Welcome to the Marine Leadership Group’s e-book on credibility. The purpose behind this e-book is to give you tools which will assist you in becoming a superior leader. We go into detail about the foundation of leadership, credibility, and specific behaviours you must incorporate into your daily actions to become the leader people want to follow. It is true, people respond differently to various behaviours displayed in different situations. Nonetheless, the behaviours described below are universally recognized as essential for a leader to exhibit in order to be accepted as a leader.

At the end of the day, followers decide to follow. Leaders do not really make the decision about who will follow them. It is up to you to demonstrate the most effective behaviours which will encourage followers to follow.

A note about terms: the generic ‘follower’ is used throughout this book to denote people who are in a leader / follower type situation. This includes employees, clients, co-workers, assistants and colleagues.

**Specific results you can expect to see**

This e-book gives you tools to help develop your credibility as a leader in order for the people in your organization or on your team to want to follow you. By focusing on and building up your credibility, you will slowly start to see changes happening all around you. Followers will become more loyal and committed to their roles and tasks. Trust among followers will grow deeper and stronger. Politics within the organization will start to reduce. Team performance will increase as well as greater respect will be visible
among team members

The changes you make in your behaviour, based on this e-book or through other sources, will help instill transformation all around you. Be the catalyst for change to improve your organization.

**Common problems or roadblocks people encounter**

One big hurdle for a new leader is often a lack of understanding about how to create an authentic leader / follower relationship. This is critical for leaders to understand: leadership is about relationships. This fundamental lack of understanding often translates into a belief in the need for command and control on the part of the leader.

The reality of command and control is that it ultimately creates weak team communication, followers may lack engagement with their work, and there is often a negative work environment because followers do not work to their full potential. In the command and control scenario followers are often treated as children rather than as adults. To counteract the command and control stereotype, leaders need to remember they are interacting with complex people who have ideas and expectations of their own.

**Values**

Becoming a credible leader requires you to take the time necessary to know yourself in terms of your values, morals and general behaviours. You may feel you are in touch with what you feel is right and wrong, but a lot of what happens in a leader / follower relationship is not specifically about right or wrong. Additionally, if you do not know
where you stand in terms of your morals, it is easy to fall into a habit of having situational ethics and morals.

Situational ethics creates uncertainty in your followers because there is a distinct lack of consistency from you, the leader. This uncertainty can lead to issues where followers have to guess how a leader will react in any given situation. Guessing on the part of followers is a weak position to be in no matter what kind of relationship you are in. A credible leader behaves consistently and in line with their values and morals. If followers know what a leader values or understands the leader’s morals, there will be no doubt how a leader will behave and react in any given situation. This certainty creates a strong relationship between leaders and followers.

As a suggestion for a group activity, when a new team is assembled or there are new people joining an established group, have the members answer questions which will connect shared values among everyone. This can be done in the form of a questionnaire or in a round table discussion, but the point is to get shared values recognized by everyone. This will help produce a higher performing team.

**Leadership Myths**

Those of you hoping for a quick and easy path to outstanding leadership performance are in for the usual answer that anything worth knowing takes time to learn. The hard part of leadership development is the sheer volume of information available for you to go through before knowing where to start.
Leadership is easy to read about and relatively easy to think about in case studies, but is very hard to internalize and make part of your natural behaviours. To build trust, credibility, loyalty, engagement, and create a strong leader / follower relationship, there is no easy path. You cannot simply read a biography about a great leader and expect to become a great leader yourself.

The truth is that leadership cannot be taught. All a coach or facilitator can do is put the tools for growth into your hands. It is up to you to do something with the tools. You need to look at your behaviours and compare them to demonstrated behaviours of successful leaders. If you find yourself demonstrating poor behaviours you need to make the effort to change what you do. Only you can change your behaviour.

Anyone can learn leadership, but learning leadership requires practice and reflection on experience and changing what needs to be changed. Be open to what you encounter and remain open minded to learning something new you will become a person people want to follow. There is no easy formula to master.

**Credibility is the solution!**

Trust is the foundation of credibility and credibility is one of the foundations of leadership. People need to trust you as a leader in order to decide to follow you, and to achieve trust you must be credible as a leader. This is the undeniable truth of leadership. If you do not have trust and credibility with your followers you can try any number of different leadership behaviours or techniques, but in the end you will not
succeed as a leader. Credibility as a leader is the foundation upon which all other behaviours rest.

So what does credibility mean? At its root, credibility is about developing the integrity, intent, capabilities, and results that make you believable to others. And it all boils down to a simple question: Am I someone others can trust? This is a clear example of how trust is the foundation for credibility and for all other actions on the part of a leader. At best a leader without credibility will have followers who go through the motions rather than be fulfilled and engaged with their work. At worst, you will have followers who actively undermine you, all the while displaying a distinct lack of effort dedicated to the project or activity at hand. As a result, this may produce a situation where a leader attempts to rely on their title alone to try to get followers to produce at a higher level, with understandably poor results. A situation of “do it because I said so” occurs, where coercion is used to get people to complete a task rather than treating people with respect and as adults. In a coercive situation, employee engagement is nonexistent and loyalty towards the leader is never a consideration. A leader with no credibility is actually a hindrance to the overall work process undertaken.

True leadership is not about a position. Rather leadership is about who you are as a person and the relationship you create with followers. Relying on a title for leadership is the weakest form of leadership in terms of commitment from followers because a title does not create credibility. A person who relies on their title for authority often worries
about losing their title, authority and control rather than worrying about their followers. This self-centered, fear based viewpoint is easily recognized by followers which creates the situation where even less engagement is forthcoming from followers.

**Create credibility and be a true leader**

Credibility rests on the **trustworthiness, expertise and dynamism** of individuals (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Indeed, as Stephen M. R. Covey describes in his book the Speed of Trust, trust is the beginning of influence as a leader because trust is foundational to credibility. This means by increasing our credibility, we build our leadership foundation.

The foundational components for leadership have remained constant over time (Kouzes & Posner, 2011) and are made up of being **honest, competent, inspirational and forward looking**. When the sets of characteristics for leadership and credibility are examined side by side, it is easy to see how similar they are to each other.

Trustworthiness includes honesty, expertise equates to being competent while dynamism includes being inspirational and being forward looking is a general characteristic of leadership which helps build credibility.

John Maxwell suggests leadership is simply influence, no more or less (Maxwell, 2007). When considered this way, it is obvious that without credibility a leader will not be able to influence followers. Without influence, a leader will not have followers. A leader with no followers is simply a person out taking a walk. In other words, without influence, no
combination of leadership behaviours and characteristics will create a situation where leadership happens.

**How leaders create credibility**

- They use ethical considerations to guide decisions
- Through words and deeds leaders encourage honesty throughout the organization
- Speak candidly about tough issues facing the organization
- Tell the truth, not just what important constituents want to hear
- Can be trusted to maintain confidentiality
- They place ethical behavior above personal gain
- Follow through on promises they have made
- Act in accordance with their stated values and the shared values of the team

These are all straightforward ways of creating credibility. Practice these ways of behaving until they are your normal reaction in any given situation.

**Credibility is built through Character and Competency**

**Character:**

Character is the sum of your qualities as a person, including your moral strength, and is a combination of your attributes, traits and abilities. Character is who you are. It defines you and guides your actions, hopefully in a positive way. Character, viewed through a leadership lens, requires the following components:
• Have humility and be ego-less - Do you go into situations and presume to know everything?
• Be honest and trustworthy
• Have integrity – Integrity can be summed up simply as doing the right thing for the right reason even when no one is watching. Integrity is steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code, whatever you decide that code will be.
• Are you congruent and consistent between what you say and what you do?
• Intent – What is your motive, agenda and behaviour – Demonstrate you care about your followers / employees
• Know yourself – What are your foundational morals and values and how do you display these attitudes to others? Are your values and morals clearly understood by others?
• General attitude – Do you play well with others

Character rests on many things, personality being one of those traits. It must be stressed personality and character is separate and independent from one another and should not be mixed up. Your behaviour demonstrates your character. When you are on time for an appointment and you are cordial and generally pleasant to be around, you are said to have good character.

Before you can grow and mature as a leader, you must have a clear understanding of your values and commit to living consistently with them—since they will shape your
behavior and influence the way you lead. Character links to your morals and values foundation. What you feel to be right versus wrong is displayed in your behaviour. Followers will take their cues from the way a leader behaves and adjust their behaviour to align with the leader’s behaviour. Therefore, if a leader's behaviour indicates it is alright to lie, cheat and steal, those behaviours will start showing up in the behaviours of followers.

Other character traits which you must consider as a leader are more general character behaviours such as your general work attitudes and self-management skills such as punctuality, time management, motivation, and having a strong work ethic. Indeed, the absence of these traits, which used to be called "character issues," repeatedly shows up as a primary concern in numerous studies. Indeed, studies over a 20 year period show character behaviours are still critical for success in today’s work world.

**Reflection on Character**

Look at the choices you have made in your past, and observe how much you have or have not lived by your moral code and character principles. Don't waste time feeling regretful or guilty. Remember that "...until a person can say deeply and honestly, I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday, that person cannot say, I choose otherwise" (Covey, 1989, Habit 1).

Become the leader you want to be. Be conscious of the decisions you make and know you will choose differently next time!
Competence:

Competence is the second criteria which creates credibility. If you are seen to be competent, you will be seen as more credible than someone who is not competent. Competency indicates a sufficient amount of knowledge and skills which enables someone to act in a certain capacity or situation. If you rely on arrogance or your title in place of competence your credibility will be considerably weakened, leading to a weak leadership position. Competence includes:

- Capabilities – Are you relevant or do you have the necessary knowledge or skills
- Results – What’s your track record and how successful have you been

By building up your capabilities and producing results you will be seen as competent and your credibility will grow.

In addition to character and competency, the following characteristics take you from being a good leader to an outstanding leader:

- Ability to inspire - Be dynamic, uplifting, enthusiastic, positive, and optimistic
- Be forward looking - Have a vision about how things could be and to be clear enough about it that others will be able to see it themselves

Earning credibility is an everywhere activity: on a factory floor activity, in a person to person activity, on the sun deck of a boat or in the main salon of a yacht, in every situation. “Credibility is gained through physical presence in small amounts over time. Leaders have to be physically present, they have to be visible and they have to get close
to their constituents to earn their respect and trust” (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p.31).

Additionally, credibility is built no matter what role you are in when you do what you say you are going to do. A team leader cannot direct from afar. This comment is directed specifically towards the leaders who want to sit and do nothing but tell people what to do. This behaviour is no way to lead and is the source of many issues these leaders may not even be aware of.

**Reflection on Competence**

Competence is a combination of results and capabilities. If you are to be seen as competent, you have to achieve what you set out to do. If you spin your wheels and waste time and complete little to nothing, your credibility will be questioned. Followers want to follow successful leaders.

**Behaviours a leader must display**

- Respect for others
- Be a trust builder
- Demonstrate authentic concern and care for followers
- Affirm shared values
- Develop capacity in followers - nurture and groom everyone in the organization for future leadership
- Serve followers and create meaning for followers
- Continually be learning and improving yourself – and be seen to do so. You are
never satisfied with the status quo and are always striving to get better at what you do as a leader. This will be seen by others as not resting on your laurels or being complacent.

Leaders must be in the midst of the action, which includes being seen doing what they expect others to do. “Leaders who are inaccessible to followers cannot possibly expect to be trusted just because they have a title” (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 31). Credibility is earned through participating with others, “leaning forward and being interested, stopping to listen and being responsive to others” (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). As stated earlier, credibility is built over time as a leader walks the walk for everyone to see.

Fortunately, there is good news if you find you are not strong in one or some of the factors which create credibility. You can behave yourself into increasing your ability simply by working at it. This is where the work and effort come in to make change in your life. For example, if you feel you could be better at having integrity, consciously make the effort every day to be a person of deep integrity. In fact, recruit outside help from co-workers and family members to get feedback and have open discussions about what you are doing. The more you work at improving your characteristic, the better you will become at it. Over time the characteristic will become second nature, but the effort must be made to change. The effort being put forward becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy. Success will depend on how badly you want to change and the purpose behind the need to change. If the purpose is superficial, expect superficial results.
Credible leaders inspire loyalty and commitment due to the way they make followers feel. Followers feel valued, inspired, challenged and respected by a leader who has earned credibility in the eyes of their followers. When people work with leaders who are admired and respected, followers feel better about themselves.

**What happens when credibility is lost?**

Fortunately there are actions a leader can take to gain back lost credibility. To increase the chances of regaining the credibility of your constituents you need to follow the order of the “six A’s of leadership accountability” (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 149 - 151):

1. Accept responsibility
2. Admit to any wrongdoing immediately
3. Apologize sincerely to constituents
4. Act to change your behaviour
5. Amend wrongs you have caused – atonement for your previous actions
6. Attend to your future behaviours by getting feedback and be open to the constructive criticism

When people are asked what’s the most important thing a leader should do after making a mistake, the universal response is “admit it” and take ownership of the problem. To admit means that you first have to accept personal responsibility for your actions, and, in the case of leaders, the actions of everyone in your organization. Then you have to publicly acknowledge that you have made a mistake. Because of concerns of legal
exposure or a mistaken fear that admitting a mistake may hurt credibility, many times leaders either deny or attempt to cover up any wrongdoing, thus ensuring even more damage to their reputations.

Evidence shows that attempting to hide mistakes is much more damaging and is much more likely to erode credibility. In research conducted by Kouzes & Posner, they found “admits mistakes” was mentioned second only to “tells the truth” when people were asked to explain what behaviors best define an honest person. There’s no better way to demonstrate your honesty to your constituents than owning up to your mistakes. By admitting you’re wrong—and then doing something about it—you can strengthen your credibility rather than diminish it (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

**Continual credibility recovery is no substitute for good leadership!**

Followers, co-workers and employees are forgiving, but only up to a point. If you continually go from disaster to disaster as a leader, it is highly encouraged you take a step back and examine your leadership behaviours and look for ways to improve your situation or skills as a leader. Otherwise your supposed followers will be looking for the nearest exit.
Conclusion

Credibility is not measured by you. Credibility is measured by those who follow you and is based on if followers can trust you. To build credibility a leader must build their character and competence. However, every leader is human. If something happens and you lose credibility in the eyes of followers, make every effort to be honest and up-front in admitting wrong doing and accept responsibility as this will go a long way towards rebuilding credibility.

If you find yourself relying on your title alone to try and coerce or convince team members to contribute their maximum effort, you will not have very much success. Leaders must consciously build credibility. This happens when a leader is involved in the tasks rather than trying to direct from afar. Leaders have to get their hands dirty and lead from the front at all times. In other words, leaders must walk the talk.

What people want in a leader is someone who is honest and trustworthy, who is competent and has expertise, has a vision of the future, and is dynamic and inspiring. By displaying these characteristics leaders generate credibility in spades.

What Now?

Now that you know the foundation of leadership is credibility, it is up to you to put into practice what you have read. The points listed above need to be internalized so you can behave differently. Old behaviours must be replaced by new ones in order to honestly display change. Look inside yourself with a critical eye, knowing you are not perfect,
and make the necessary changes for future success.

We hope this information has been worthwhile for you. It is now up to you to implement changes in your behaviours to build credibility. It will not be easy. Nonetheless, put in the effort to be seen as a change agent for those around you and grow your credibility.
References:


