

Credibility and Leadership

Credibility. How do you get it? More importantly, how do you keep it? Gaining credibility takes years to achieve, and maintaining it must be a lifetime goal for any leader. One wrong move can instantly erase years of hard work. As a longtime communications consultant, who has worked with executives in many fields, Christine Züst believes that communicating with credibility is an art form, one which a leader can master by using a few simple guidelines.

Align your verbal and nonverbal language. Credibility is enhanced through consistent verbal and nonverbal language, the key word being consistent. Executives who overlook nonverbal language, or body language, are dismissing one of communication's most powerful tools.

Lead by listening. The good news about listening is that it is a learned behavior, which means, even if you are a poor listener today, you can train yourself to be a better listener tomorrow.

Make realistic promises and keep them. Credibility can evaporate if you don't keep your word, whether in writing or verbally. Your credibility slips when you don't live up to the standards you have set for yourself or others have set for you. If promises are made and repeatedly broken, you begin to lose your credibility. If you have a habit of committing more than you can deliver, take this advice: Think before you speak, and realistically promise only what you know you can deliver.

Speak from the heart. When a message is communicated from the heart, it is more believable. An audience can quickly tell the difference between a speaker who is genuine and one who is artificial. Don't just talk the talk. Walk the talk.

Be yourself. Many people who fall into the credibility gap do so because they misrepresent themselves. People can see through individuals who try to position themselves as someone they are not. They know the difference between a wannabe leader and the real thing.

Be an expert. You are at the top because you know your business, and you have the ability to lead others. Yet, there are leaders who lack credibility because they operate with only a superficial knowledge base. The more you know, the more believable you are. The credible leader is also one who is more than willing to share that acquired knowledge with others.

Be honest. We need to look no further than the political arena to select our best examples of how to lose credibility by covering up. Leaders are the first to be scrutinized during tough times, because they are in control, whether they are in government or corporate America. Too many leaders think they are invincible. Accepting a leadership position means you also accept full responsibility for your words and actions. Be honest from the beginning, and your credibility will remain intact.

Be proactive. It's never too late to do a credibility check. To stay on track, ask yourself questions, like, "What could potentially jeopardize my credibility?" "What steps can I take to improve my credibility?" "What can I do each day to ensure that my credibility is maintained?"

There is no asset more valuable or powerful than your personal credibility, because it goes to the very core of who you are as a person and a leader. You are responsible for building and maintaining it for life.