

Denver Business Journal - November 13, 2006

<http://denver.bizjournals.com/denver/stories/2006/11/13/smallb8.html>

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, November 10, 2006

Build credibility if you want to influence others

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#) Special to the Denver Business Journal

Influence and persuasion are impossible without credibility.

Selling is about helping others make decisions. Credibility really means being believable. Credibility is the rational, logical and intellectual component that drives the intuitive feeling to trust someone. Understanding how to build credibility when trying to influence someone will increase the number of favorable decisions you receive.

There are specific steps you can take to build your credibility. Begin with expertise in your field, take ownership of your behaviors, be empathetic with your buyer, and be genuine, consistent and honest. These principles strengthen and maintain credibility.

- Be an expert -- One of the major qualms decision-makers experience when hiring a consultant is the fear that the consultant "doesn't understand my business." Sellers are consultants for their services. Superficial knowledge destroys credibility. If you don't know something, retain credibility by saying so, and then find the answer and deliver it in a timely fashion.

Credible sellers share information and encourage open communication. They continually learn more about their solutions, competitors, and more notably, their customers. Experts truly are lifelong learners.

- Take ownership -- All of us have recited incorrect information unknowingly or made mistakes. Be quick to acknowledge errors and avoid any cover-up.

Instead of blaming traffic when you're late to an appointment, acknowledge that you "misjudged the drive time." Everyone experiences traffic delays, yet everyone knows it's an overused excuse.

The recent political campaigns are a good example of lack of ownership, with all the accusing, finger-pointing, blaming and excuse-making.

Remember when President Richard Nixon said, "I am not a crook" and President Bill Clinton said, "I did not have sex with that woman"? Hardly honest statements, and most people would have been more forgiving if they had taken ownership of their behaviors from the start and told the truth. As they do with politicians, buyers are scrutinizing sellers more closely.

- Be empathetic -- Identifying with the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others bolsters credibility.

During a recent sales call, the seller inquired about a current buyer's personal loss. When the buyer started to share her personal experience, the seller abruptly moved the conversation back to business. The unspoken message implied the answer wasn't important and the seller really didn't care about the buyer or their experience.

Being empathetic means caring and listening with all your senses, while imagining what the buyer is experiencing. Stephen Covey said it best: "Seek first to understand, before you seek to be understood." Empathy may be the single most important ingredient in building credibility.

- Be genuine and authentic -- This one is easy; just be yourself.

Not all selling styles apply to everyone. For example, some sellers can use humor naturally and comfortably, while others' attempts at humor may appear awkward, stiff or insincere.

Credibility and conviction go hand in hand. Talk and speak from your heart. When doing so, your credibility is less likely to be in question.

When trying to be something you're not or when you over-rehearse something so much that it sounds canned, you appear phony.

The overused, "How are you today, Mr. or Ms. So-and-So?" that we all have heard from telemarketers is a good example. It's clear there's little sincerity in their question from not only their tone but also from their urgency to move the conversation forward to what they are selling.

- Be consistent -- It's better to promise less and deliver more, so be consistent in promising only what you know is possible.

Every credible salesperson should use "no" whenever necessary. Say, "no, I am sorry, I can't meet that deadline," or "no, that is not an area we can help you with." It's a quick and powerful way to build your credibility.

Avoid saying one thing and doing another. It evaporates any trust you may have.

Nonverbal communication is always stronger than what you say. The seller who says, "Your back order is my top priority" and doesn't get back with an answer quickly is letting their actions speak louder than their words.

The old saying "walk the talk" is a must. Credibility leads by example, so how you communicate what you know is just as important as what you know.

- Personal presence -- Charisma usually is associated with confidence, a firm handshake and someone who looks you in the eye while standing straight.

Charismatic people project a favorable initial impact, and have a seemingly uncanny ability to charm or influence others. They're generally composed, assertive, focused and authentic, and usually possess superb communication skills.

Honing these skills enhances your degree of credence.

Relationship selling is the continuing buzz phrase in selling, and credibility and trust are the foundation. By balancing knowledge, style and behavior, you can ensure your credibility remains intact.

Garry Duncan is principal of Denver-based Leadership Connections, a sales training company. Reach him at 303-462-1277 or garry@leadershipconnections.com.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.