

Likeability: It's an Inside Job

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Except for functional sociopaths, everyone wants to be liked. Yet, despite this innate desire to be liked, we often, unwittingly, behave in ways that make us unlikeable. There are many dictionary definitions of likeability but my favorite comes from author Tim Sanders who describes likeability as “an ability to create positive attitudes in other people.”

The business case for likeability is strong. As an example, a Harvard Business Review article entitled [*“Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, and the Formation of Social Networks,”*](#) looks at how people choose those they work with. The research refers to the informal social networks that evolve at work and that are vital for getting things done in today’s collaborative business environments. It shows that people choose who they partner with at the office according to two criteria. One is job competence (Does Joe know what he’s doing?). The other is likeability (Is Joe enjoyable to work with?). The evidence is strong that personal feelings regarding a person’s likeability play a pivotal role in forming job-oriented relationships and informal networks that are crucial for the completion of tasks. In fact, likeability is so powerful that in many cases, it will trump competence!

Whether you are a sales person, a business owner, a leader or a receptionist, an absence of likeability is a social handicap, one that can hinder your effective functioning in both, your personal and professional life. This article is not about faking likeability by showing up in a shrink-wrapped version of ourselves, complete with a fake 500 watt smile, while feigning interest in others. People see through this veneer very quickly anyway. This article is about developing genuine likeability which can only come from deep within, from who we are when no one is looking.

So what can we do to be more likeable? Here are a few tips:

Assess your likeability. Take a moment to complete this free, online [*likeability self-assessment*](#). If your score is high, congratulate yourself. Perhaps you can mentor someone. If your score is low, consider incorporating some of the elements of likeability in your every day behavior with colleagues and in your personal relationships. In particular, focus on eliminating any unlikeability aspects. Choose one to

concentrate on and keep practicing it until it becomes a part of your operating system. For example, “I talk more than I listen.” If this describes you, consider being the last one to speak in a meeting, once in a while, and see what happens.

Cultivate an emotionally attractive personality. Are you so engrossed that you may unwittingly appear cold and impersonal to others? Are you buried in your Blackberry while someone is talking to you? We can get so task-focused at times that we end up paying scant attention to others’ contributions. Make an effort to know more about others and communicate deserved appreciation at every opportunity. Know how to make the first 2 or 3 minutes comfortable for another person or the group so that work can proceed on a positive tone. Be aware of not giving signals of disinterest by fiddling with your papers or looking at your watch. In meetings, do you frequently give people the washboard forehead? Don’t overlook the small interpersonal niceties that are the oil that makes relationships run smoother.

Address people by their name more often. "A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." Dale Carnegie didn’t say this for nothing. Calling someone by their name is the quickest way to shorten the distance between you and that person.

When you greet others, lead with your smile. This is borrowed from Tim Sanders’ [*The Likeability Factor: How to Boost Your L-Factor & Achieve Your Life’s Dreams*](#). In his book, Sanders unveils the following four elements of personality that are essential for being perceived as likeable:

Friendliness (Communicating liking and openness to others)

Relevance (Connecting with others’ interests, wants and needs)

Empathy (Recognizing, acknowledging and experiencing others’ feelings)

Realness (Your integrity that stands behind your likeability & guarantees its authenticity)

Be likeable in your online community. We all share an innate need for social connection—being noticed, appreciated, having a sense that others care about what we are doing. The same applies to our virtual relationships. Make an effort to support those in your social network. It takes a second to press a

“Like” button or re-tweet an article you enjoyed. Once in a while, leave a comment on a blog that you found useful. If your habitual response to a blog topic, however, is to simply add a link about your own treatment of the same topic, then consider that you may be the equivalent of the conversation stealer, who interjects his own story to change the focus of the conversation to himself. As well, consider including, in your blog, links to useful articles posted by others, even if the posts happen to be those of competitors. Paradoxically, the more we shine the light on others, the more we are noticed. Share generously online: don’t withhold your best content. This is coming from a place of abundance, a magnificent force. Observe Twitter etiquette. To that end, read Guy Kawasaki’s article: [How to Avoid Twitter Cluelessness](#).

Handle criticism with velvet gloves. In the privacy of our hearts, none of us likes to be criticized. Consider first of all if delivering a judgment on the faults and actions of someone else is more about you than about them. Emmet Fox put it brilliantly: “Criticism is an indirect form of self-boasting.” If the criticism is essential and a part of getting the job done, then follow a few good rules: Focus your comments on the work or project and not the individual; keep it succinct—no lecturing; phrase it in positive terms: this means focusing on what the person needs to do rather than on what the person is doing wrong; point to the benefits, the same way you would do if you were selling something.

Add emotional value to all of your transactions with clients. Emotional value is the monetary worth of feelings when customers have a positive experience with your organization. This includes not only products but contacts with people and services. As Janelle Barlow and Dianna Maul explain in [Emotional Value: Creating Strong Bonds with Your Customers](#), customers always have feelings, sometimes intense, other times barely perceptible, when they make purchases or engage in transactions. That’s why it is imperative that an organization establishes a company-wide ethos that stresses creating positive emotional states for employees and clients. Unhappy employees cannot add emotional value to customers. Friendliness and empathy, essential elements of likeability, are central to adding emotional value. The book includes a brief test for assessing the quality of your organization’s empathy. For example, “What is the impression your organization creates by the speed with which you respond to customers?”

Don’t hire malcontents. These are unlikeable people who seem to be in a perpetual bad disposition and are a vexation to all those who have to work with them. They scare customers off, cause divisiveness,

affect productivity and are often the cause for losing good people on the team. Get all those in charge of recruiting to understand the importance of hiring for both competence AND likeability, for every position in the company. Consider that one of your most important jobs as a manager is to hire the right people. Get involved in the hiring process and involve others. A negative person can fool one interviewer and pass through the corporate filter, but it is not likely that he will succeed in fooling an entire team.

Handle complaints with grace. It's a known fact that we prefer to buy from people we like. And the litmus test of our likeability is our behavior when things go wrong. How you make a person feel when they are seeking redress is a key determinant of whether or not you will see them again.

Likeability is just too important to dismiss in our harried lives. The more we are liked, the easier it is to have a positive effect on others and our organizations. Being likeable has a ricocheting effect on us and our ability to accomplish things and succeed, in both our personal and professional life. Whether we are dealing with a desk clerk, a shopkeeper, a teacher, a senior leader, or a professional—from the boiler room to the boardroom—likeability is everyone's business. And the only way to achieve it is by genuinely working on increasing our emotional worth, for ourselves and for those around us. Likeability is an inside job.

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