



Solving the Inexperience, Credibility, and Trust Paradox

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Earlier this year, I had the privilege of presenting a program entitled, “Competitive Advantage,” to 25 or so bright-eyed, ambitious, next-generation leaders at a prestigious insurance company’s new agent school. The focus of my talk was how to outrun the “lack of experience stigma” that creates a credibility, trust, and self-confidence issue for new producers.

If you are an inexperienced insurance and risk management professional, it is essential that you conquer this issue. The purpose of this article is to help you solve the credibility and trust paradox through the realization that you have resources to overcome the experience deficiency. Let’s focus on the following five:

Credibility is not the only element of trust.

While it is logical to think that credibility is the primary factor driving trust, it is important that you realize that there are numerous contributing factors at work. People don’t trust someone just because they are smart and experienced. Rather, trust is the result of a complex set of calculations made by someone when they decide whether to believe you when you say something. Even if you have all the experience in the world, that skill is not enough to guarantee trust. The astute consumer weighs in on a number of factors including, but not limited to believability, empathy, humility, and vulnerability. For example, your willingness to acknowledge

obvious ignorance **creates** rather than destroys credibility. Your ability to say, “I don’t know. But I will get you the answer,” indicates self-confidence and authenticity.

True credibility comes from letting the other person see you as you are – not as you would wish they would see you. Transparency and authenticity trump expertise and experience.

Flaunt your research capabilities.

One of the best ways to build credibility and trust is to develop unique knowledge that makes you a go-to resource for your clients, prospects, and co-workers. You gain respect and gratitude through researching issues with the goal of delivering data, insight, and trends.

If you are a recent graduate, there is no question that you possess a set of freshly honed research skills that you can put to immediate use in a professional context. That being said, attempt to determine what specific types of knowledge your customers and associates crave. Then, build your area of expertise around them. And when you have downtime, read trade journals, relevant industry publications, and watch YouTube videos from industry thought leaders. When you make yourself a resource for solving problems, you build credibility and are seen as a source of information.

Build your network.

Effective networking is not about serving yourself. Rather, finding ways to make other people more successful. Successful producers understand that real networking is about generosity not greed. It is about giving before you receive. Learning how to help others succeed is the key ingredient in your networking process.

The great myth of networking is that you to reach out to others only at the time of need. This is incorrect. Successful individuals built their network long before they needed anything at all. Creating a community is not a short-term solution or one-off activity only to be used when necessary. Building a powerful network is a journey not a destination. It begins with a predetermined plan and a strategy to carry it out. The strategy is built upon the constant process of connecting – of offering and asking for help. When you put people in touch with one another and give your time, expertise, and share freely, the pie gets bigger for everyone.

If you are new to the industry, you should build a deep and varied network of trusted colleagues who will provide you with counsel and advice as you progress at work. These individuals will serve as catalysts and a sounding board on your quest to become a credible and trustworthy source.

Work on your personal brand.

As stated in the May 2017 column, personal brand really does matter. As you build your book of business, you need to communicate a strong personal brand to create trust and attract clients, prospects, and centers of influence.

Personal branding was popularized in an article by Tom Peters first published in *Fast Company Magazine* ("A Brand Called You") in 1997. Peters writes, "Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

The secret to building your personal brand is to figure out what makes you "you." This is the necessary first step to making your personal brand realistic, relatable, and trustworthy. Start by thinking about what you plan to accomplish in the marketplace. Think about what benefit your brand offers and how you are different from your competition. In other words, you need to determine your unique value proposition.

Think about what makes you unique. How do you stand out from the crowd?

Once you've answered this question honestly, you can begin packaging your personal brand to reach prospects, clients, carriers, and colleagues in a way that delights them and keeps them coming back for more.

Building your personal brand stimulates your business and lays the foundation for future success. Your personal brand will grow and evolve over time as your goals change. And that's the beauty of figuring it out. By getting to the core of your passions and your unique value proposition, you are investing in a personal brand that's transparent, relatable, authentic, and trustworthy for the long haul. Your personal brand...an investment in your future working making.

Find a mentor

A mentor is someone with more entrepreneurial business experience than you who serves as a trusted confidant over an extended period of time. Why do they do this? First and foremost, as a way of giving back. They do it because they care about and respect you. They may do it to develop their skills as a teacher, manager, strategist, or coach. And a true mentoring relationship also works in both directions – the mentor learns about new ideas from you, just as you learn timeless wisdom from them.

The mentor's role is to provide an appropriate degree of challenge and support – emotional, technical, and tactical – so that you can build competence and confidence. The mentor is an information source supporting you with decision-making, problem-solving, and ongoing encouragement. His or her non-judgmental approach is most critical as your development hinges upon self-discovery.

How do you go about finding a mentor?

Know Yourself: Consciously think about where you are in your career, and where you would like to be. Assess what type of personality you have, and which personality types complement your style. Consider your strengths and weaknesses and define how a mentor might best guide you.

Keep an open mind as to who this person might be: A mentor is someone who will help you grow in areas which are most important to you. This person is not necessarily your best friend, supervisor, or anyone with a high-ranking title, or even someone in the same business. It is far more important for you to look for someone who exemplifies the traits and skills that you want to adopt.

Identify where you may find a suitable mentor: Good sources of mentors include your management team, industry association, online communities, and professors. You may also wish to consider people in your non-workplace communities such as retirees, local business leaders, and people associated with your hobbies.

Know what you want to achieve from the relationship: This is essential. A clear understanding of your purpose and the desired result will ensure that you find a suitable mentor. Without knowing what you wish to achieve, you will waste your time and that of the mentor. In the best of all worlds, it is not just you who will benefit from the relationship. The mentor will also see the opportunity for personal growth.

Think about people who have been mentors in the past: Whether purposeful or not, you have had prior mentors in the past. Think about people who have mentored you and the qualities that you appreciated most about them. Use these traits as barometers in determining the traits you desire in your new mentor.

You have resources all around you to solve the inexperience, credibility, and trust paradox. These resources will give you a competitive advantage in your quest to become the trusted advisor.

About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.