

Enhance Your Professional Credibility

By Jean Maslanka Kelley

Credibility is not something you automatically have, nor is it something you can bestow upon yourself – it’s something others bestow upon you. And, like beauty, credibility is in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, in order for others to view you as credible, you have to consistently and deliberately act your way into credibility.

Unfortunately, most people don’t give their credibility a second thought. They automatically assume they are credible (after all, who doubts their own credibility), yet they don’t take precise measures to ensure that others view them the same way. But if you don’t take active steps to enhance your credibility, others will do it for you...and you may not like the results.

There are three main components to credibility that you need to be aware of. They are your values, your behaviors, and your reputation. Use the following information to manage each of these areas and your credibility will increase.

- **Your Values**

You acquire your values over the course of your life and they ultimately shape your expectations of others and of the world. And just as you have values that you use to judge others by, so does everyone else. The problem comes when those who are judging your credibility have different values than you. For example, some people value arguments and lively debate. So if someone values argument and you don’t, it may look to you that the person is mean and likes to argue all the time, when all they’re really doing is trying to encourage a lively debate. But because you have different values, that person loses credibility in your eyes for being a trouble-maker. And on the flip side, the other person may view you as weak or “wishy-washy” because you don’t engage in lively debates, when in fact you simply value keeping the peace more so than arguments.

Another challenge arises when a value has degrees of alignment. For example, most people say they value accuracy. But does everything need to be 100 percent accurate, or is 80 percent accurate enough? Exactly how accurate something is can be a reflection on credibility. Therefore, you need to know what others value and to what degree they value it, as their own standards will dictate the level of credibility they bestow upon you.

- **Your Behaviors**

Behaviors are things you choose to do. We all make thousands of choices every day, from whether to visit a sick friend in the hospital to which employee to promote or lay off. We choose whether we hold deadlines in high regard, whether we greet someone in the hall, and whether we’re direct or indirect with others. The key thing to remember is that you’re judged by your outward behavior that you choose to display, not by your wonderful intentions. We all have great intentions, but most people don’t follow through on them.

Some key behaviors to focus on as you attempt to boost your credibility include:

- Don’t over promise. Do what you say you will do. You choose what you will and will not do every day.
- Be open about your motives behind a directive or decision. You choose what you tell people.
- Fess up to mistakes (early and always). You choose to cover things up or put them out in the open.
- Keep people’s confidences. Get permission before divulging sensitive information. You choose whether or not to repeat information.
- Treat others consistently and fairly. You choose your actions toward others.
- Listen to others. You choose where you put your mental focus.

- **Your Reputation**

Your reputation is the total of what your values are and how you choose to act. Ultimately your behaviors lead to your reputation, and then all three of these factors – your values, your behaviors, and your reputation – lead to credibility.

Your reputation is something you have, whether you know it or not. And unfortunately, you can get a bad reputation very easily. For example, if someone else values prompt return phone calls, and you routinely don't return phone calls, you'll quickly get a bad reputation as someone who doesn't follow through. In fact, it's often the small things – like not returning emails promptly – that tarnish someone's reputation more so than the bigger issues.

The good news is that you can enhance your reputation by working on it, which will inevitably boost your credibility. You simply need to think about the behaviors you choose and the kind of reputation you want to earn. Therefore, find out what people's expectations are of you and then meet them. Additionally, observe people who are successful or who you think have a good reputation. What behaviors do they choose and why have people bestowed credibility on them?

Finally, realize that being likable doesn't play a big part in your reputation. You can be very quiet, shy, and totally introverted yet still have a stellar reputation. Conversely, you can have a great personality, be the life of the party, and be totally charming, but have a less than flattering reputation. So no matter who you are, where you work, or what your personality, you can have a great reputation.

Credibility Matters

In today's economy and job market you need to take the proper steps to enhance your credibility. In fact, if you're not taking values, behaviors, and reputation into consideration, you could quickly find yourself out of a job with few prospects for new work, as your credibility will be tarnished. A lot is on the line here, so take it seriously. Build your creditability today so you can have the success you desire for years to come.

About the Author

Jean Kelley, author and entrepreneur, is the managing director of Jean Kelley Leadership Alliance whose faculty and Trainers have helped more than 750,000 leaders and high potentials up their game at work in the U.S. and Canada. For more information on keynotes, in-house programs, or customized training, email jkelly@jeankelley.com or go to <http://jeankelley.com>.