Be Likeable, Be Yourself

Idea In Short

Invest in likeability the way you invest in technical skill. Start with competence and dependability, then give generously, communicate simply and double-down on what makes you different. People listen to, interact with and are persuaded by people they like. Authenticity beats schmoozing every time.

Why Likeability Compounds

Likeability marks nearly every successful consultant. The more people like you, the more they listen, interact and allow themselves to be persuaded. This is neither controversial nor deep. It is simply leverage. An unlikeable consultant fights friction in every meeting, while a likeable one finds doors already open. The habits below come from more than 20 years of corporate observation, and they hold up better than ever.

Start With Substance

Do not be fake. Likeability never requires becoming a schmoozer or a sycophant. Sales veterans learn this early. Clients might know nothing about the product, yet they always know when a seller is lying or lacks belief. Humans are wired to detect fakes. Books such as How To Win Friends And Influence People built an industry on the topic, along with seminars and coaches.1 The foundation stays constant across all of them, and it starts with substance.

Be competent. Know your material, be useful and serve as a resource for others. In business, a person without competence offers nothing to like. You become overhead, which means cost. Be dependable next. Keep promises to your client and your team. In any maturity model of professionalism, dependability sits at level zero, the ground floor. Failing there fails everything. Before becoming a great consultant, become a reliable one.

Slow Down and Give

Busy professionals multitask constantly and sometimes do things poorly. In the rush to clear our plates, we cut corners, stop listening and run roughshod over people. Speed with sloppiness undermines confidence in the work. Stay alert and self-aware, because a manager who keeps catching and fixing your mistakes is counting your remaining days.

Generosity is the counterweight. Life is not about you, as Rick Warren famously opened The Purpose Driven Life.2 Give your time, energy, passion and empathy. Ask colleagues whether you can help with their work. The question feels risky because someone might accept, so ask anyway. Proofread a document, make copies, fetch lunch or write a thank-you note. Small gifts build large accounts.

Self-deprecation belongs in the toolkit too. A willingness to mock yourself disarms a room and signals vulnerability. It reminds everyone that nobody is perfect and lowers collective defenses. Hard lessons teach this. One leader who once drove a teammate to tears learned that demanding constantly is not the smartest way to motivate.

Think in Relationships, Not Transactions

People are not transactions. Put yourself in their shoes and remember that clients hold day jobs beyond your project. Ask for help rather than demanding it. Students hear the same advice repeatedly: do not be a human robot. Being genuinely human has sadly become a differentiator, which makes it an opportunity.

Make yourself easy to understand. People tend to like people who resemble themselves in speaking pattern, disposition and background. For all the talk of diversity, most people remain socially insular. Meet them halfway. Write simple, direct emails. Mirror your client's speaking style, because arriving loud and fast with a quiet, deliberate client destroys rapport. Be yourself while flexing your delivery to the audience. Research on workplace networks confirms that likeability strongly shapes who gets consulted and who gets ignored.3

Authenticity as Strategy

The competitive gap in actual and perceived quality keeps shrinking. Plenty of vendors,

products and people can solve your client's problem. You, however, are unique, and that is appealing. As one wise sister puts it, you do you.

Authenticity requires support. If you are fully yourself, you need teammates who fill your blind spots. Hire people who complement you. Think Zuckerberg and Sandberg, Gates and Ballmer, Jobs and Wozniak, Moses and Aaron. Every memorable leader found a counterpart whose strengths covered their gaps.

Fun matters more than managers admit. Everyone seeks flow in their work, and roughly 90 percent of corporate life is a process drag. Add levity, meaning and joy, and people want to join whatever you are building. Then pass the ball like John Stockton. Make others successful. Get your manager promoted. Get your client promoted, and they will remember you forever.

Finally, double-down on your uniqueness. Speaking three languages, coming from another country or carrying an atypical background is not a weakness. It is the gateway to a powerful story. Anyone can be the same, and sameness is bad. Unless a client connects with you intellectually or emotionally, you remain just another salesperson peddling product. Your first job on any engagement is to create common ground and give people a reason to like you.

Likeability Under Pressure

The habits above face their real test when engagements go sideways. Deadlines compress, data disappoints and stakeholders grow tense, and this is precisely when likeable professionals separate from merely pleasant ones. Dependability under stress builds more trust than charm in calm weather ever could. Generosity matters most when everyone is busy, because helping a drowning teammate at your own cost gets remembered for years. Self-deprecation defuses the blame games that tense projects breed. The consultant who stays human when the room turns cold becomes the person clients request by name on the next engagement. Likeability compounds fastest in adversity, which is why it cannot be faked for long. Anyone can perform warmth during a kickoff dinner. Only genuine habits survive week nine of a difficult project.

Choose Your People

One deeper point closes the list. If some people dislike you while you are being your best self, who cares? You do not need their approval. Misanthropes and difficult characters exist everywhere. Find new people, better people, positive people. As the saying goes, we do not get paid enough to fix adults. Likeability is a habit you control, and so is the company you keep.

- 1How To Win Friends And Influence People
- 2The Purpose Driven Life
- 3Competent Jerks, Lovable Fools, And The Formation Of Social Networks

Summary

Likeability is a professional asset built on competence, dependability, generosity and authenticity. Connect with clients intellectually and emotionally or remain just another vendor. Craft teams that cover your blind spots, make others successful and choose positive people. Above all, be yourself.