

Three Ways to Increase Credibility in Your Message

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We say “yes” or “no” to a message or a person long before we have time or information to process things rationally. Kevin Hogan, author of *The Science of Influence*, explains it this way:

“When you first meet someone, millions of neurons in the brain are activated.... [T]he unconscious mind goes immediately to work, makes all kinds of judgments and evaluations, and essentially pegs the person a winner or loser in approximately four seconds.”

When a message receives an instinctive “yes” response, I think of that message as having magnetic properties—it attracts the receiver with a nearly irresistible force. What gives such a message its pull? What makes it magnetic—or compelling or engaging? What makes people respond with a heartfelt “yes”?

Invest in Visual Appeal

Like it or not, our first instinctive test involves appearance. Hogan cites research showing that people who are physically attractive receive more positive attention than those who are not. Of course, many people who are not perceived as exceptionally attractive are successful communicators. How do they do it?

Those who experience success are generally well-groomed and dress appropriately for specific situations. People who don’t bother with their appearance, and those who don’t bother to match an image to a venue, fail the visual test. Sometimes a new suit is an investment, not an expense.

If the first impression comes from a website rather than a personal encounter, we still assess visual characteristics. We like clean, attractive lines, with plenty of blank space. We are attracted to color, to images, and to high-quality photos. We are engaged when we perceive relevance *at a glance*. While most businesses do not need a glitzy website with animation, they do need an attractive, easy-to-navigate, customer-centered site.

Increase Your Credibility & Likeability Quotients

In addition to testing messages for appearance, those who receive our messages test for credibility. According to Jay Conger, author of the article, *The Necessary Art of Persuasion*, credibility is a mixture of expertise and relationship. The quality of a message is judged by the character of the person behind the message.

Expertise, of course, is not limited to formal education. In many cases, a perception regarding expertise is developed through a number of encounters over time. To increase the expertise quotient of your credibility, be consistently knowledgeable, thorough, and prepared for meetings and projects.

On the relationship side, Conger maintains that “people who are known to be honest, steady, and reliable have an edge....” We give our support to people who have been generous and supportive of us in the past. If we believe someone has a sincere interest in our concerns, we are naturally receptive to their messages.

Both credibility and likeability are essential traits of personal magnetism. Mitch Anthony, author of *Selling with Emotional Intelligence*, says, “Clients place as much emphasis on ‘likeability’ as they do on ability.” Sales guru Jeffrey Gitomer maintains that, all things being equal, a person will buy from someone he or she likes. Gitomer also reminds us that people buy from salespeople who make them laugh.

To increase your success in selling your ideas on a daily basis, increase your likeability quotient. Make sure you express a positive, lighthearted tone.

David Goleman, Richard Boyantzis and Annie Mckee, authors of *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*, tell us that people who have the ability to exude upbeat feelings are emotional magnets for others:

It’s one reason emotionally intelligent leaders attract talented people—for the pleasure of working in their presence. Conversely, leaders who emit the negative register—who are irritable, touchy, domineering, cold—repel people....

Turn Up Your Hearing Aid

In his classic, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders*, Stephen Covey makes the following observation: “Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” In a world where this indictment is unquestionably true, a person who genuinely listens is magnetic. Covey refers to this type of listening as *empathic*.

We might think of empathic listening as turning up the hearing aid. It involves listening carefully enough to identify the emotion behind a message as well as the message itself. While some people are naturally more empathetic than others, listening skills can be developed. To practice empathic listening, pause before you respond. Check your understanding by rephrasing the message. Ask questions about the other’s concerns. Demonstrate respect for the concerns you hear—whether you agree with those concerns or not.

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Using Influence and Credibility to Move Business Forward

We often think of our messages in terms of words. Certainly, words are important, but people often respond with “yes” or “no” before we get a chance to say any words at all. The visual components of our messages have an early impact. They can draw others to our messages or repel them. Once we’ve crossed the visual hurdle, the level of expertise, likeability, and attentiveness we’ve established determines the strength of our personal magnetism. To get a resounding “YES” for your messages—and support for your goals—reach beyond the words themselves. Cultivate other ways to make an impact.

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