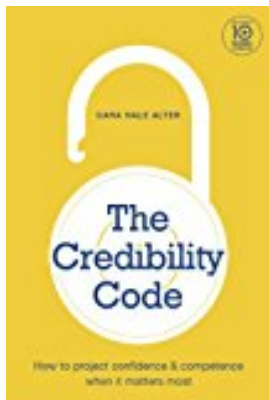


[PDF] The Credibility Code: How To Project Confidence And Competence When It Matters Most

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Description:

Review People make up their mind in a split second whether you have credibility or not. Ms. Alter has compiled a series of specific behaviours that can help in such situations, particularly when you

re not feeling at your best. Many people believe that credibility, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. In truth, very specific behaviours lead us to an assessment of credibility, she writes. Three pillars combine to project credibility: a strong posture, a strong voice, and strong eye contact. The book offers tips on how to take control in each area, so you aren't undermining yourself in meetings with colleagues or clients, or in high-profile interviews to gain jobs. The posture code boils down to five essentials: Keep your spine tall and strong. Stand with your weight balanced equally on both feet. Keep your head level. Point your nose directly at the listener. And command the space around you. Strong posture will make you seem more dynamic, she says. It helps to practise. You can check your posture when you're in line at the grocery store, or riding an escalator. You can take a field trip around your office, chatting with colleagues and consciously checking to make sure that your head is level, you are balanced, and your nose is pointed directly at the other party. To build credibility through vocal behaviour, speak with optimal volume, articulate clearly, keep the pacing relaxed, and highlight your message with expression. For most people, the greatest opportunity for growth is in making ourselves more audible. In particular, watch that you don't speak too softly or drop volume at the end of phrases or sentences. In general, the more crisply you enunciate your words, the more intelligent and the more attentive to detail you'll sound, the author adds. The more lazily you articulate your words, the less intelligent and less credible others will perceive you. The most influential vocal skill, she suggests, is resonance. You want a memorable sound, like James Earl Jones or Oprah Winfrey. That comes with engaging your diaphragm, seeking a stronger sound from below. Credibility also requires making and holding eye contact. Ms. Alter notes that this is reciprocal, so if when speaking people aren't looking at you, perhaps you aren't looking at them. Maintaining eye contact also pushes back at our tendency to be self-focused, and automatically turns our focus to the other people we're talking to. When giving a presentation, she encourages you to copy a sheepdog, constantly corralling the wandering sheep. Never let any part of the room go too long without some attention from you, she suggests. Maintain eye contact with everyone, regardless of rank or apparent enthusiasm. You'll seem more like a leader, more inclusive, and more in command. The book covers many important areas, including how to control your gestures; the derailers that can subtly erode your credibility, such as Caroline Kennedy's ums and you knows that cut short her bid for a U.S. Senate seat when Hillary Clinton resigned; and how to find the balance between authority and approachability. The focus is on practical tips and actions to improve, with many case examples that help to clarify where you can go wrong.

Harvey Schachter, Special to *The Globe and Mail*

--The Globe and Mail

When Cesar Millan, known on TV as the Dog Whisperer, walks into a room full of canines, the four-legged followers know immediately that he's in charge. His voice, his posture and his gestures all convey his top-dog status. But Cara Hale Alter says the two-legged beasts of the world also could learn a thing or two from Millan. Alter, founder and president of SpeechSkills, says that one of the clear things that puts Millan in charge is his lack of head movement. This level-headed position is one of the best ways that Millan conveys his "executive presence" to a pack of dogs exactly what we should be doing in our careers if we want to convey the same thing to the workplace pack, she says. Alter, whose SpeechSkills is a San Francisco-based communications training company, says many people are unaware of such subtle clues. But she has done research on how we all can do a better job of establishing our authority and capability and put it in a new book, *The Credibility Code*. "Many people are unaware of the negative things they're doing," she says. "They don't understand how their image is being formed by the way they move or speak." Alter offers this advice for those seeking to look more credible: Stop filling in. A stray "um," "uh" or "you know" can make you sound unsure. Instead, don't be afraid to pause while you search for the next word. Don't sound like a teenager. Ending a statement with an upward rise of the voice used to be common among teenagers

but has filtered into adult conversation, Alter says. This "up talk" is easy to pick up, so make sure you haven't adopted the bad habit. Try reading an article out loud, making sure you end statement with a downward inflection of your voice. Control your space. Just as Millan conveys authority with little head movement, you can convey more personal power by controlling a tendency to shift your weight from leg to leg or bob your head. Such movements comfort you, but Alter says you appear more calm and confident if you're still. At the same time, stop trying to reduce your presence by tucking your arms to your sides, placing your feet close together or dipping your chin. Those kinds of behaviors say that you feel threatened in your space. Open your posture. If you feel nervous, you may start to play with your clothing or jewelry, clasp your hands or wipe any expression off your face. The more gestures and facial expressions you have, the more comfortable and relaxed you appear. Alter suggests going to places such as a farmers' market or a shopping mall and interacting with others to practice your skills. Once you become more comfortable, you'll be able to use those skills in business settings. Maintain eye contact. Don't drop your eyes in a business setting because you appear to step away from the conversation. Give speakers and listeners your full attention. To practice keeping your eyes at horizon level while speaking, put blank Post-It notes on your office wall. Ask yourself questions and then hold your eyes on the notes while you give an answer. Finally, Alter suggests videotaping yourself to spot conversational glitches or habits that may be undermining your credibility. "I've had a lot of people tell me they don't think they have any issues, and then I film them," she says. "Once they see themselves on camera, then they're very eager for coaching.

Anita Bruzzese, Gannett --USAToday.com

About the Author Cara Hale Alter is founder and president of SpeechSkills, a San Francisco-based communication training company. She's spent two decades studying why, among smart, capable people, some project credibility and others don't. As a corporate trainer and keynote speaker, Alter has worked with a wide range of organizations from high tech to heavy machinery, including eBay, Facebook, Google, Caterpillar, Fireman's Fund, Kendall Jackson, Williams-Sonoma, Harvard Medical School, and UC Hastings College of the Law. She is also a popular instructor at Stanford Continuing Studies and UC Berkeley Extension, and has worked professionally as a commercial and voice-over actress.

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