



Do your partners trust you? Why should they?

By John A. Gentle, DLP

CREDIBILITY IS AN INTERESTING WORD. It has its roots from the Latin “credito,” meaning to entrust to another or to believe. Credibility was defined in 1954 as “inspiring or having the capacity for belief.” What outward manifestations do you and your company consistently display that allows others to trust you? Or conversely, what actions have sabotaged your efforts to build credibility?

Recently, I read about a community college that had just lost its accreditation for its nursing program. Seems as if the college had been advised of shortcomings two years ago by the accrediting authority; and while it did some work internally, they never communicated their actions and plans back to the authority.

A major shortcoming was the fact that the school had too few instructors without advanced degrees. Advanced degrees means higher costs, something that most organizations are looking to avoid these days. Not hearing anything back from the college over the time period, the authority notified the college two months before the start of school this fall that their accreditation had been withdrawn.

The issue of credibility comes into play because the college chose not to tell its student body of the lost accreditation until two months after school started. Students were outraged—and rightfully so. While the college still had accreditation within the state, their program was not recognized outside the state. So those students who were already in the program and had planned on moving out of state after school are now trapped without credentials.

There are several takeaways from this story. Besides the fact that the school had poor process, the first and foremost issue is trust. Your business partners need to be able to trust you and be able to do so consistently. Trust is not generated from a single act, but comes about over a period of time through a series of demonstrable actions—either

good or bad, inadvertent or orchestrated.

The second issue, which was the underlying factor, was that the school apparently didn’t have the depth of talent needed to satisfy the accrediting authorities. This is a major problem for all companies. Baby boomers who spent years in the practice of their vocation are being lost at a rapid rate to retirement. This group is being replaced with many intelligent individuals who do not understand the industry but are given short-term development experiences and challenged to take cost out of the department. But sometimes, for more immediate cost savings, a less-seasoned professional is given greater responsibilities and challenged to drive cost out.

Assuming that you actually care about your credibility, the first action that should be undertaken is to talk with your business partners about their perception of you, your team, and your company—yes,

all three. And while we would hope that the results are consistent across the board, you may be surprised to learn that they are not.

Someone promises one thing and another department does not

fulfill that commitment. Or perhaps you promise something and break your word at a later point in time; or maybe a shortfall in experience has led you to make decision(s) that are detrimental to your carriers and subsequently to your company. After garnering feedback from your carriers, the carriers are then asked for examples of what hallmark companies have done to earn their trust.

All of this will be for naught if you don’t plan on acting on the information that you have asked for. In fact, if that’s the case, it would have been better for you not to have journeyed down this path in the first place.

Relationship management is critical to the success of every company. Suppliers are looking for credibility and consistency of approach from you, your team, and your company. Good suppliers know what to look for and seldom allow themselves to get trapped. If you want good suppliers take heed; if you don’t care, you may wind up working with suppliers that don’t trust you any more than you trust them. And that’s not good for your company or your reputation—a reputation will follow you wherever you go. ■

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