



## Where Are You on the Credibility Scale? by Michael Lovas

The Washington Times recently published the findings from a fascinating survey released by list Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The research involved several thousand in-depth interviews and produced an index that rates public figures according to their perceived credibility.

Professional athletes fared very badly, but they outranked political party leaders, PR specialists, entertainers and TV-radio talk show hosts, who ranked last. Can you see why? All those people have an agenda. Why would you trust someone whose goal it is to satisfy his or her own personal objectives instead of yours? Flatly, you wouldn't, and thousands of people indicated that in this study.

The research team spent five years on this survey and produced 5,000 pages of material. The team found that credibility was complex and full of intangibles: demographics, attitudes, peer influence, life experience, ideology and civic involvement. Essentially what it means is that for a spokesperson to be seen as credible, he or she must be perceived as honest, competent and a leader.

Because Americans look to different people for guidance and information, it's possible for you to be a highly credible spokesperson. However, the Credibility Index released by the PRSA does not include insurance agents, brokers or financial planners. Why do you think that is?

The following is the order of credibility as determined by several thousand Americans. Where would you rate yourself?

1. Supreme Court justice
2. Teacher
3. National expert
4. Member of the armed forces
5. Local business owner
6. Ordinary citizen
7. Local religious leader
8. High-ranking military officer
9. School official
10. National leader with shared traits
11. National religious leader
12. Network TV news anchor
13. Governor
14. Local business representative
15. Local newspaper or TV reporter
16. National civil rights leader
17. Locally elected council member
18. U.S. senator
19. Nationally syndicated columnist
20. Mayor of a big city
21. Head of state-level agency
22. Head of a local-level agency
23. Reporter for large newspaper or magazine
24. U.S. congressman
25. Head of a large corporation
26. National Credibility Index
27. Local civil rights leader
28. U.S. vice president
29. Head of national association
30. Community activist
31. Wall Street executive
32. Head of a presidential advisory board
33. U.S. president
34. Member of presidential Cabinet
35. Pollster
36. Student activist
37. Local labor union leader
38. Candidate for public office
39. Head of national labor union
40. Famous athlete
41. Head of national interest group

42. Political party leader
43. Public relations specialist
44. Famous entertainer
45. TV or radio talk show host

What's missing from that list? Bail Bondsman? Musician? Banker? Psychologist? Graphic Artist? Since it also doesn't include agent, planner or broker, it's clear that our industry has some image work to conduct. The first question I see is a dangerous one. Will we initiate a PR campaign? Begin an image cover-up? Or will we begin to show ourselves as who we are to our prospects?

That opens another dangerous question. If we are the people responsible for the financial security of Americans, are we truly in possession of honesty, competence and leadership? Probably. But, let's look at each one and figure it out.

**Honesty.** On a scale of 1-10, where do you rate yourself? It's easy to be honest about things that don't matter. It becomes harder when we stand to lose or suffer as a result of our honesty.

**Competence.** It's difficult to remain in this industry without taking a lot of CE classes. So, the competence issue would seem to be a moot point. But let's explore it a little further. Are you committed to continuing to learn and get better? Would you take classes that were not mandated? As you answer that question, look at the paragraph above.

**Leadership.** This element of Credibility is the most difficult one to possess. It doesn't refer to the title of manager or director on your business card. It refers to your emotional evolution, courage and ability to communicate with different kinds of people. It has the look and feel of selflessness.

**Here's the test question.** Are you now taking a class in self development or self growth? Reading a book does not count. If you answer No, you must reassess your honesty and your commitment to learning and getting better. Remember, it's easy to be honest about things that don't matter. It's easy to claim honesty when it doesn't involve taking any action. But Credibility requires action because that's the true test of intentions and belief systems.

If you'd like to know more about personal growth and leadership development, just give me a call. I'd love to give you some options.

**Sources:**

The Washington Times, 07-08-1999, pp A8.  
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).  
National Credibility Index  
Credibility by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner

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