

# The Credibility Factor

THE SMART WOMAN'S GUIDE TO  
CREATING A MORE POWERFUL IMAGE



## Kim Foley



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# Chapter One

## Claim Your Power and Reach for the Stars

For more than twenty-five years I have been totally smitten with one word. This word has the power to make or break corporate giants, or to sabotage the success of any individual who is trying to get ahead. You cannot be a leader in any arena, you cannot be successful in the business world, and you cannot be successful in your personal relationships without it.

The word is credibility.

Whether you are a successful attorney with a prosperous practice, a stay-at-home Mom getting ready for a return to the workplace, a politician preparing for a campaign, or a creative person pursuing your dreams, and whether you realize it or not, you need to assess and cultivate your credibility.

The notions surrounding this word have tremendous psychological and emotional power, but the word is seldom, if ever, mentioned to most of us while we are growing up. Ask five people what credibility means and you will probably get five different answers.

And yet, the concept of credibility permeates our subconscious.

We are constantly trying to understand the people around us by absorbing concrete information as well as subliminal cues given out by the images they project, and their body language. One of the main reasons we do this is to establish their credibility: Can I trust this person? Is what they are saying true? Do they know what they're talking about?

Since my job as a stylist is to get people ready for their television appearances, credibility is the one word that is foremost in my mind as I am preparing them for the camera. Just as we all do when we meet someone in person, TV viewers are in a constant process of making judgments based on what they are seeing and hearing. They are making important assumptions concerning the level of education, social status, wealth, temperament, health, and the moral and ethical values of the people they see.

This means that as you go about your day—at work, in social situations, at home, and in your neighborhood—the way you present yourself tells people who you are and what’s important to you. Your image—which includes the overall effect of your hair, clothing, makeup, speech, and body language—is one of the most powerful tools you have. It can be used to maximize your potential. Unfortunately, it can also undermine you.

Now, I am the first to acknowledge that in a perfect world we would all be judged on our honesty, our best skills, and our real values, but the sad truth is that often, before we have a chance to demonstrate or share any of those things with others, we are judged, and sometimes dismissed, simply on the basis of the image we present. Study after study has shown this to be true.

This may not be fair, but it is real.

The assumptions others make about our intentions, motivations, our tastes, and our values can keep us from getting the jobs we deserve, the relationships we desire, and the opportunities that we yearn for. In short, they can get in the way of the joyful and successful unfolding of our lives.

Let’s take an example: You’ve decided that you want to interview for a managerial position that requires great organizational skills and reliability. This position is something you really want and know you are qualified for. You submit a resume and get a call asking you to come in for an interview. Here’s where the trouble may start:

- You show up with an impressive resume, but it hasn’t been updated.
- You wear your nicest suit but your shoes are tired and scuffed, and your blouse isn’t ironed.
- You overslept, so you pulled your hair back and just “threw on a little lipstick.”

Because you know you don’t look your best, you find yourself avoiding eye contact with your interviewer. Now your feeling of insecurity about your appearance is affecting your body language too. This cannot help but negatively affect how your interviewer will respond to you. She may think that you are not really interested in the job; she may think you have something to hide; or she may simply think you are painfully shy. Whatever the case, she is not impressed, and you have just blown your opportunity and undermined all the efforts you have made to get to this point.

Successful people know that having a great resume and the right credentials are not necessarily enough to secure the job you want; and that it takes more than fervent desire and commitment to fulfill your dreams and goals, whatever they may be. In order to fulfill your dreams and realize your goals you need the help of other people. And when it comes to getting other people on your side, your physical appearance is one of the most important assets you have. It can also be one of your most dangerous weapons of self-destruction.

Even before you open your mouth to speak, other people will evaluate you based on your Credibility Quotient. Your Credibility Quotient is the sum of all the elements that people use to make assumptions about you, including your overall appearance, cleanliness, hair and makeup, clothing and accessories, body language, and attitude. In this book, you will learn to evaluate your Credibility Quotient, to improve it, and use it to make a powerful and positive impression on the people in your life.

### Evaluate your Credibility Quotient:

- Are you constantly interrupted?
- Do you sometimes feel invisible at business or social events?
- Do you feel that your ideas are not well received by your colleagues or clients?
- Have you been stymied in your efforts to get promoted?
- In stores, do you find that others are waited on ahead of you, even if you were there first?

### Why do so many people sabotage their own best efforts?

Maybe your image just hasn't been something you have thought much about. You're confident about your work and your value as a competent human being, as well as the skills you have to offer the company. So you just get up and put on whatever clothing strikes you as comfortable, or convenient at the moment (or you just put on the only clothes you have that are clean). You know that you are going to impress people with your track record, and what you have to say, not with the way you are dressed and the way you present yourself. *Right? Wrong!*

You know you have the experience and expertise required for this job. But so do other candidates, and your competition may know that image is paramount. So, if you come to the interview looking haphazard, and another candidate looks competent and credible, she is going to get the job. You may have more experience and better skills, but she has shown the interviewer how she would be perceived by clients, and in that very important regard, you just didn't measure up. As a result, hiring you may have been seen as risky, despite your great resume. If, on the other hand, the image you project is as professional as your resume, you are in the best position to maximize your potential and take advantage of the opportunity before you.

Let's take stock of the situation. Consciously or subconsciously, you have chosen the image you now have, and you should know that you can also choose to change your image at any time. However, there are two very important rules to remember when you make the decision to alter your image:

**Rule 1: Your image must be authentic for you.**

No matter what kind of image you want to project—artsy, corporate, sexy, earthy, or something else—it has to truly reflect who you are on the inside or you will not be able to carry it off and you will both feel and look foolish. This does not mean that you will not occasionally be uncomfortable “trying on a new look” at the beginning. If you are making more than one change to your image at a time—for example, both your hair and your makeup—it may take some time to feel comfortable with the “new” person you see in the mirror. That's okay.

**Rule 2: Your image must be appropriate for your environment.**

It's just as disconcerting to see a bride in a bathing suit as it is to see someone at the beach in a business suit. If you are an artist, your creativity should be expressed in your image. If you are in finance, your image must radiate confidence and trust. If you are in direct sales, you need to be approachable and professional.

Beyond that, because you don't function in just one environment, you need to develop the ability to adjust to changing circumstances, often several times within a single day. For example, within one day you may have different clothing for walking the dog, attending a board meeting, supervising the fourth-grade Halloween party, and going to a PTA meeting. The way you dress should always be congruent with the situation you are in.

So the question you always have to ask in preparing your physical presentation is, “What image is going to get me the best results for this particular occasion?” Too many women make the mistake of wearing what they wish was appropriate instead of what really is appropriate. And too many women lose out on unexpected opportunities by dressing in a way that does not invite them.

So how can you get control of the messages you are sending? How are people “reading” you? And how can you determine when you are on-message, and when you are sending mixed, or inappropriate signals?

We have all seen someone who was trying a bit too hard for a certain “look” and ended up looking ridiculous. We’ve also seen people who have what I call tunnel vision: they zero in on one or two areas of their appearance to the exclusion of everything else. You know, the woman who has impeccably groomed and manicured nails but stained, crooked teeth. Or the woman who puts tremendous effort into managing her body weight but has an unflattering hairstyle and hair color. And let’s not forget those who make the right fashion choices but wear inappropriate makeup. The list goes on. We have all met someone about whom we thought, “If she just did this or that, she would really look sharp.”

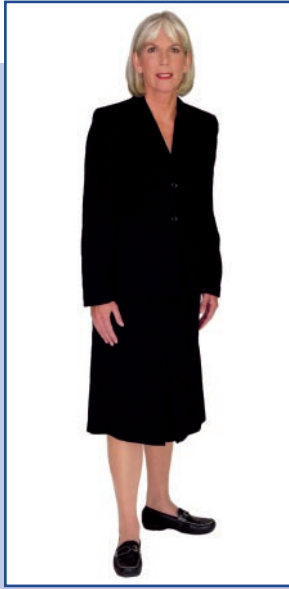
But seldom do we think that tunnel vision applies to us. This is where I can help you: because the one thing that we all lack, at least occasionally, is objectivity.

One of the most important reasons to work with a good fashion stylist or image consultant is to have help in deciphering the language of clothing, and using it to your own best advantage. In this book I will walk you through a self-assessment that may uncover some areas of tunnel vision that you might want to look at more closely.





Let's play a game. It's going to involve making some unfair assumptions about the woman in the photographs below. *(But that's okay: she's a good sport, and we have her permission.)*



Look at each image and ask yourself:

- What is important to this woman?
- Is she confident?
- Is she reliable?
- Is she dynamic?
- Is she timid?

Think of just one word to describe the woman in each photograph.

It's clear that these three images convey completely different messages. Suppose she is applying for a job in a corporate setting. Which woman would you hire?

If you are thinking right about now, "I don't want to be judgmental," then you are missing the point. Because, like it or not, every day, in every situation, you are being judged (and so is everyone else in the world.) So let's learn how you can choose what kinds of judgments are being made about you, and turn the situation to your advantage.

It's important for you to know up-front that cultivating and maintaining your credibility is not a one-time quick fix, and it can't be done in a day. It is a process that involves your heart and soul as well as your body and mind: and it begins with your own tender thoughts of who you are, and who you want to become. It is a process that needs constant tending, and once in a while radical readjustment. It is something that you need to pay attention to all of the time, especially if the fulfillment of your dreams and desires is important to you. It is also something that can become second nature. The time and energy you invest in this process will pay off, big-time, for the rest of your life.

It's worth it!

The process can also be fun, exciting, and rewarding in many ways.

**T**ogether, we are going to dissect every angle and aspect of your credibility. We are going to analyze the way you present yourself, and talk about how to deal with specific issues and challenges that no one else will tell you about. We are also going to identify any unwitting saboteurs that may be keeping you from realizing your fondest dreams.

If you follow the process outlined in this book you will be able to:

- Assess your current wardrobe, and analyze how well or how poorly it is moving you toward the fulfillment of your goals;
- Choose to take control of how you are being perceived;
- Determine where you are going in your life; and
- Plan how you are going to get there.

What's waiting for you on the other side of this process is joy, confidence, abundant opportunities, and a world of exciting possibilities.

Does that sound good to you? Well, okay then, let's get started!