

1

Credibility to Make a Good Start

You graduate and obtain a licence to practise and the degree is placed after your name on a business card or plaque outside your surgery. The degree/licence is a sign that you are qualified to practise and that you can be trusted. You are credible. However, credibility is more than a qualification. It is about who you are and how others see you.

The most important quality in a leader is that of being acknowledged as such. All leaders whose fitness is questioned are clearly lacking in force.

Andre Maurois

In this chapter you will learn about:

- The factors that matter in establishing credibility.
- How credibility is based on others' perceptions, requires followers, is better based on actions, is dependent on first impressions, and is fragile.
- Assessing the credibility of your key contacts.
- Auditing what will help or hinder your credibility as a leader.
- Building charisma and distinguishing yourself professionally and commercially.

Overview

Gerald Ratner, former chief executive of the family jewellery company Ratners, achieved notoriety after mocking his own company's products during a speech to the Institute of Directors in 1991. Ratners had built its business on selling cut-price jewellery.

After a liquid lunch, during the speech Ratner stated, "We also do cut-glass sherry decanters complete with six glasses on a silver-plated tray that your butler can serve you drinks on, all for £4.95. People say: "How can you sell this for such a low price?" I say: "Because it's total crap." He also claimed the chain gold earrings that were cheaper than a prawn sandwich but probably would not last as long. The Ratners Group lost almost £500 million in value and nearly collapsed.

Credibility is the first hurdle of leadership. If we can't jump this hurdle to project authority and legitimacy, we'll find it difficult to reassure others of our ability to operate

effectively within a leadership role. Skills and competence, no matter how exceptional, will not be enough. Without credibility we will find it next to impossible to succeed as a leader.

What is more, credibility is easily undermined – and once lost it's difficult to regain.

- What factors do you think matter in establishing credibility?
 - Does your credibility depend on a stellar academic track record?
 - Membership of particular networks or clubs, or being an alumni of a certain institution?
 - Experience and age?
 - Interpersonal poise and presentational impact?
 - Or the 'X factor' and charisma?

Think

This section outlines five things to know about credibility.

1.1 It Is Based on Others' Perceptions

One of the hardest tasks of leadership is understanding that you are not what you are, but what you're perceived to be by others.

Edward L. Flom

Credibility is credibility only in the eyes of others. Whatever we might like to think about our talents, contribution, and impact, others are the judge of our credibility. If others don't respect us or see us as credible, we must recognise that perception is a leadership reality.

- Is that unfair? Or is that a reflection of the realities of human nature and social dynamics?

1.2 Our Credibility as Leaders Requires Followers

If we look over our shoulder and no one is following, we're not leading. We can exercise power and status to force others to do what we tell them, although then the result is reluctant subordinates who grudgingly obey our orders, but will not be engaged in our plans. We have credibility when others follow because they want to, not because they have to.

- Think about how your own outlook on credibility will influence the way in which others view you.

1.3 Credibility Is Better Built by Actions Rather Than Words

Dr Rajendra Pachauri is a climate change chief who won a Nobel Prize for coordinating research in climate change, including the warning that the glaciers in the Himalayas might melt by 2035. He came under fire for ignoring his own plea for everyone to reduce

their carbon footprint. On the one-mile journey from his home to his office, he could have walked, cycled, used public transport, or the eco-friendly electric car he had been issued. Instead, his personal chauffeur picked him up from his home in a 1.8L Toyota, ignoring the advice of the Energy and Resources Institute, of which he is Director General, to reduce pollution by avoiding the use of private vehicles where alternatives exist.

As Henry Ford noted: ‘You can’t build a reputation on what you’re going to do. You build a reputation on what you’ve done.’

We can talk about effectiveness as leaders. We can announce exciting plans for the future and what we intend to do. The reality is, though, that our credibility is established when we deliver against others’ expectations.

Don’t say it if you don’t intend to do it. And if you’ve said it, do it even if you regret it for being time consuming, awkward, embarrassing, or expensive. If you don’t, you will damage your credibility.

This is credibility as commitments and the tough lesson of living with the consequences of misguided commitments should ensure we are more careful when making future commitments.

- What have you done that will reassure others of your leadership credibility?

1.4 First Impressions Count, so Project Well

We only get one chance to make a first impression and that impression is made in a few seconds and is hard to change. People will evaluate us within 10 seconds of meeting us, usually before we’ve even had a chance to open our mouth.

So be appealing and make sure you get off to a good start in social encounters. Look and sound the part. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and others will view you more positively if you establish yourself as credible and confident. To make a positive impact attend to your physical appearance and dress well.

One of the best ways to make a positive first impression is to demonstrate immediately that the other person, not you, is the centre of attention and conversation.

Last impressions matter too. Endings are important. Don’t allow conversations and meetings to fizzle out in awkwardness or hesitation. Know how to end social interactions.

- How do you come across to others in social situations?
 - As hesitant and unsure of yourself? Arrogant and more interested in what you have to say?
 - Or as possessing that level of poise and self-assurance that has the confidence to take a genuine interest in others; ask questions and listen; and speak clearly and with power?

1.5 First Impressions: Tactics

- **Prepare in advance** for key encounters, then just try to forget yourself. No one is at their best if they are self-conscious.
- **Be on time** and look the part; present yourself appropriately.

- **Be confident**, and smile; use body language to show you're open to others, make eye contact.
- Avoid a fumbling introduction. Have ready a '**verbal business card**', a quick, 30-word summary of who you are and what you can do. Focus on the benefits for the other person rather than simply stating your job title: 'I'm X and I'm here to help you with Y.'
- Listen; **remember names** and use them.
- Check your **speaking style**; people judge your intelligence and values on how you select and use words.

1.6 Credibility Is Fragile

Our credibility can be destroyed quickly and sometimes for the most trivial of reasons. The following mistakes will damage credibility:

- **Losing the plot.** When you fail to keep up to date with your field of expertise and fall back on out-of-date thinking and practice, you become out of touch and irrelevant.
- **Questionable ethics.** When the gap between what you say and what you do grows, your credibility disappears into the gap.
- **Being everyone's friend.** Don't aim to be liked, aim to be respected. Attempts to be popular with everyone are seen either as phony and insincere, or as asking for trouble when you need to make tough decisions.
- **Avoiding responsibility.** When you side-step problems or look to blame others, your integrity and leadership courage are rightly questioned.
- **Mismanaging expectations.** Your credibility suffers when you over-promise and under-deliver. Big announcements about future possibilities raise everyone's expectations. And when the reality of results disappoints, your credibility is damaged.

Do

1.7 Assess the Credibility of Your Key Contacts

- Make a list of individuals in a leadership role that you have encountered. Include here colleagues, mentors, your peers, as well as others generally in life you have met who are in some kind of leadership position.
- Rate each on a 1–10 scale of credibility. Don't agonise over your evaluations. It's not a detailed assessment, rather a way of highlighting who you see as more or less credible.
- Review your listing of names and credibility factors (Figure 1.1). Ask:
 - What themes emerge as key factors in those you see as more or less credible?
 - What might this indicate about your own 'theory' of leadership credibility?
 - What might be the implications for what is more or less important to your leadership outlook, and how others perceive your credibility?

Your Contacts	Rating 1-10
Mentor Name	
Peer 1 Name	
Peer 2 Name	
Partner or Family Member Name	
Other Name	

Figure 1.1 Are your contacts credible?

1.8 Conduct a Personal Audit to Ask: What Will Help or Hinder My Personal Credibility as a Future Leader?

Which factors will enhance or undermine your credibility?

- Professional excellence and technical proficiency?
- A track record of outstanding success?
- Your access to influential people and networks, which, by association, boost your own credibility?
- A broad repertoire of leadership capability to get things done effortlessly?
- Exceptional interpersonal and communication skills?
- Charisma to get noticed and to make others feel special?

Be honest in identifying your strengths and any potential shortcomings in order to develop a strategy that ensures you get off to a good start as a credible leader. What is your key priority? Is it a strength you want to build on – or a gap you know you should fill?

1.9 Build the Charisma Factor

- What will set you apart from your peers and differentiate your practice from others?
 - Is it your professional proficiency?
 - Is it the extent to which you project yourself with authority?
 - Is it how you make others feel special?
- What could you do to project yourself with greater authority, power, and influence?

Review the dynamics of charisma with the help of the further reading at the end of the acknowledgements.

Charisma isn't a magical force. It's the combination of a blend of specific factors: how we project ourselves, how we look and present ourselves, how we listen, and how we interact with others.

- What for you is helping or hindering your personal 'charisma factor'?

In a Nutshell: Credibility to Make a Good Start

To make a good start as a leader you need to establish your credibility. In this chapter you learnt that without followers there is no leadership. Others' perceptions of you are critical.

Also you discovered that credibility is fragile and how to avoid damaging your credibility. How are you perceived by key contacts? What factors affect your credibility? What is needed so you project well and make a good first impression?

In your personal audit, you identified your strengths and potential shortcomings, and put together a robust strategy for personal development.

The chapter finally examined how you can build the charisma factor and understand what will set you apart from your peers.