

Skills 360 – How to Sound Credible (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you ever notice when someone talks about himself too much? How does that make you feel about the person?
2. Do you ever exaggerate? Or do you tend to report facts and ideas accurately?
3. What do you think about the “power of positive thinking?” Is it a good idea to ignore negative ideas and focus only on positive ones?

Vocabulary

Exaggeration: making something seem bigger, greater, smaller, or more important than it really is; “Come on Todd, don’t you think it’s a terrible exaggeration to say that we’ve got 75% market share? It’s more like 25%.”

Straight up: open and honest; “All right, let’s be straight up here: what’s really making the staff so unhappy with their jobs?”

Superlatives: the superlative form of an adjective or adverb expresses the idea of “most,” or more than all others; “I’m glad to see so many superlatives used in reviews of our new product, like *the best* and *the most reliable*.”

To debrief: to discuss or review something after it is completed; “That sales meeting sure was stressful... how about we go for coffee and just debrief for a bit?”

Attendance: how many people are present at an event or group setting; “Attendance at our annual conference is usually about 2,000, but this year we’re expecting even more people.”

Blanket statement: a general statement about a group of people or things, usually without evidence; “To say that tech entrepreneurs are short-sighted and greedy is a pretty unfair blanket statement.”

To ramble on: to talk about something for a long time in a confusing or annoying way; “Harold has to learn how to give short and concise presentations, rather than rambling on for an hour and putting everyone to sleep.”

Ignorance: lack of knowledge; “Well, I’d like to take the position in Spain, but my ignorance of the culture and language would make it really difficult.”

Inconsistency: "inconsistency" is when ideas, behavior, or beliefs are not always the same or in agreement; "I'm concerned about Frida's inconsistency; one day she supports the new ad concept and the next she's arguing against it."

To stick to something: to continue with a plan, idea, habit, or way of doing something; "To really make your social media plan work, you've got to stick to it for a year or more."

To backtrack: to return to something discussed before or to change your opinion or ideas about something; "It looks like management is backtracking on their promise of pay raises because they money just isn't there."

Optimism: the belief or attitude that good things will happen; "I'm not sure Jay's optimism is justified: we've posted a loss in the past four quarters."

Peachy: nice or excellent; "Oh hey Dale, yeah, things are just peachy here in Toledo. Sales are up, and everyone's happy."

To face up to something: to accept or acknowledge a difficult situation; "Sooner or later, we're going to have to face up to the fact that our overhead is just far too high."

To open up: to speak honestly about something; "If a manager can open up to his employees, he will build trust and receive honest input in return."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to talk about how you can sound more credible or believable.

In the last lesson, we looked at what you should say to sound credible. In this lesson, we're going to take a look at what *not* to say. In other words, there are some things that can damage your credibility. These are habits or expressions that will make people trust you less, not more.

One thing that makes you sound *less* credible is talking about yourself too much. The words "I" and "me" are dangerous if you use them too much. Boasting about what you've done, and what you know, or who you know, won't make most people trust you more. All right, it might work for *some* politicians with *some* listeners. But for the most part, talking at length about how great you are is not a good idea.

Another thing to avoid is **exaggeration**. If your company earned \$800,000, don't say "We've made millions of dollars." And if there have been a few dozen complaints, don't say there have been hundreds, or thousands, of complaints. Just be **straight up** with people. Tell them the truth, then explain why it matters. Exaggerating for emotional effect does *not* make you sound more credible.

A related habit is using too many **superlatives** and other extreme language. Superlatives are words like "the most" or "the best" or "the worst" or "the first." And other extreme language includes "always" and "never." I mean, if you're **debriefing** after a corporate event that didn't go too well, what do you think sounds more credible? The person who says "Never in my life have I experienced such a bad event. It was the worst failure in our company's history." Or the person who says "**Attendance** wasn't as high as we had hoped and overall we need to do a better job of preparation and planning."

Well, that second statement actually gives *evidence*. That is, it doesn't just make **blanket statements**, it talks about specifics, like "evidence" and "planning." Giving evidence and providing specifics sounds far more credible than general statements using extreme language.

So, what if you don't have any evidence or don't know any specifics? Well then you shouldn't be talking about things you don't understand. And there's nothing wrong with admitting it. The person who says "I really don't know about that" enjoys greater credibility than the person who **rambles on** despite his **ignorance**.

One of the problems with rambling is that it leads to **inconsistency**. One day you say this, the next you say that. And pretty soon people don't know what you actually think, and they doubt you really know what you're talking about. In other words, you have no credibility. But if you're prepared – like I suggested in our last lesson – and you **stick to** what you know, then you won't have to **backtrack**. There's nothing worse than having to say "Yeah, well, what I said before isn't quite true."

Now, you've probably heard about "the power of positive thinking?" Or you've read that [optimism](#) leads to success and that focusing on the negatives will lead to failure? Well, positive thinking is great. But you can't deny it: not everything is perfect. And the person who stands up and says everything is [peachy](#) when it's clearly not can't really be trusted. You'll be far more credible if you can [face up to reality](#). So, rather than saying "Oh don't worry, everything with the new staff will work out great," you might want [to face reality](#) with "Yes, there are some problems, and we need to talk about them."

Okay, there's one more little thing I want to warn you against. It's an expression that people sometimes use to introduce bad news or an opinion that not everyone agrees with. That expression is "To be honest." Can you see the problem with this expression? If someone suddenly says they're being honest, what does it mean about the other things they talk about? Are they usually *not* honest, but now suddenly they want to [open up](#) and tell the truth? No, being credible means that people believe you're honest without you having to announce it.

All right, how about a recap? I've talked about some of the things you should avoid, like talking about yourself too much, exaggerating, and using extreme language. I've also suggested knowing what you are talking about and relying on facts and evidence. And finally, I've cautioned against being *too* optimistic. Now, if it seems like sounding more credible takes more work, well perhaps it does. Nothing comes easy, especially trust and respect... Believe me!

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [BusinessEnglishPod.com](#) website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. Which of the following should you *not* do if you want to sound more credible?
[Select all that apply]
 - A Tell people the truth.
 - B Use "I" and "me" a lot.
 - C Exaggerate for emotional effect.
 - D Explain why an idea or fact matters.
 - E Talk about what and who you know.

2. Which of the following is an example of what you *should* say when discussing a plan you don't like?
 - A "To tell the truth, this is probably the worst plan we could come up with."
 - B "In my opinion, this would never work in a million years."
 - C "This plan looks like the most expensive with the least impact."
 - D "I think the plan's timeline isn't very realistic and the budget is too high."

3. If you don't have a lot of knowledge about something, what should you do?
 - A Use extreme language to talk about it.
 - B Confess your ignorance.
 - C Try your best to make people believe you understand the issues.
 - D Limit yourself to general statements.

4. Which of the following statements would likely damage your credibility?
[Select all that apply]
 - A "I stand by what I said before about this issue."
 - B "Well, I'm not sure what I said before, but now I don't support it."
 - C "I don't have quite enough information to say what I think."
 - D "I know I said it's a bad idea, but let me be honest: I think it's wonderful."

5. Positive thinking...
 - A ... is useful, but dangerous if it means ignoring the negative.
 - B ... is terrible, because it makes other people focus on the negative.
 - C ... leads to success.
 - D ... can help us deal appropriately with negative realities.

6. Which of the following might damage your credibility and should therefore be avoided? [Select all that apply]
 - A The expression "to be honest."
 - B The acknowledgment of difficulties.
 - C Blanket statements.
 - D Overstating or understating facts.
 - E Debriefing after difficult situations.
 - F Using extreme language.
 - G Providing clear specific evidence.
 - H Admitting don't know something.

Review Answers

1. Which of the following should you *not* do if you want to sound more credible?
[choose all that apply]
B Use "I" and "me" a lot
C Exaggerate for emotional effect
E Talk about what and who you know
2. Which of the following is an example of what you *should* say when discussing a plan you don't like?
D "I think the plan's timeline isn't very realistic and the budget is too high."
3. If you don't have a lot of knowledge about something, what should you do?
B Confess your ignorance
4. Which of the following statements would likely damage your credibility?
[choose 2]
B "Well, I'm not sure what I said before, but now I don't support it."
D "I know I said it's a bad idea, but let me be honest: I think it's wonderful."
5. Positive thinking...
A ... is useful, but dangerous if it means ignoring the negative.
6. Which of the following might damage your credibility and should therefore be avoided? [choose all that apply]
A The expression "to be honest"
C Blanket statements
D Overstating or understating facts
F Using extreme language