



Richard Keith

# Learning to like your likeability

Richard discusses ‘likeability’ and the need to for it to be genuine.

For many of us, the demonstrating of our competence is central to our act of persuasive communication that we undertake. Isn't that what our counterparties really need to know? Whether presenting, pitching to a potential client or communicating with an investor, the main thing we are trying to get across is that we are (very!) good at what we do, no?

Well, yes but there's more. Whilst demonstrating competence is key, there are other elements that your audience will take into consideration when you are attempting to persuade them of something.



*A real smile goes a long way<sup>2</sup>*

Trustworthiness is crucial, as Des later describes in this journal; but along with that, we believe that *likeability* is also an important factor. (Trust and likeability are distinctly related, but more on that later.)

Robert Cialdini famously unpacked the principal of “liking” when it comes to influencing people. In his book *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion*<sup>1</sup> he details how we are more likely to be persuaded by people we like, and even divided this up into different facets of likability. For example, we are more likely to be persuaded by people who are physically attractive (that is, we like how they look), or people who pay us compliments or even people whom we perceive to be similar to us in various ways.

Then there are the obvious and well-known things that we can do to be more likeable. For example, smiling (appropriately and authentically), open gestures and displaying a genuine interest in your counterparty.

But beyond that, what does likeability really mean in the world of professional communication? When we speak of likeability, we don't mean that you need to become best friends with

your audience so that you can share summer holidays together in a cottage on the coast. Rather, we believe that you must have the capacity to build a genuine rapport with your counterparties, based on real respect, not the faux-respect more commonly associated with fear or obligation. If you think of your own professional experience, the most productive working relationship with colleagues or clients probably had this element at their centre.

*“When we get the sense that someone isn't being genuine we can feel manipulated rather than persuaded”.*

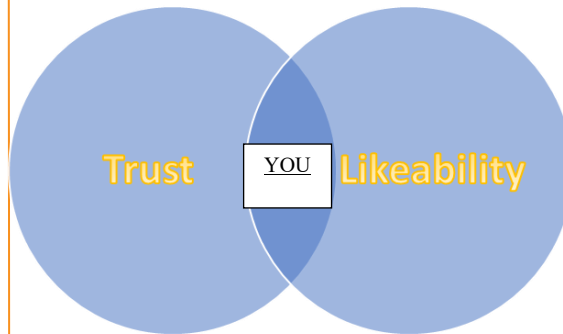
From the above definition, one thing should be clear. We may indeed have different “likes” for we are all different people; but when it comes to interacting with others, we like people who we *believe are genuine*. Authenticity in any interaction is a big driver of the real respect at the core of likeability. When we get the sense that someone isn't being genuine we can feel manipulated rather than persuaded. This can be an issue in pitching, for instance: whilst a

**Advice squeezed straight from the experts**



# Learning to like your likeability (cont...)

team trying to win a piece of work may say one thing – perhaps something along the lines of “*We want to help you solve your problems and mitigate the problems of the future*”, their voice and



*Trust and liability*

visual communication may be conveying something else – possibly something like “*I don’t care particularly about this piece of work*” or worse “*I WANT YOUR MONEY*”. If the audience feel any sort of insincerity from the team pitching, it can lead to a clear dislike for the speakers, and severely reduce the chances of winning the work.

This is where the Venn diagrams of trust and likeability overlap. We are more likely to trust people who we feel are genuine with us, in part because we like their authenticity; and we like people who we feel are genuine with us, in part because we trust their authenticity. If we send people mixed messages – that is, we display discongruent communication – then we risk becoming less trusted and liked.

We at GPB long ago coined the phrase, “*Yourself at your best...even in the toughest situations*”, and this is exactly how you can become more likeable. Being the best version of you, but undeniably, authentically *you*, is a very likeable quality because we respect it. You at your best means you are confident without being arrogant, relaxed without being unprofessional, and pleasant without lacking authority.

Ah, authority. The mystical element of gravitas that we so desperately want,

but can feel so elusive. Often we have advised clients on the need for likeability in persuasion, and often we are told in return that to do so would sacrifice authority. Does that have to be the case?

Here it is all about balance and flexing your communication. Really great communicators know that you cannot demonstrate your likeability, trustworthiness and competence at exactly the same time all the time; they know, rather, that successful persuasive communication should *balance these overall*.

If you think of the entirety of your 20 minute pitch or presentation, and the Q&A that follows, it becomes easier to understand that the overall impression that the audience takes away must be the sum of the component parts – your likeability, trustworthiness, competence, along with your authority and dynamism, all underpinned by authenticity.

Being very good at your job is important; and helping people understand how good you are is also important. But don’t feel you have to sacrifice genuine likeability in your communication, it may be more valuable in achieving your goals than you think.

By Richard Keith

#### References

1. Cialdini, B., 1993. *Influence (rev): The Psychology of Persuasion*.
2. Image: <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/commercial-use>

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