

# AXIS *of* INFLUENCE

*How Credibility and Likeability  
Intersect to Drive Success*



MICHAEL LOVAS  
PAM HOLLOWAY

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Michael Lovas & Pam Holloway



New York

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# Introduction

The axis we refer to in the title is a standard X/Y axis, but it is populated by very uncommon elements. If you picture X as Credibility and Y as Likeability, you can actually track or measure how effective you are with your chosen target audiences. The more you have of each, the more influential you can be. The more influential you are, the more successful you can become.

I suppose we all find ourselves from time to time showing off our knowledge, which might get us points in Credibility but not in Likeability. Other times we charm people with our jokes or bright smile, which may score us Likeability points but do nothing for our Credibility. Only when we combine both sides of the axis do we find ourselves at our most powerful. To dominate our markets, we must show ourselves as being high in Likeability and high in Credibility at the same time.

In the early nineties I (ML) began writing about Credibility. I simply did what I thought was logical. I interviewed people I perceived as highly credible and asked them two questions: How did you get there (in other words, what did you do to establish your Credibility)? And what impact did it have on your bottom line? The answers were consistent from everyone.

Each person said that writing a book had the biggest impact on his or her Credibility. Those who hadn't yet published their book noted that articles, reports, white papers or delivering speeches had served to build their Credibility. The consistent answer to bottom-line impact was 50 percent. Their businesses improved by 50 percent as a direct result of these Credibility activities. They had achieved one part of the Axis of Influence.

This information prompted me to combine my marketing, writing and coaching skills into a new company called Credibility Marketing. For more than a decade we focused on helping professionals demonstrate their Credibility. The majority of people we worked with were in fact credible, but suffered from a disconnect between perception and reality. In other words, their Credibility was not obvious to the people they were looking to attract.

We helped solve that disconnect by getting the expertise out of their heads and into a form they could use. We showed them how to use their Credibility as a differentiator. We helped them transition from *chase* marketing to *attract* marketing. When Credibility Marketing is used effectively, it means clients find you and self-select to do business with you. This is vastly preferable to the alternative—you continually chasing after people, hoping to find those who will buy what you're selling. Credibility Marketing is a much more effective approach, isn't it?

We started writing a book on Credibility in the early nineties but set it aside because we weren't able to find enough hard evidence to substantiate the impact of Credibility. As compelling as it is, anecdotal evidence by itself is really of little value. This began to change in 1995–96 with the publication of Kouzes' and Posner's book *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose it, Why People Demand It*. Their book is more for managers rather than sales professionals, but it helped the concept of Credibility gain a foothold. Over time researchers began to take a scientific look at related concepts including perceptions of competence and trustworthiness.

We continued to write about Credibility. We also began to develop tools and techniques that we taught in our classes and used in our coaching. Although we had many success stories, we had a sense that something was missing. We began to ask ourselves, "Is Credibility enough?"

We decided to take an even closer look at the characteristics of the highly successful and see if we could identify the *what else*. After analyzing many world-class professionals, we found the missing ingredient. It is *Likeability*.

Like us, I'm sure you know people who are highly credible but, for whatever reason, just aren't particularly likeable. Likewise you know people who are likeable but not particularly credible. It's the combination of Credibility and Likeability that separates the great from the pretty good.

With that bit of wisdom in mind, we decided to address both topics in this book. They are in fact two sides of the *success equation*—sort of the yin and yang of success in business relationships. They are also related in two other ways: the determination of both is made primarily by other people, not you; and the determination is made quickly in the other person's subconscious mind.

Because the subconscious is a messy, illogical environment where subjective perception is more important than reality, the determination of your Credibility and Likeability is not always logical. Perhaps the most important nugget of truth in this book is that the actual levels of your Credibility and Likeability are secondary to what other people perceive about you. Their perception is reality.

If you want to understand how to improve the way other people see, hear and experience you, then you're in luck. That's exactly what you're going to learn in these pages.

As coaches, consultants and trainers, we love helping professionals improve their Credibility and Likeability. We believe it's where the real action is! We wish you the best in your own quest to become more credible and likeable.

— Michael Lovas and Pam Holloway

## **Chapter 2: The Process:**

### **Trust + Likeability + Credibility = Influence**

In March 2008 I (ML) was consulting with a military contractor in Iraq. The contractor was asking about Credibility, specifically how he could prove his Credibility to the Iraqi Army, so they would take his advice. I suggested that he may not be aware of the process he needed to follow. I explained to him that he probably had already demonstrated his competence, but for his work showing competence was putting the cart in front of the Hummer. It wasn't his competence that the Iraqis questioned; it was his trustworthiness. He had not yet proved himself trustworthy to them. Without that trust, they would find him and his advice suspect. Without that trust, they would not be able to predict with certainty that his advice would be appropriate to them 100 percent of the time. There would always be the question—would he sell them out?

In a situation like that, the bottom line is a bit more serious than in a retail-selling situation. Let's say that contractor gained trust and then did not live up to it. In Iraq, he could get shot. What about in the States? There is an argument to be made that the Bush administration failed to live up to its promise, and that's why the Democrats did so well in the 2008 election. What about in American

business? What if your firm provides flood insurance but cancels policies when claims are filed? What if your firm provides credit to consumers and cancels the accounts of people with excellent credit? Don't those situations paint a picture of businesses that have failed to live up to the promise of trustworthiness? Have they not breached the trust? Don't they lose any Credibility?

Let's apply that lesson to you and your business. Most of us have met people who are knowledgeable and competent, but we don't care to do business with them. There's just something about them that causes us to keep them at arm's length. This is generally an issue of trust. Trust is fundamental to both Likeability and Credibility:

- Trust is your ticket. Without it, you can't get into the show.
- Once you prove that you're trustworthy, you'll find that both Likeability and Credibility are possible.
- All the Credibility in the world is for naught if you can't make yourself likeable to the people you want to influence.
- When you can combine trust, Likeability and Credibility, you will become the most powerful force.

Likeability and Credibility represent the fulcrum where business teeters one way or the other. Your own business goes up or down based on how adroit you are at building and using your Likeability and Credibility. The question everyone asks is, "How can I get these qualities?" The answer is you don't get them; they're not the result of an event. Instead, you develop them. They are part of a process—a process that begins with trust.

If I trust you, I will be comfortable enough to engage with you a little longer and see if I like you. If I like you, then I'll engage a bit longer and give you a chance to demonstrate your Credibility. If I

perceive you as both likeable and credible, you have doubled the odds that I will want to do business with you.

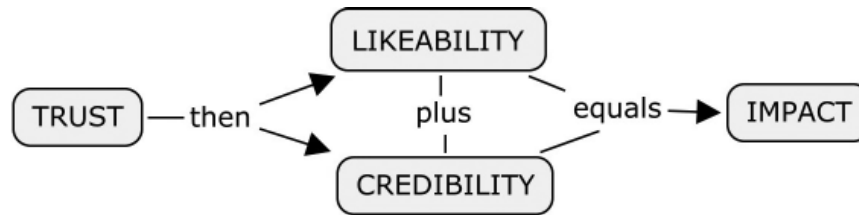


Figure 2-1: Likeability-Credibility Process

We can use that as a formula. Without trust, you won't get far in business. Can you succeed in business if you are perceived as credible but not likeable or likeable but not credible? The answer is "Yes, but ...". If you are credible but lack Likeability, can you be successful? Yes, but not if your business is heavily dependent on relationships. If you are likeable but not perceived as particularly credible, can you be successful? Yes, but not if your business depends on high levels of knowledge and expertise.

*Likeability truly is the wild card here.* Many people argue that Likeability is not an essential ingredient for success in some professions. Interestingly, the legal profession is the most common example put forth. Let's look deeper into this question. When I hire a lawyer to defend me, or a surgeon to operate on me, or a consultant to revamp my business processes, I simply do not have to like them, as long as they implement their area of expertise.

The question is: if my lawyer were more likeable in addition to being credible, would that improve his or her effectiveness? It would if he or she had to present our case to a judge or jury or anyone else. It certainly influences whether or not I want to spend time around him or her. And that influences whether or not I am likely

to continue to do business with him or her and recommend him or her to my network of colleagues. The same goes for the surgeon, the consultant and any other professional.

The point is the level of success you achieve and the sustainability of that success are directly tied to both Likeability and Credibility. Without both, you are limited in how far you can go. Put the two together and watch your results spike!

This will make even more sense when we look *under the hood* and see what actually goes on in the brain when people first meet you and make subconscious decisions about you—your trustworthiness, Likeability, and Credibility.

# About the Authors



**Michael Lovas** is the author of nine books, currently writes three columns, and has written more than a thousand articles on Professional Credibility and Psychological Communication in the financial industry. His work is found in *Financial Planning*, *Morningstar Advisor*, *ProducersWeb*, *Horseshmouth*, *Sales & Marketing Management*, *Free ERISA*, and dozens of others.

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Michael and Pam are co-founders and principals of About People, a unique consultancy serving the financial service industry.

Their book are deeply researched and the results proven before being published. If you like what you see here, you will love AboutPeople books! Available at [www.aboutpeople.com](http://www.aboutpeople.com) and at Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble bookstores.

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