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## The Likeability Factor

by Ken Embley, CPPA

Are you a likeable person? How much does it matter to you if your boss is a kind person? Would you rather work with someone who knows what they are doing but is a jerk? Alternatively, would you rather be on a project with someone who might be a bit clueless but is likeable?

Do good things happen to likeable people? According to a Harvard Business School study, the answer is YES! A person's likeability is an important factor when it comes to being hired, promoted or able to rally workers—and rallying workers means being a leader.

Are you—am I—a likeable person?

A few months back, I came across a book by Tim Sanders titled ***The Likeability Factor***. The basic premise of the book is that life is a series of popularity contests and the more we are liked—or the higher our ***likeability factor***—the happier our life will be. The author states that the choices other people make influence our health, wealth, and happiness. Decades of research show that people choose who they like (they vote for them, they buy from them, they marry them, and they spend precious time with them). The greater our likeability factor, the greater the probability that we can find success as public managers and leaders.



Are you—am I—a likeable person? The author identifies four critical elements of personality to develop our likeability factor.

***Friendliness***—our ability to ***communicate liking and openness to others***. The author asks, “Have you looked at your own promotional picture?” For example, when under pressure are we able to step outside our body and listen to the tone of our voice? Do we like what we hear? Tone of voice is only one of many means to communicate liking and openness to others.

***Relevance***—our capacity to ***connect with others' interests, wants, and needs***. We become relevant in the lives of others when we learn about their interests, wants and needs.

***Empathy***—our ability to ***recognize, acknowledge, and experience other people's feelings***. In her book about Abraham Lincoln—*Team of Rivals*—Doris Kearns Goodwin states that empathy was Lincoln's greatest leadership trait. Lincoln had a gift—a gift that made it possible to see critical situations through the feelings of others. Lincoln's awkward stature and mannerisms made it difficult for people to approach him and for Lincoln to approach others. However, five minutes of Lincoln listening to the feelings of others produced a lifetime of likeability.

***Realness***—the ***integrity that stands behind our likeability and guarantees its authenticity***. Research and common sense come together on this one. Likeability does not work if we have to pretend because people can tell the difference between sincerity and insincerity.

The author defines ***likeability*** as ***an ability to create positive attitudes in other people through the delivery of emotional and physical benefits***. He goes on to say that...

Someone who is likeable can give you a sense of joy, happiness, relaxation, or rejuvenation. He or she can bring you relief from depression, anxiety, or boredom. In addition, by being likeable, and by generating positive feelings in others, you gain as well. The quality of your life and the strength of your relationships are the product of a choice—but not necessarily your choice. Many of the determiners in your life are the choices that other people make. The more likeable you are, the more likely you are to be on the receiving end of positive choice, from which you benefit.

The observations of Tim Sanders are simple, yet profound. In my opinion, if we can prove to others that our **friendliness**, **relevance**, and **empathy** are **real**, we will be amazed at the difference a high **likeability factor** can make in our lives and in the administration of our public responsibilities.

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