

Reputation vs credibility

While reputation is shallow and fragile, credibility can be transformative. Building it, however, requires honesty, authenticity and vulnerability, writes **ANGELA HEISE**.

There is a lot of talk about people who, on the surface, seemingly fulfil all the criteria of a successful person, and who are even considered role models, be it in law, business, entertainment, politics or social and religious institutions. When it transpires that these upstanding members of the community have a dark side, it often turns out the people around them were aware of it, but never spoke about it or even aided and

abetted. Their dishonest behaviour was simply accepted as the shadowy side of a reputation in need of protection.

Which makes me wonder: what is a reputation worth these days? Is there something else more important than a shiny image?

The dictionary defines reputation as a widely held opinion or belief about someone's characteristics. These days, it is often determined by the regularity and positivity with which a person is mentioned in media outlets, by Google ratings, a great

social media profile with thousands of followers, and the ability to get lots of "likes".

Reputation can easily be manipulated and often is not much more than a marketing and PR persona, a branding exercise to promote a manufactured product which may have very little to do with the actual person behind the mask.

It can be challenging for people to sort out what they should or should not believe. It's easy to take social media posts or gossip magazines as gospels of truth; it's much harder to know who

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actually is the person behind the posts.

Younger people especially are starting to believe they have to be flawless, that they have to live up to the celebrity idol they have put on a pedestal. This can result in dogmatic views and behaviours which, without any informed thinking, simply emulate those of their hero or heroine. So when their idol's mask slips, when they fall from the pedestal, there is either disappointment and anger or total denial and continued blind adoration. On the flip side, there are the cynics who have decided we live in the Matrix, that nothing is real, and that there is no point even trying to be successful as per the criteria defined by people who then violate them. In either case, low self-esteem prevails.

So what is the alternative to reputation, to being your own trumped up facsimile?

Credibility is defined as having a quality to be trusted and believed in, which is dependent on observable action.

A scientist or expert court witness is only credible when the information they share is evidence-based. Unlike reputation, however, credibility is not about hiding flaws; it is about owning them. It's simply about not believing your own hype. It's about being authentic.

Here are some ways to build your credibility so that, before other people start believing in you, you can believe in yourself and then act from a place of genuineness and high self-esteem. This creates congruence and physical, mental and emotional health.

- **Define your ethical values.** Know what you stand for and then live accordingly without the expectation to be perfect. Don't impose your standards on others.
- **Be honest.** When you find yourself judging someone, check how this judgment relates to you. Realise the hypocrisy of espousing standards you may not fulfil yourself.

- **Have respect for others** even if you don't agree with them. Develop the ability to separate the person from the behaviour.
- **Be vulnerable.** This is not about sharing your dramas to elicit sympathy; it's about owning your imperfections, being able to openly talk about your failures as well as your successes from a place of humility rather than self-promotion.
- **Honour your word.** Don't say one thing and do something else. If you change your mind, be open about it; avoid blaming others for supposedly misunderstanding you. Walk your talk.
- **Know how to get back to integrity** when you are in breach of any of the above. Instead of hiding behind self-righteousness and pseudo-apologetic regret, show remorse and make amends.

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