

## **Your Competence**

Competence is your knowledge and ability in a particular subject area. Competency can be real, perceived or imagined. True competence comes from lifelong learning and experience that has gradually taught you what you know. Perceived competence comes from other people who are judging you based on external factors and their personal experiences with you.

True competence is an accurate reputation that is based on your intelligence, your expertise and your knowledge. People create perceived confidence in themselves by using certain tactics, like dressing in the appropriate uniform: a white lab coat or a suit and tie. Perceived competence is tricky. Hence, you have to be careful in how you explain your competence. If you launch into a laundry list of your accomplishments or of your education and titles, you might be perceived as a braggart. Take advantage of less direct or less self-proclaiming ways to show your prospects your competence. For example, you can hang your degrees on the wall, have someone else give a brief bio in her/his book's introduction or have someone else offer her/his recommendation.

We consider others to be competent when we see them continually learning and advancing their training and education, being successful in what they do or having a strong track record with all the people they have worked with. Ultimately, genuine competency comes down to "either you know it or you don't." Can you deliver what people are looking for? The dictionary definition of competence is "the quality of being adequately or well qualified physically and intellectually." Competence is being qualified to teach about, to persuade on or to perform in regards to your particular topic.

In influential situations, people will watch and judge you to see if you pass as competent. Two studies clearly illustrate this point. In the first study, a group of elementary school children watched a video of two boys taking a math test. The teacher walked between the boys and looked at each of their papers. To one boy she said nothing while to the other boy she said, "Don't forget to carry your tens." The children observing the videotape were told that the boys scored the same on the test. They were then asked whom they

wanted as a future math partner. Most of the children chose the boy who did not receive any help from the teacher. Clearly, the simple need for assistance influences how others perceive your competence.

The second study showed that competence can increase sales. An experimenter in a mall approached unsuspecting patrons and asked them to buy raffle tickets. In the first situation, the experimenter dazzled the shoppers with his incredible calculating ability when in actuality he was using a concealed communication device. In the next situation, the experimenter showed poor calculating skills and made a fool of himself. In the third and final situation, the experimenter did not have any incredible skills. The study found that the shoppers bought considerably more raffle tickets from the supposed calculating genius. In other words, the situation in which the experimenter showed extreme competence increased sales.

© 2009 Kurt W. Mortensen