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Boost Your Credibility At Work

This is a guest post by Dianna Booher, author of Communicate with Confidence! How to Say it Right the First Time and Every Time! *(2nd Edition McGraw-Hill Professional 2011).*

Credibility is hard to earn and easy to lose. People judge you not only based on your job performance, but also by your communications–how you talk and what you talk about.

Words have to match actions. In addition to meeting your deadlines and hitting all your goals, it's vital to establish trust. Whether you are speaking, sending written messages or using social media, a lack of trust will lower your hallway credibility.

If you mess up (as most people do at some point in their careers), make an effort immediately to correct the problem. The positive long-term effects will far outweigh the initial set-back. In fact, you may find that you've earned even more credibility than you had in the first place. People like winners, but they like comeback stories even better.

Whether you're looking for a new job or trying to excel at your current one, these steps can help build—and maintain—your credibility.

Show concern. People will care about you and trust you when you care about them. Colleagues want to know that they have a sympathetic ear in you. They also want to feel that you'll fight for them and their work even though you may have less invested in the results than they do.

Admit what you don't know. This can be humbling, but it's better than bluffing your way up the ladder and then having your ignorance "discovered." Instead of pretending to know it all, ask questions that will increase your depth of knowledge on the subject. It's okay to be unclear on something as long as you're upfront about it. Nothing makes people believe what you *do* know like admitting what you don't.

Skip confessions of honesty. Every time I hear someone say something like, "To be honest, I think the project involves far too many suppliers," it

makes me think: Are you typically *not* honest with me? For the same reason, you shouldn't preface your comments with expressions like "frankly," "candidly," or "to be truthful" either. These phrases all imply that what follows—the truth—is the exception, rather than the norm, for you.

Avoid exaggeration. Think about how you use hyperbole. Did you wait on the phone for five seconds, or five minutes? Did the supplier raise the rates by 2% or 10%? Spinning a story can put you on a slippery slope. Exaggeration makes for great humor, but it is a credibility killer.

Keep confidences. What happens when a boss or confidante tells you, "This information is not to leave the room," and you turn around and share it with someone else? This sends a signal to other people that you will break their confidences too. On the other hand, those who observe you keep a secret will feel comfortable sharing their own.

Evaluate criticisms and objections. If pushing back is your reflex, people will think of you as a reactor, rather than a reflective, credible thinker. The more thoroughly you consider contradictory information, the more credible your final opinion or decision will be.

Assume responsibility. If you had some control over a situation that didn't end the way others wanted it to, own up to it—whether you cast a deciding vote or just played a role. Shirkers suffer credibility gaps.

Pay attention to perceptions. I've heard people say, "I'm my own person. It doesn't matter what others think." Then they feel disappointed when colleagues don't treat them courteously, fail to respect their time, ignore their input, or disregard their information. These same people complain when they don't get the job they want or the salary they expect. They don't understand why the best employees hate to work for them or why colleagues don't give their best efforts on team projects.

If this sounds familiar, face the facts: People form impressions based on what they see. So think about how your actions *look* to them. Is that how you want to be perceived?

Make your appearance count. Physical appearance, dress, grooming, posture, presence, and poise either underscore your credibility or damage it. Look the part you want to play. You'll be happy with what you see reflecting back.