

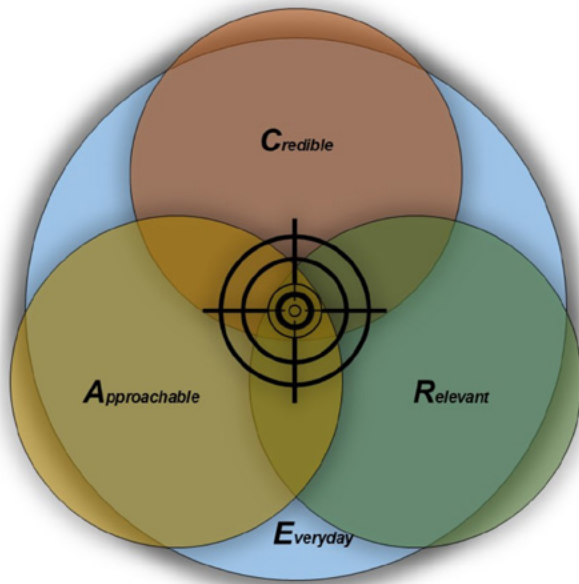
Deputy Commandant's Corner - Mentorship Part 3

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The series of mentorship articles have been well-received, and I have appreciated the feedback. I am learning (and daresay “being mentored”) from leaders that have offered their own insights as supplements to the articles. It is fun to see leaders apply the CARE Model to things other than mentorship. By design, the Model can be applied to a variety of professions. CW2 Andrew Mauer posted a solid application of the Model on LinkedIn.com to being a Warrant Officer as he observed each component of the Model through a Warrant Officer’s lens.



As a reminder, the CARE Model was born from my poor answer to a good question about success. We should be so well-versed at being Credible, Approachable, & Relevant Everyday (CARE) that it is natural to apply its value to our lives (my biased opinion, of course). We all know people that are stellar at one component, but weak at the others. Of course, it is easier to preach it and teach it than it is to live it sometimes.



We have laid the foundation of mentorship in previous articles in Strength in Knowledge. To keep the momentum of the CARE Model’s application to mentorship, let’s attack the first component. To me, Credibility is the brain of the Model. It is where education, experience, discipline, and proof reside within the Model’s boundaries. We know people that we refer to as “the nicest (or any singular, good quality) person you would ever want to meet.” That is a great quality. However, that cannot be enough to be successful as a mentor or leader. The person must also be credible – in ways that can benefit a mentee. Unfortunately, your level of credibility is often determined by other people. In general, we cannot declare ourselves credible. Instead, it must be proven to be credible and endorsed by others.

What does being credible even mean? I am glad you asked. The Oxford English Dictionary highlights that the root word in Latin is “credibilis,” which means “to believe, confide, entrust.” When someone is credible, he or she is trustworthy and knowledgeable. It is even better when someone says that you are “incredible.” That word sounds like it would mean the opposite of credible (such as the relationship between “correct” and “incorrect”). Originally, it was indeed the opposite of credible. It evolved from “not believable or not trusted” to being “too extraordinary to be believed.” ADP 6-22 tells us, “Credibility of a person or organization may stem from their appearance, conduct, and reputation” (page 5-9). Those words are directly linked to other familiar terms: Character, Presence, Intellect, Leads, Develops, and Achieves.

The words we use and the way we use them can hurt credibility and a title or rank cannot heal it. There are myths (or practices) about mentorship credibility that work just enough in certain situations that they seem appropriate and useful. Every myth contradicts portions of, or all of, the Army Values as outlined in ADP 6-22. There are certainly other myths out there, but these are some of the more common ones:

Credibility Myth #1 – Self-promotion ensures others know how credible you are: You know you are a solid performer, with vast amounts of education and experience. You know your job. You do your job very well. If those statements are true, other folks already know. Advertising your resume and how awesome you are is NOT part of maintaining credibility. I watched a senior aviator in a large meeting briefly provide his aviation resume so that others in the room knew he was amazing. He failed to realize that he was in the meeting to begin with because of his expertise. After a moment of awkward silence and a few eye rolls, the commander began discussing more important things than this person's awesomeness. That individual lost some credibility by deliberately trying to prove that he was credible. Set ego to the side. Being viewed as credible is not an event. It is a process. Information about the mentor will naturally surface during the mentorship process.

Credibility Myth #2 – I can build my credibility by disrupting the credibility of others: We should be recognizing and advertising the excellent qualities of others. Sharing credit has tremendous benefits by building trust and stronger teams (ADP 6-22). How can you possibly be viewed as credible by tearing down a teammate or ignoring their value? That is not a good lesson for a mentee to observe in a mentor. Your credibility has nowhere to go but up when you edify others (with sincerity). When mentors devalue others for gain, mentors lose much more than credibility—they lose trust.

Credibility Myth #3 – If I don't know, I had better say something that seems plausible: Fabricated answers that sound reasonable can be easily disproven if they are wrong. I had a Warrant Officer Candidate tell me that he appreciated when I answered a question with, "I don't know," during a mentorship session. That stuck with me, and it reminded me to not be afraid to admit a shortcoming. I did not lose credibility for not knowing the answer. Instead, I actually gained credibility and trust because I was simply honest. People know when mentors are generating an answer just to seem smart or credible. See Myth #1 and set ego to the side.

Credibility Myth #4 – The credibility I currently possess is enough: I was at a division-level Quarterly Training Briefing (QTB). It was before the days of the ACFT when the APFT was the measure of fitness for Soldiers. The CSM made a point of highlighting how each battalion and company needs to improve their APFT scores. Of all the stats presented, that was the only area that held his attention. Why? Because he was an outstanding athlete and maintained high physical readiness himself. Fitness is certainly important for all warfighters. In reality, he was a stellar NCO; however, some saw him as a one-dimensional leader and mentor. Credible mentors are diversified investors in more than one stock.

Credibility Myth #5 – Being credible is enough to be a successful mentor: It can be for short periods of time or in a singular area. Each component of the CARE Model overlaps for good reasons. It is not enough to be exclusively credible if you are avoiding the other components. Each component of the Model is directly and indirectly relationship based. Where you place your aiming reticle determines your value in the moment, as well as during the mentorship marathon.

When I first wrestled with the Model, I found that the first component must be credibility. As a mentor or leader, it has to be first because any further value is lost without it. Mentors without credibility are not mentors at all. They are lighthouses without a lightbulb. Taking the Model to the next component is directly linked to that first component. When we fail at the numerous credibility tests, folks will not seek us out. Therefore, we are no longer approachable. Therefore, we are no longer relevant. Next quarter we will explore the value of being Approachable as a mentor—or as a person, parent, professional, etc. depending on how you conceptualize and apply "approachability." Until then, consider your own credibility awareness as you lead and mentor others. I will do the same.