

## Perspectives

Monica Little  
CEO, Little & Company

# Building credible leadership

What's the No. 1 quality of a good leader?

Most organizational-effectiveness and leadership gurus agree: Credibility.

When you're credible, people trust you. They believe in you, seek you out and are willing to stand by you. When you lead an organization, your credibility gives you a powerful tool for building internal allegiance. And, if you personify a product or service, your credibility is inextricably linked to that of your brands (and vice versa). In any case, credibility is an asset that you can't afford to ignore.

Here's how to build strong credibility and sustain it over time:

### **Know what you want to say**

Great leaders have clarity around three essential core assets: vision, mission and values. In other words: what you aspire to be or do in the world, how you'll get there, and how you'll behave and filter your decision making. When every action and decision are consistently tied to these truths, people see you and your brand as authentic. That means that even when the chips are down, or something unexpected happens, they're more likely to weather the storm with you.

### **Walk your talk**

Align what you say with what you do, both publicly and in your private life. Period. Customers need to believe that you, as the leader behind the organization and/or brand, will help fulfill your brand's promise. Similarly, internal team members need to understand and believe in your vision to be fully engaged in reaching it. Without consistently walking your talk, it's virtually impossible to be seen as credible — the first ingredient in creating trust.

Holding your long-term goals as your north star, your mission as your roadmap and your values as the lens through which you filter your decisions will help keep you on track.

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### **Act courageously**

Once you've declared your vision, you will inevitably be called upon to make difficult decisions, including weighing short-term successes against your long-term goals. This is not easy, but it's critical if you want to maintain credibility. In fact, making tough, values-based trade-offs, and letting people see that, is probably one of the best ways to turbocharge trust.

### **Speak up**

To be a successful leader, you'll need to do more than just act in accordance with your stated values. You need to repeatedly point out what you've done. Tell people why you made your decisions or behaved in a certain way. Remind people. This is part of how you teach others in your organization what success looks like. And it allows you to create an ongoing dialogue with all of your constituents, which builds your larger, increasingly credible, brand story.

### **Own up**

Of course, leaders aren't perfect. No one is. True leadership calls for honesty and humility. In today's social media milieu, everyone's going to see your mistakes. The best strategy is to admit when you're wrong, correct your mistake, apologize when necessary and move on. Again, this is a lot easier to do when you've built a history of trust with your audiences. Trust is like a savings account: It takes commitment to build a balance, but it's great to have when you need it.

### **Look long term**

While everyone loves immediate gratification and results, don't count on them. Building credibility with your various constituents takes time, consistency and care. Holding your long-term goals as your north star, your mission as your roadmap and your values as the lens through which you filter your decisions will help keep you on track.

### **Remain true**

And finally, the best leaders are steadfast. Building credibility is more difficult for the mercurial. Changing your mind too often can lead to confusion, and most people simply won't be willing to take the time to figure out where and why you've changed direction. When people know what to expect, and see you backing up those expectations with action, they are more likely to not only perceive you as a leader, but to follow you as one.

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