

THE

PERSONAL
CREDIBILITY
FACTOR

How to Get It, Keep It,
and Get It Back
(If You've Lost It)

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Introduction

I Wouldn't Trust That Person for a Minute!

You have probably had this feeling before. It's that little mental nudge you get when you really don't expect it. It might even seem somewhat irrational at the time. Try to put yourself in the following situation: You have been invited to have lunch with a respected business consultant who is interested in hiring you as a contractor. "Kate" has a solid reputation and an established consulting business. She wants you to consider joining her as a consulting partner to work with some of her best clients, and this could mean wonderful earning potential for you! The lunch is going well—but you cannot shake this odd feeling that something just isn't right. That little voice will not go away that is saying, "Don't trust! Eat your lunch and let it go at that. This just doesn't feel right!"

Or perhaps the opposite has happened to you—which might be equally confounding. Have you ever been challenged with hiring contractors to help you with projects around your house? Most of us have learned that hiring someone for odd jobs, such as small building projects or fixing a clogged drain, can be downright infuriating. Perhaps you have experienced the frustration of having a contractor who won't return your phone calls. Or, maybe you can identify with the challenges of having appointments made to estimate pricing, but no one shows up. Then, when you call to find out what happened—your call isn't returned. Unfortunately, you begin to believe that you will never be able to find someone to do the work.

Then, amazingly, someone walks into your life that is dramatically different. If you are fortunate enough, you meet someone like "Dan." Even though you are a little cynical about hiring contractors, you believe that Dan will keep his appointments, follow through on commitments, and do a great job with anything he agrees to do. And,

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he won't agree to do something that he doesn't believe he can do effectively. When you look back on it, you can remember being certain that Dan could be trusted from the first time you talked with him.

So, what does this mean? Does it mean that most of us have internal voices that can predict whether someone is trustworthy and credible? Does this mean that personal credibility is just something we instinctively sense in others? And, what about you? Do others instinctively believe and trust in you—or is there some reason that others are naturally skeptical of you?

*Our "instincts" about people can be helpful, but, obviously,
it is so much more than that.*

It isn't particularly complicated either. Everyone can have strong personal credibility—but it does require that we understand it, desire it, and make a decision to seek it for our lives.

What Is the Personal Credibility Factor?

When others believe, trust, and have confidence in you, you naturally receive their respect—you are someone with *personal credibility*. When you are respected, your self-worth and confidence increases. When you receive respect—from both yourself and others—you are more self-accepting. Self-acceptance allows you to just be yourself, which increases authenticity. When you are authentic, others instinctively believe and trust in you more.

But wait...Is personal credibility based on the type of person that *you are*, or is it based on the types of things that *you do*?

If you really think about it, the only way we can assess people is from our observations of what they do.

It is what people do that forms our opinions, relationships, and ultimate decisions of whether to trust and respect them. Our impressions, thoughts, and opinions are constantly being formed and reformed, most often in our subconscious. Although we might be unaware of it, we stay in constant “observer” mode with those around us, and they stay in that same mode observing us! We might not always have all the facts, and our observations might change over time, but, regardless, it is still the only information on which we have to base our thoughts and opinions of others. For this reason, it is what people *do* that determines our belief, respect, and trust in them—it is what we all *do* that determines personal credibility.

Why would this matter? It’s really pretty simple. At our very core, we want to know who we can trust and respect—and we want to receive that same trust and respect from others. However, we are living in a world where it is becoming more and more difficult to discern who deserves our trust and respect. Headlines and TV news are filled

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regularly with stories of troubled organizations such as WorldCom and Enron, fallen TV evangelists, government leaders, and others taking the spotlight for misleading the public. Consequently, we find ourselves wondering if personal credibility with public figures is only something of the past. On a more personal level, family, friends, or coworkers violate our trust and lose credibility as a result. Most people—regardless of whether they are in the public spotlight—don't intentionally choose a life of being disbelieved, mistrusted, and disrespected.

The reality is that personal credibility either occurs or is damaged due to ongoing decisions we make and behaviors we demonstrate.

For most of us, there is an inherent need to be valued and respected by others, while at the same time, to be comfortable and confident in being who we authentically are. We want to live a life that causes others to say: “(Your name)—now that is someone with personal credibility!” We all don't experience that type of life though. The great news is this: We can experience greater personal credibility—if we are willing to honestly evaluate ourselves, look at our own actions and behaviors, and build some new habits.

Secret #1: Forget Power, Position, Status, and Other Such Nonsense

Strong personal credibility is available for everyone—regardless of who you are and what you do. Your position, status, or role in life have nothing to do with your personal credibility factor. Different people play different roles in their careers, jobs, and other activities—and some are roles of very high authority—however, there’s no lasting connection between higher status/power and personal credibility. Let’s look at a few examples.

Same Ideas, But Very Different Results

“John” held a senior vice president position in a large Fortune 500 organization. John was a creative, likable, and bright executive. His staff and peers greatly enjoyed working with him and he inspired others to new and creative ways of thinking. As a member of the senior leadership team, John regularly presented suggestions, recommendations, and proposals for consideration with his fellow senior leaders. Unfortunately, the outcome of most of those recommendations was, “Uh, good idea, John. But we can’t implement that idea right now. Maybe we can reconsider later.” He was politely listened to and verbally patted on the head. John just did not have a good track record for gaining approval for his ideas.

This organization was growing, and as is customary when companies grow quickly, reorganization became necessary. “Alice,” another member of the senior management team, was asked to assume responsibility for a larger role in leadership, and as a result, John, along with two other colleagues, was now to report to Alice in her new role as chief administrative officer. John respected Alice and accepted this restructuring positively.

Then, an odd thing started to happen to John’s ideas and recommendations. Alice reviewed many of them personally and then worked with John and the other senior leaders to reconsider implementing those ideas. In about six weeks, approximately 80 percent of the recommendations John had previously made were funded and approved by the president and the other members of the leadership team. These were the same ideas that did not receive much positive attention previously. Why? Alice had personal credibility. John simply did not have it—or at least at the same level. Although John was liked, he did not have the strong respect of the other leaders. In Alice’s new position, she worked with John to have his ideas reevaluated and considered. Although the authority within John’s position was the same, under Alice’s leadership, the results were very different. You might be

thinking that since Alice now had more authority within her newly established position that she was able to get more accomplished.

Bigger position—greater power, right?

Actually, that had no real impact in this situation. The people on the leadership team who had shot down John's ideas were the same people who later approved them. Alice held the same "rank" as the rest of the members of this team, no more or less positional power than others who were involved in the decision making. This group of leaders, however, believed that Alice would not make recommendations unless they were solid. They just did not have the same confidence in John. We'll explore more about the specifics that impacted that later. But, the key point is that results did not occur as a result of the *position* Alice or John were in. Both of their positions had status and authority, but Alice was respected—she had stronger personal credibility. Naturally, John was mystified by Alice's results and why they differed so much from his own. Why did Alice get more respect from the leadership team? Why did it matter that *she* was recommending the same basic concepts that he had previously and yet she received approval? Eventually, John asked Alice to explain how she was able to gain such different outcomes. At first, Alice wasn't sure how to respond to John's question. She needed to spend some time thinking about what she did and how she did it. Eventually, however, she was able to provide John with some very specific feedback about how she had learned to work hard in a few basic areas, and how that work had paid off for her. She realized she had learned to do certain things that would increase her opportunity to gain others' trust and respect. She also assured John that he could choose to make a few simple changes that could significantly improve his results as well. In later chapters, you will discover more about Alice and what she did—and what John had been doing that was diminishing his success and decreasing his personal credibility with this team.

It's What You Do, Not What You Say

“Chuck” was a leader in a large call center operation. He was bright, tough-minded, and very strongly opinionated. He spoke with authority, and those working with him had no doubt that he would take action based on that authority. He also had a tendency to be somewhat lazy. It was not unusual to see Chuck reclined at his desk, feet up, reading *The Wall Street Journal*. Chuck met periodically with his leadership team, told them his expectations, and then verbally blasted those whose results were less than expected. The performance of Chuck’s team was pretty strong—for a while. Then, performance began to suffer. His team of leaders slowly but surely were either seeking positions elsewhere or were very busy trying to find ways to keep Chuck’s attention off them. Eventually, Chuck’s business results decreased significantly, and this ended in his being replaced.

“Mitch” replaced Chuck. Mitch was also bright and strongly opinionated. Like Chuck, Mitch told people exactly what he thought and expected. He regularly had informal “floor meetings” where he walked from area to area, brought small groups together, told them what he wanted for the organization, and gave time for them to ask questions and make suggestions. He listened respectfully, considered others’ perspectives, and kept employees informed with information on his future plans. He didn’t attempt to make everyone happy—but he usually explained the reasons for his actions and for decisions he made. Mitch also demonstrated energy and passion for his job and the business. If he wasn’t out on the floor talking with people, he was meeting regularly with individual leaders to brainstorm ideas for improvement. Not surprisingly, it was fairly common to hear employees in the organization speak about the difference in leadership styles between Chuck and Mitch. Interestingly, the terms “say” and “do” were used to describe both leaders. Chuck was often referred to as “Mr. Do as I Say, Not as I Do.” The managers who reported to him

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often rolled their eyes when leaving conversations with Chuck, incredulous with how he spent his time reading the newspaper while at the same time verbally assaulting them for failing to give enough effort to achieve better results. Mitch, by contrast, was referred to as a leader who would not ask anyone to do anything he wasn't willing to do first. Employees knew where both leaders stood on issues. They also learned that only one of the leaders, Mitch, was willing to stand in the same place he was asking others to stand. As a result, Mitch was able to gain employees' willingness to accept and trust his direction.

The organization under Mitch's leadership began to show more positive results. The business improved. The parent company decided to use this location as a testing ground for new products and processes. Think about it...Chuck and Mitch had the same degree of "position authority." These two people held the same job with the same power within the position. The results were very different—but it wasn't the power or authority of the *role* that made the difference! The difference was in how they behaved—and as a result, Mitch gained respect, whereas Chuck lost it.

Secret #1 Applies to Other Life Experiences

We just reviewed two business leadership examples. But what about comparing status or position in our personal lives? We see examples of it every day—with parents, teachers, or even staff at our local coffee shops. The Starbucks barista has less authority within his/her position than the store manager. If you occasionally visit coffee shops, you understand that after you are known as a “regular,” you are hoping to interact with the person who connects with you, remembers your favorite drink in the morning—versus the afternoon—and makes some type of comment that makes you feel recognized or special. You are not at all concerned about whether you are dealing with the manager—you just want to interact with the person who has proven credibility and who you trust to know your preferences! The real power is the positive impact this person leaves as you walk or drive away!

School principals have more authority within their organizations than teachers. When it comes to your kids and how they are performing in school, do you think first about the highest authority position to deal with, or do you think about talking with the individual teacher who is interacting with your child? Typically, the person you want to talk with is the person who has the greatest influence on your child's situation—the teacher!

Power and authority are not the issue!

Credibility in Parenting

“Charles” and “Linda” are the parents of two young children. They’re a typical young family; both parents work, with precious little time to themselves and with the demands of a four- and two-year-old, plus balancing the rest of their hectic lives—they can feel pretty stressed at times. Occasionally, they lose patience with their kids, and occasionally, they give in to the demands those kiddos place upon them. Generally, though, they treat parenting as their top priority. They make mistakes, like we all do. But, they send very strong messages to their children that they are loved, and that they as parents will set the rules and boundaries for their lives on a daily, consistent basis. Their children are delightful to be around.

“Susan” and “Steve” are also parents. Their children have been raised in very similar circumstances regarding schedules, working parents, and so on. Unfortunately, though, Susan and Steve have raised their children as an afterthought. It’s sad, but in reality, it is true. They were not ready to take on the responsibility of raising kids.

A typical day in the lives of Susan, Steve, and their kids goes something like this:

Kid says: “I want to go to the school roller skating party on Friday night.”

Parent says: “We’ll talk about it later.”

Kid says (next day): “I want to go to the roller skating party Friday night.”

Parent says: “I told you...we will talk about it later!”

Friday night arrives, and the kid is demanding to go. The parents, after all the nondiscussions, are resisting. The kid has a temper tantrum. And...the punishment for the tantrum is:

“You WILL NOT go anywhere tonight or all weekend because of your behavior!”

No one enjoys being around Susan and Steve with their children. It is always a scene of loud disagreement, and the children are becoming sulkier and more difficult in general.

The difference here? Personal credibility. Charles and Linda have established it with their children. Their kids are learning that their parents will behave in a certain way that they can rely on and trust. Susan and Steve have lost credibility and, unfortunately, don't even realize it. Their children don't know if they will be ignored, punished, or even indulged because their parents don't want to deal with the pressure the kids place on them. Steve and Susan just know they are extremely stressed and have children who are likely to have meltdowns. The status or power of being a parent doesn't mean anything—both sets of parents have the power of the position of parent—it is the parents' credibility (or lack of it) that leaves the impact on children and others.

Think about your life. How much of your effectiveness as a parent, employee, leader, spouse, friend, volunteer—whatever role you are playing—occurs as a result of the power or status of your position?

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Honestly answer the following questions. Be sure to consider both your professional and work situations as you do.

1. Why do others respond positively to me when I request something from them?

In my personal life:

In my work life:

2. If I had no authority to give direction, how likely is it that others would choose to respond positively to my direction?

In my personal life:

In my work life:

If your responses to these two questions indicate that you rely heavily upon the power, status, or position of the role you are in, you might want to think about that. If you are dependent upon “because I said so” to accomplish results in any part of your life, just think about it and how that might be impacting your personal credibility. Although position or status might help you gain short-term results or superficial respect from others, it rarely sustains for long periods of time. People who establish and maintain strong personal credibility have come to understand that their personal credibility factor is based on what they do—not the position or role that they have.