and frank. You never want to appear defensive or to be avoiding your audience or the issue. Let them understand your thinking process. I am not saying you need to disclose everything about your product or service. What I am saying is that you need to provide a reason why you are doing what you are doing. Be willing to share the information your audience needs and wants.

Trustworthiness increases when we are big enough to own up to our mistakes and weaknesses. People can forgive weakness, but they won’t be as quick to forgive cover-ups. Oftentimes, if a persuader is open about a weakness or a drawback in a particular product, he still seals the deal. Frequently your honesty will be the characteristic that wins people over. In the end, it is better to risk rejection than to hide something your audience will later find out on their own. If your audience is only hearing positive angles from you, you could lose credibility. At the Persuasion Institute, I have analyzed thousands of client offers. One common theme among many of the deals that were not selling is that they appeared too good to be true. While the offers may have been legit, the audience just did not buy into them. When we weakened such offers, sales often increased.

Lying decreases your credibility. Most persuaders think that only when they are *caught* in a lie that it decreases their credibility—and they have been caught, more often than they know. We have found that most people will not call you on a lie. They will sense it, mentally record it, and simply won’t come back. You thought you would get

away with it, but they still sense it. Whatever you want to call it—lying, fibbing, untruthfulness, creative license, fabrication, or deception—it still decreases your overall trustworthiness.

As you already know, a confused mind says no. A related danger is that when you don't provide any additional forms of credibility, the audience will base all their opinions of credibility on you, the communicator. And the more involved your audience is, emotionally or financially, in the topic you're going to present to them, the harder it will be to establish credibility. High involvement increases skepticism and it is credibility that will decrease that skepticism. An audience with low involvement (not a big issue) in a particular issue is more likely to defer to other sources (including you) because it requires less mental strain or emotional investment than trying to figure it out for themselves.

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