

Debbie Nicol: Genuine credibility will take anyone a long way

Debbie Nicol

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During an intense verbal debate between a group of Emirati participants at a workshop I was hosting, Arabic-to-English translation apps suddenly appeared. The group were attempting to agree on the best translation for an English word I had just uttered: “credibility.”

It appears that while there are close substitutes, there is no one exact translation. Quite a pity really, because “credibility” deserves vast airplay as it brings with it such great value. Credibility, a form of believability, is really about “doing what you say you will do”, which in turn yields understanding and trust. Which team member wouldn't relate to that and which leader wouldn't prioritise that?

Credibility is earned through both simple and complex means:

• Simple

Leaders are undoubtedly busy people, yet never too busy to remember. The saying “if you want something done, give it to a busy person” goes a long way here in the stakes of credibility. Forgetting is perceived as but an excuse.

– Credibility is banked when a leader remembers to do what he says he will do, even if it takes until late in the evening. That action may be to track down a resource, link up two people or even read and reply to an email of interest; whatever it is, it simply does not slip through the cracks.

– Credibility is banked when names are recalled and family situations are honoured. Recently I witnessed a high-flying senior executive take time out to honour the life of a past employee who was taken from this Earth way too soon. The executive could have sent condolences or flowers, yet did not; priorities acted upon build credibility.

– Credibility is banked when respect for others is evident. If meetings are required, be on time; after all, time is a shared commodity. When mistakes are made, show vulnerability and admit you were wrong. It is not rocket science, but rather sound fundamentals that drive decisions and actions based on respect and human need.

• Complex

Leadership is not always easy, yet leaders are the best learners. They often come face to face with decision points and emotional quandaries. The world may not always offer solutions, yet beg a leader to choose the “least bad” option, delivering ultimately a “bad” action. It may be difficult in this case to earn credibility, yet with full communication of the reason why choices were taken, based on the achievement of “least bad” consequences, trust will slowly seep through.

– Credibility will never be earned from doing nothing on a long-term basis; credibility feeds on action, not inaction. When tough choices exist, and others are still not believing, ask them one simple question: what would you do if you were me?

– Credibility is earned when the reality of “behind-the-scenes” is scrutinised and squeaky clean insights emerge. Take, for example, a business that is extolling virtues of exponential business results, yet many discover achievement was at the expense of resources or people. Team members may have been overworked and underpaid, taxes may have been paid by creating loopholes in the system or thriving communities may have been decimated and become obsolete. Surface level results will no longer earn instant credibility by default.

– Credibility becomes even more complex when an intention is explored. Take, for example, a leader who shares information and trains the people well, in which case it is likely for a win-win common interest of development for all; credibility flows. Another leader may share, yet not openly or fully and may train, yet not consistently, possibly for the intention to attract external validation for himself. Corporate intention is often questioned with some of the more shallow Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives that act as a facade to distract, so unscrupulous corporate behaviour will not be uncovered. Will the investment of time, money and effort shine for a short time or sustain and propel both parties into more opportunity?

A legend of credibility

David Bowie was a performing arts guru, forging credibility at each and every turn of his career. He promised ubiquity and omnipresence and delivered ubiquity and omnipresence. He promised innovation and delivered innovation. He promised a life full of surprise and embedded that right to the very end. His message was clear, his reputation solid and millions around the world came to trust, understand, depend upon and follow him.

To coin some famed Bowie wisdom: “the truth of course is that there is no journey. We are arriving and departing all at the same time”. Corporate credibility is not about arriving at leadership, departing from leadership, it simply is the foundation of leadership. How much credibility do you have banked?

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