

LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY:

Why It's Vital and How to Get It

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"Reason and judgment are the qualities of a leader." Tacitus, 116 A.D.

If you think about the issues weighing executives today, two consistently rise to the top of surveys on critical organizational challenges—improving customer service and product quality. But even if “perfection” is reached in these areas, it’s a fleeting victory as over time, customers continually raise the bar on expectations. For this reason, we turn to our leaders to direct us in anticipating needs and setting the right course in meeting rising demands.

What this means is that organizations need to become the kind of place where people choose to stay, supported by leaders who have the capacity to effectively enlist others in supporting an inspired vision. But who decides if a product or service is up to quality standards? The customer. Who decides if a leader has qualities worth following? The customer (or in leadership jargon—the constituent). Constituents take an active role in the process of getting things done, and who *delegate* authority to another to *act on his or her behalf*. A constituent *gives* authority to a leader, not *visa versa*. Constituents could be employees, or customers, suppliers, shareholders, business partners, and community members. Leaders take note: you are not a leader without followers.

According to surveys of more than 15,000 people worldwide and over 400 case studies, the top four qualities people expect from their leaders are (in order of frequency), honesty, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent. These qualities are what communication researchers refer to as “source credibility.” In measuring the believability of a source of information, be it a CEO, the President of the United States, or a used car

salesman, researchers generally use the qualities of trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism—strikingly similar qualities to three of the top four in other studies. Credibility then, is the foundation upon which leaders and their constituents will build their tomorrows.

Credibility is the ability to inspire belief or trust that you have what it takes to get the job done--that you are competent. Without it, don't expect people to follow. Competence is therefore one of the key elements in developing credibility. To agree to do something in which you are incapable of performing is, in plain English, idiotic. There's nothing heroic about saying you can turn around a department when you lack the skills to do it.

Credibility is not only worth having, it's essential if organizations are to develop effective leaders who engage in meaningful work. Having a credible leading manager promotes positive work attitudes, organizational pride, stronger teamwork, increased sense of ownership, personal responsibility, and closer alignment between personal and organizational values.

In Kouzes and Posner's book, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*, they reveal significant research findings into the importance of credibility. Their research led them to the formation of what they call, "The Six Disciplines," reliable measures of actions that build the foundation of credible leadership. They differentiate between those people who have the capacity to lead others to "new visions of the future," from those who cannot.

THE SIX DISCIPLINES OF CREDIBILITY

- 1. Discovering Yourself:** acquiring competence, self-confidence, self-awareness, defining values, belief in yourself, demonstrating exemplary character
- 2. Appreciating Constituents and Their Diversity:** acknowledging, rewarding,

- listening, soliciting feedback, promoting constructive controversy, taking risks, trusting others, building relationships
3. **Affirming Shared Values:** finding common ground, creating a cooperative community, using systems to reinforce shared values, reconciling value dilemmas
 4. **Developing Capacity:** building competence, offering choices, encouraging ownership, inspiring confidence, promoting communication/feedback, taking responsibility
 5. **Serving a Purpose:** making meaning, staying in touch, becoming a visionary “story teller,” going there first, teaching with Moments of Learning, creating systems that work together towards common missions and visions
 6. **Sustaining Hope:** taking charge, demonstrating courage of conviction, building positive thoughts and images, giving love and encouragement, making hope a priority, building healthy lives and superior performance

IT'S MORE THAN MONEY

Leadership is a means to an end. Effective leaders believe in a vision and encourage constituents towards that vision while providing interesting and challenging work. It's not the money people ultimately work for however; it's being engaged in meaningful work that contributes to a larger purpose. The money is a buy-product of hard work, a sense of ownership, and being connected to community. Studies now show that feeling connected to others is what makes most people happiest. If leaders can connect into the hearts and souls of their constituents, they can create a loyal following. They can begin to do that by working on developing credibility.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

Leaders exemplify specific qualities, attitudes, and attributes that set them apart from others. A leader earns the right to lead, because they have followers who believe in their credibility. In order to enlist people to follow, assess how well you:

1. SEARCH

Search for challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve.

2. EXPERIMENT

Experiment and take risks, learning from mistakes.

3. ENVISION

Envision an up-lifting and ennobling future.

4. ENLIST

Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams.

5. FOSTER

Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.

6. STRENGTHEN

Strengthen others by sharing information and power while increasing their discretion and visibility.

7. SET

Set an example for others by behaving in ways that are consistent with your stated values. Be a role model of excellence for others to follow.

8. PLAN

Plan small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment.

9. RECOGNIZE

Recognize individual contributions to the success of every project.

10. CELEBRATE

Celebrate team and individual accomplishments regularly.

11. SHOW LOYALTY

Above all, a leader must be loyal to the cause. Disagreement is not disloyalty. If a leader, in the best interests of others, disagrees with popular opinion, s/he should be listened to. A leader who actively encourages actions that are counter to the welfare of the team, however, is disloyal.

12. SHOW COURAGE

Leaders must have the fortitude to carry out assignments and the gallantry to accept the risks of leadership. They must not balk at the sight of obstacles. The role of the leader has inherent loneliness, despair, ridicule, and rejection. Leaders must sometimes be long-suffering in their duties.

13. SHOW DESIRE

Few leaders will sustain themselves as without strong personal desire — an inherent commitment to influencing people, processes and outcomes.

14. ENDURE

Each succeeding higher level of leadership places increasing demands on physical and emotional levels. Leaders need stamina to recover from disappointment and to nurture bodies with basic, healthful staples. Leaders cannot lead from their bedside.

15. DECISIVE

Knowing when to act and when not to act, taking into account all facts bearing on the

situation and then responsibly carrying out right actions.

16. SHOW SELF-CONFIDENCE

Proper training and experience develops a personal feeling of assurance. Lack of confidence says these duties are beyond you.

A LEADER IS ONE WHO SERVES

No one sees an organization's errors more than its customers. Be an undercover detective to determine if you're on the right track. Listen to your constituents and lead to serve their needs. Work for them, and they will work with you. The truth is that you will get everything you want in life, when you increase your contribution to others.

What Really Matters

It's not the length of a life
or the depth of a grave,
but how you will be measured
is by the help that you gave.

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