

Report – March 2021

The top 10 characteristics employers and recruiters really want when they say they are looking for credibility

Introduction

Regardless of their location and sector, most employers and recruiters often have a vague definition of the concept of credibility. They, like most people, regardless of their occupation (or whether they're employed or not) say they know what credibility is, but then find it difficult to actually define it.

It becomes even harder to define when you ask them to compare it with other personal attributes and characteristics such as authenticity or integrity.

But most employers and recruiters say they look for, and want, credible staff and new employees. They say they want individuals who have credibility without actually being able to actually say in definite terms what this means.

In actual fact, whilst they say the concept of credibility is important to them (because most people do say it is important), there are actually 10 other personal characteristics that they're really looking for, which for many of them are more (or at least as) important as credibility.

This report, which you are receiving as a thank you for kindly completing the international survey into credibility at www.TheCredibilityIndex.co.uk, details what those 10 characteristics are. It is based on research and discussions with employers and Human Resources (HR) professionals, and direct experience of recruitment and people management.

The top 10 characteristics employers and recruiters are actually looking for

I. Consistency

When an employer or a recruiter initially looks over your CV or resume, one of the first things they are looking for is consistency. They want to see that you have worked in the required field or sector for some time (or at least studied it in some depth if this is the first job you are applying for), and most importantly that you have stayed in that area of expertise or industry during your career.

You may be able to explain why you have previously worked in other sectors, albeit in some cases for a short period of time before you returned to the original field – and this wider experience may actually bring benefits to the company – but employers and recruiters typically are looking for a 'sure thing'; someone who knows the industry inside and out because they have consistently worked within it for years.

They are also looking for consistency in terms of job progression within the industry; that you have grown and been promoted into more senior roles (or those with more responsibility) within the field during your career. This gives them the assurance that you have consistently performed well in previous roles in the sector, as well as gained more knowledge and experience within it.

2. Honesty / Truthfulness

This may seem like a ‘no-brainer’ but employers and recruiters place great value on honesty and truthfulness. They want employees and candidates who always tell them the truth, no matter what, and particularly so when first applying for a job. However, a surprising number of people include mistruths and half-truths in their CVs and resumes, and even give false or misleading answers in interviews, in the hope that they will be selected for the job they have applied for.

But most employers and recruiters are savvy to this, and will often challenge interviewees and push them hard (through asking for examples or specifics of their claims) to get to the truth. But even before the interview stage, employers and recruiters often discount some of the claims made on CVs and resumes because they suspect them to be lies or at the very least, significant exaggerations of the truth. Some employers and recruiters have even moved away from relying on CVs and resumes because of this, instead preferring (and finding more reliable) their own questionnaires and assessment processes to find the best candidates.

Interestingly, many employers are relatively comfortable with their employees not telling the truth (or at least the whole truth) when speaking to prospective and existing customers and clients. Some expect that there has to be a level of exaggeration to win new business and keep existing customers happy, thus indicating that honesty and truthfulness are more important to them (the employers) in their own relationship with the employee rather than the relationship the employee has with clients and prospective customers.

3. Authenticity

Somewhat like credibility, the concept of authenticity can sometimes be hard to define. However, employers and recruiters commonly say that authenticity is a key component of what they are looking for in prospective employees. What they mean by authenticity is someone who is (or appears to be) genuine, and who has elements of many other of the characteristics in this report (such as honesty and believability).

But being authentic, like most of the other characteristics listed here, is not something you necessarily learn to be within a formal education setting like school or university, but rather is something you are or are not. But that is not to say you can’t learn to be more authentic, but this is learnt largely through personal self-development rather than through a formal process.

Employers and recruiters are always looking for evidence of authenticity in candidates, proof that the person they are reading about in a CV or resume, or interviewing face to face, is genuine and sincere. They want people who know themselves well, and act and behave in a way which is authentic and in alignment with their own personal beliefs and values. After all, no one wants to employ someone who is false or less than genuine.

4. Track record

Like consistency within a specific industry, sector, or field, employers and recruiters look for a candidate’s track record when considering their CV or resume. In fact, a candidate’s past experience and achievements (within the relevant area of expertise) is considered one of the most important – if not the most important – factor in deciding whether a candidate should be selected to progress in a recruitment process.

Having solid past experience of doing the job and the activities it entails is exactly what the employer or recruiter is looking for, as it means the candidate will bring well established skills and knowledge to the company, as well as the competencies needed to do the job proficiently. No in-depth (and potentially costly) training is likely to be required for the new employee, because they have done the job before and know it inside out.

Having gained achievements whilst working in a similar (or the same) job elsewhere – such as improving a process, winning new clients, or some other tangible benefit – adds to the track record ‘story’ or narrative, and makes the individual an even stronger candidate for the job.

5. Believability

Ultimately employers and recruiters are never going to select someone for a job if they don’t think they are believable or capable of being believed. A potential candidate could score highly against other job requirements and specifications, and even some of the other characteristics in this report such as track record or reliability, but if they (the employers or recruiters) don’t believe what they say, or don’t think others will believe them, it is unlikely they will be selected to proceed in the recruitment process.

Being believable, like authenticity, is rarely something you learn through formal education, or even in some cases, through past experiences. You are either believable or you’re not. But through personal self-development and learning to be more authentic and genuine, you can increase your level of believability and how much others trust and believe you.

Think about an experience you may have had in a sales environment, perhaps someone ringing you up out of the blue (‘cold calling’ you) or when you went to buy a car (in the UK car salespeople have a fictionalised image of being untruthful and dishonest, and far from believable, although this is often unjust and not warranted). It is likely how much you believed the salesperson had a significant subconscious impact on whether you made the purchase or sales appointment or not. This is because in most cases a person’s believability is highly important to us, and has a significant impact on how much we trust them and what they say.

The same goes for employers and recruiters who need to feel confident that the candidate or new employee is honest and trustworthy.

6. Transparency

Employers and recruiters, like most people, don’t like surprises. They don’t want to find out once a candidate has been recruited that they actually have a history of poor, or even dishonest, behaviour or lack the skills to do the job they were hired to do proficiently. Hence in the recruitment process, they look for candidates who are transparent and open, and they test this by asking probing questions about their experience, achievements, and history.

There is, however, an unwritten acceptance that candidates – like most other people including the employers and recruiters themselves – will sometimes try to cover up, hide, or dismiss elements of their past or gaps in their suitability for the job by not disclosing them or by highlighting other characteristics or achievements which offset the potentially negative points.

Employers and recruiters don’t expect any candidate to be 100% transparent, because people in general rarely are, but they do expect a candidate to be open about themselves and willing to talk

about their positive and negative experiences and traits. It is particularly impressive when a candidate openly and honestly identifies their perceived negative points or areas where further development is needed, and demonstrates how they are addressing these themselves (perhaps by doing a training course online or reading about the issue or practising to make them more competent in that particular area).

7. Competency

The ability of a candidate to do the job advertised competently is a fundamental requirement for employers and recruiters. Having a past history of doing the same, or a very similar job, is a strong indicator that the candidate is competent to perform the new role, however, having qualifications or professional certifications in the subject area adds to the employers and recruiters confidence that they are more than capable of doing the new job.

But competency can also be evidenced through references and testimonials from other people (such as your past employer or former work colleagues), or can be tested through exercises and activities which form part of the recruitment process.

When a candidate doesn't have experience of doing the job before (perhaps because this is their first job or because they have chosen to take a different career path), their competency to do the new job can come from their non-work related activities (such as a hobby or activity they do for fun) or from previous workplace activities in a different job which demonstrate skills and abilities that are useful and important in the new role.

8. Integrity

Integrity, like some of the other characteristics in this report, is often difficult to define in definitive terms. However, many people define it along the lines of having a strong personal moral and ethical code, which dictates how a person behaves and acts.

Employers and recruiters often include integrity as an important requirement in job specifications, particularly for jobs in the charity and social purpose sector. This is because they feel it is important to hire people who share their values and beliefs, and who have their own internal moral 'compass' which directs them to act honestly and in line with their principles (which ideally match those of the employer).

As with some of the other characteristics, integrity is difficult to teach anyone, and isn't specifically taught in formal education or professional settings. However, you can have integrity (and behave with integrity) by aligning your behaviours and thoughts with your inner beliefs and sense of right and wrong.

Employers and recruiters want to see that candidates have integrity evidenced through their past behaviours and actions, sometimes from outside of the work environment. This may include hobbies or recreational activities they do or causes they support either locally, nationally, or internationally.

9. Reliability

It may seem obvious, but employers and recruiters are looking for candidates and employees who are reliable, and can be relied upon to get the job done. Although many employers expect to have to allocate some of their (or their team's) time and resources to supporting employees, the ideal

scenario is for employees to be self-managing and able to do their work proficiently – and without any issues – day in and day out.

An employee who frequently calls in sick or is late into work most days, or fails to deliver to the agreed deadline, is the last thing that an employer wants.

In recruitment processes, some employers and recruiters ask a candidate about their reliability, but it is more common for them to look for evidence of this in their CV or resume, or through references the candidate has been asked to provide. However, gaining or getting definitive proof that a candidate is reliable is hard to achieve, meaning that employers and recruiters often have to rely largely on their best judgement, despite the fact that reliability is an important factor when hiring someone.

10. Knowledge

Knowledge of how to do a job better or knowledge which can increase a company's ability to win more work or perform their activities better is highly sought after by employers and recruiters. Often specialists in a particular field, including highly educated post-graduate students (such as those who have completed a Masters degree or PhD), are brought into companies with very little actual work experience (or experience in that sector) because of the knowledge they have learnt.

The employer or recruiter understands that this knowledge can transform the company's fortunes or give them a competitive edge over their rivals. Due to this, they are sometimes willing to relegate the importance of other significant characteristics (such as track record, integrity, or any of the other characteristics in this report) in order to get the knowledgeable specialist on-board.

Consider the field of IT and Digital where it is not uncommon for companies (including some of the world's biggest and most high profile firms) to actively hire recruits straight from school or college, many of whom lack a significant number of the characteristics highlighted in this report. These recruits are in many cases not assessed against 'usual' job specifications and requirements, but instead assessed for their technical ability and knowledge. In fact, the founders of some of the world's most famous IT and Digital companies were considered 'geeks' by others before they found widespread success (and even in some cases, afterwards), with many considered to be lacking in social and personal skills.

For most employees, or potential employees, having a deep knowledge of a specific topic or in a particular field can largely mean they too can bypass some of the 'usual' requirements for a job, although having the other characteristics (or at least some of them) adds to their appeal to employers and recruiters.

In conclusion

The above 10 characteristics are all top factors for employers and recruiters when they look to hire someone, and are in most cases considered more (or at least as) important as credibility. But it is important to note that when many employers and recruiters define the concept of credibility, they use many of these characteristics to describe what makes someone credible.

The full, more in-depth, findings of the research into credibility will be published in the book 'The Credibility Index'. To receive notifications about the book, or to share your views, please contact us using the contact form on www.TheCredibilityIndex.co.uk.