

Your Influence Depends on Believability

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



Have you ever struggled to gain buy-in for an idea? Or to sell a product or service? Or persuade a friend or family member to change their behavior in some way? Or help someone reframe how they think about something? If you think about it, you probably do it every day. If you are in a position of leadership in your workplace, family, or community, you probably spend about 75 percent of your time communicating with the intent to influence in some way.

There are many attributes to being a good communicator, and influencer in particular. People skilled in persuasion are great listeners. They are empathetic. They are articulate. They make people feel heard and valued. Perhaps most importantly, they start their conversations and presentations with the “why”. They capture their audience’s buy in for the problem to solve or opportunity to leverage. Yet, there is another attribute of great influencers that is not so obvious. Great influencers make their idea, advice, or value proposition believable.

For example, if you are talking to someone about improving their health, you might spend a lot of time on *why* they need to go on a diet. You would probably also spend time talking about *what* to eat. But would you give equal attention to making the diet believable? In other words, would you talk about how likely the diet is to work for them and the probability of them receiving the benefits the diet would offer?

Making your message believable is crucial to being an effective influencer. It shows that you know what you are talking about. It reassures your audience that something isn’t just theory. It inspires hope instead of skepticism. When you take responsibility for making a message believable as opposed to letting it be up to your audience, you are helping them overcome their natural human tendency to be question something’s validity. You then speak from a position of experience and expertise rather than merely opinion. You are more likely to be trusted. As the American Broadcast Journalist [Edward R. Murrow](#) said, “making something believable is part of being truthful.”

How do you make your points real and believable? Great communicators follow these three principles:

1. Be truthful and authentic.
2. Validate that others have experienced the benefits you are communicating.
3. Share how the benefits can happen directly to them.

Being believable requires being real. And being real starts with being truthful and authentic, which by the way also underpin trust and credibility. If you think about the opposite of being believable, that is being unbelievable, the quickest way to be unbelievable is to hide. If you think about people you don’t trust, you probably not only question their honesty, you probably don’t feel you truly know them. Maybe they seem too polished or their words are too rehearsed. Or they are too quiet or dodge questions. They may put up a façade that you can’t see through so you don’t feel you know them. So, you don’t trust them.

To be real and connect with your audience, reveal yourself. Share your own personal experiences. Share your own lessons learned. If you made a mistake that is relevant to the current topic, share it. Stick to the

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facts without exaggeration. Don't feel the need to be perfect or all knowing. If you have doubt, it is more credible to say "I don't know" than to dance around with a vague answer. Or say "I don't know for certain, but I believe"

To implement principle #2 (communicating general benefits), the most common approach is to give examples. Provide testimonials or references of how your idea, advice, product, or service has helped others. Provide statistics and data from how others have done whatever you are proposing. Provide comparisons of others who have versus have not followed your suggestions. These testimonials, references, examples, statistics, and comparisons help people see how other people have benefited. But they don't answer the question that many people still have: "What about me? I think I'm different. I'm not sure I these benefits apply to me."

To implement principle #3 (sharing direct benefits), turn your attention to how your specific audience will benefit. The most believable you can make something is to show actual progress has already been achieved. There is nothing like progress to validate you are doing something achievable. One way to get people to experience their own progress is to get them to try the idea for a period of time. When someone steps on the scale and sees their drop in weight, the diet is validated. When someone experiences a more positive reaction from a changed behavior, the behavior is validated. Their belief and motivation to continue is set.

In addition to highlighting real progress, make specific comparisons. Using the diet analogy, you might talk about others in their same weight range, age category, and lifestyle who have experienced a certain benefit. Or using a sales example, talk about how others with their same needs and circumstances experience the results you are proposing. And most impactfully, if you have benefited from something yourself, give your own personal testimony.

In summary, "believability" is a critical part of being an effective influencer. It is key to successful selling as well as gaining buy-in for an idea. It is essential to being seen as a trusted advisor. If not already part of your communication approach when communicating with the intent to influence, give it more attention. You might discover that you will come across more as a subject-matter expert than someone trying to sell something or push their own agenda.

For more information on believability, read about the "B" in the AMBITION acronym in the "*Activating Your AMBITION*" framework: <https://alpinelink.com/activating-your-ambition/>.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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