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DEALMAKER SOFT SKILLS

CONFIDENCE & AUTHORITY IN DEALMAKING

Jonathan Jay's DEALCLUB

Dealmaker Soft Skills:

Confidence and Authority in Dealmaking

How to Project Credibility Even Before Your First Deal

1. Introduction

Every dealmaker remembers their first meeting with a business owner — that nervous moment of truth when theory meets reality. You've read the books, watched the videos, attended the training, but now you're sitting opposite a real seller who's run their business for twenty years. Your palms might be sweating, your voice a little tight, and in your head you're thinking: *"Do they believe I'm serious?"*

Confidence and authority aren't about swagger or bluster. They're about calm assurance — the kind that makes a seller relax and think, *"This person knows what they're doing."* Even before you've bought your first business, you can project the credibility of someone who has. It's a skill, and like any skill, it can be learned, practised, and mastered.

In this report, we'll explore what confidence and authority really mean in the context of dealmaking. We'll look at how experienced dealmakers project credibility from the moment they walk into a room, and how you can do the same. You'll discover the psychology of confidence, how to build it from knowledge and preparation, and how to communicate it through voice, body language, and action.

By the end, you'll have a toolkit you can use immediately — one that makes people take you seriously, trust your intentions, and want to do business with you.

2. Why Confidence and Authority Matter

In dealmaking, perception often becomes reality. Sellers, brokers, and investors don't just assess your offer — they assess *you*. They ask themselves:

- Does this person look like someone who can complete the deal?
- Do they seem dependable and professional?
- Would I trust them with my business, my staff, and my reputation?

If the answer to any of those is "I'm not sure," the deal is already on shaky ground.

Jonathan Jay often says: *"You must look like you've done this before — even if you haven't."* Confidence and authority are what bridge the gap between being new to the process and being trusted with someone's life's work.

The Three Dimensions of Credibility

There are three intertwined aspects to perceived credibility in dealmaking:

1. **Competence** – You appear knowledgeable and capable. You can explain the acquisition process clearly and answer questions confidently.
2. **Character** – You come across as honest, fair, and dependable. Sellers sense integrity and goodwill.
3. **Composure** – You stay calm under pressure. Even when a conversation takes a turn, your demeanour doesn't shift.

When all three are present, you don't need to *tell* people you're credible — they feel it.

The Confidence Spiral

Confidence breeds trust, which leads to more open conversations, which leads to more opportunities. The opposite is also true: insecurity leads to hesitation, which creates mistrust, which closes doors.

The good news? The spiral works both ways. Once you start behaving *as if* you're credible, people treat you that way — and your self-belief strengthens to match.

3. The Psychology of Perceived Credibility

Psychologists describe confidence as *"the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust."* In dealmaking, both *feeling* and *belief* matter — yours and theirs.

How Sellers Judge You

Within seconds of meeting you, a seller's subconscious mind is making assessments:

- Your posture and handshake signal self-assurance or uncertainty.
- Your eye contact and tone of voice signal honesty or doubt.
- Your ability to explain your process signals experience or naivety.

These judgments happen before the first financials are discussed.

Imposter Syndrome in Dealmaking

Almost every first-time buyer experiences a version of imposter syndrome: that nagging fear of being "found out." The antidote isn't to fake it — it's to *reframe it.* Remind yourself that every experienced dealmaker once stood where you are now. The difference is that they acted *despite* the fear.

Confidence grows through exposure. Each call, each meeting, each negotiation builds neural familiarity. What once triggered nerves becomes routine.

Authority Without Arrogance

Authority isn't domination. It's quiet confidence. Sellers respect dealmakers who listen carefully, think before answering, and show genuine interest. They recoil from those who interrupt, name-drop, or oversell.

You build authority through certainty about your process — not by pretending to know everything. In fact, the most credible phrase in business buying might be:

"I'm not sure, but I'll find out."

It shows humility and reliability in equal measure.

4. Building Confidence from Knowledge

True confidence doesn't come from affirmations — it comes from preparation. The more you understand the dealmaking process, the less guesswork you face, and the more naturally confident you become.

Know Your Process

Before you meet any seller, you should be able to talk through the acquisition journey clearly:

1. How you find potential targets
2. How you assess suitability
3. How you structure deals
4. How you finance them
5. What happens post-completion

When you can outline this concisely and conversationally, you immediately sound like someone who's done it before.

Know Your Numbers

Even if you're not an accountant, understanding the basics of P&L, EBITDA, and deal multiples allows you to hold your own in any discussion. Sellers often use numbers as a credibility test. When you can ask sharp, informed questions ("Can I just check — are those figures pre- or post-adjustment?"), you pass that test easily.

Know Your Sector

Confidence also comes from familiarity with your chosen niche. Read trade journals, subscribe to newsletters, and learn the language of the sector. A well-timed reference to an industry trend can instantly signal that you're not a tourist.

Preparation Beats Performance

Jonathan often tells new dealmakers: "Don't *wing it*. The best way to sound confident is to know your material."

Preparation doesn't eliminate nerves — it channels them. When you know what to say, when to pause, and which points to make, you can focus on connection, not survival.

5. Projecting Authority Through Communication

Even with perfect preparation, your delivery matters. Confidence isn't just *what* you say — it's *how* you say it.

Voice

A confident voice is calm, steady, and unhurried.

- **Pace:** Speak slightly slower than normal. Fast speech signals nervousness; measured speech signals control.
- **Tone:** Vary your pitch and emphasis. A monotone voice sounds flat; variation adds energy and authority.
- **Silence:** Don't fear pauses. Confident people use them deliberately — they let words land.

Try recording yourself explaining your acquisition process. Listen back not for words, but for tone. Do you sound rushed, uncertain, or apologetic? Or do you sound composed and credible?

Body Language

- **Posture:** Sit or stand upright with shoulders relaxed. Lean in slightly when listening.
- **Eye contact:** Maintain comfortable eye contact without staring. Look away naturally when thinking.
- **Gestures:** Use open gestures — palms up, arms uncrossed — to appear approachable.
- **Smile:** A small, genuine smile at the right time conveys warmth and confidence simultaneously.

Sellers are subconsciously scanning you for consistency: does your body language match your words? If you say "I'm confident we can make this work," but your posture collapses, your credibility vanishes.

Language and Framing

Confident people speak in declarative sentences, not endless qualifiers. Compare:

- Weak: "I think maybe this could be a good fit for us."
- Strong: "This looks like a good fit for us."

Notice the difference? Authority doesn't mean being pushy — it means being clear.

Replace self-doubt phrases ("if that makes sense," "sorry, just one thing") with calm ownership ("to clarify," "here's what I'd suggest").

6. Building Trust and Respect Quickly

Confidence opens the door, but trust keeps it open. The most credible dealmakers combine composure with empathy. Sellers want to feel understood, not interrogated.

Show Genuine Interest

Ask about the story behind the business. Listen attentively. Summarise what you've heard ("It sounds like you've built a strong team and a loyal customer base"). This demonstrates respect and engagement.

Be Transparent About Intentions

Many sellers have been burned by time-wasters or aggressive buyers. Authority comes from clarity. State what you're looking for and what your process involves. Transparency feels like strength, not weakness.

Keep Promises Small but Sacred

If you say you'll call Thursday at 10am — call Thursday at 10am. Reliability is the simplest form of authority. Sellers notice the details; consistency builds reputation faster than any pitch deck.

7. Avoiding Overconfidence and Arrogance

There's a fine line between confidence and conceit. Overconfidence is when self-belief exceeds reality; arrogance is when it dismisses others. Both are credibility killers.

True confidence is quiet. It doesn't need to dominate the room. It invites collaboration.

Sellers can sense inflated egos instantly. A humble but assured demeanour — "I'm confident we can find a win-win" — beats any amount of boasting.

Stay open to feedback. If a seller challenges a term, listen and respond thoughtfully. Authority is reinforced when you demonstrate flexibility within strength.

8. Practical Strategies for Instant Credibility

Here are quick, actionable ways to project confidence and authority in your next meeting or call:

1. **Dress one step up** from your counterpart — polished but not flashy.
2. **Have materials ready:** a one-page overview of your acquisition company, proof of funds (if relevant), and a clear process outline.
3. **Use names often** — it builds connection and attentiveness.
4. **Prepare three smart questions** that show insight into their business.
5. **Speak last** in group settings; it signals confidence and thoughtfulness.
6. **Use calm enthusiasm** — energy attracts interest, but keep it measured.
7. **End strong:** Summarise next steps clearly, thank them for their time, and outline what happens next.

Remember: authority doesn't come from *being* the expert — it comes from *acting* like a reliable partner.

9. Case Studies: How Real Dealmakers Earned Respect Fast

Case Study 1: The Quiet Professional

Tom, a Deal Club member, met his first seller at a café. He was nervous, but instead of overselling himself, he asked thoughtful questions about the business and took notes. At the end, the seller said, "You're the first person who's actually listened." They agreed to exclusivity within a week.

Lesson: Listening well is more powerful than talking fast.

Case Study 2: Authority Through Process

Sarah was new to dealmaking but had studied Jonathan's process thoroughly. When a broker asked for her proof of funds, she confidently explained her structure and financing plan. Her composure impressed the broker, who later referred her to two other sellers.

Lesson: Clarity about process builds authority faster than money in the bank.

Case Study 3: Credibility Through Consistency

David sent a concise follow-up email summarising every meeting point and next step. He met every commitment exactly as promised. Within a month, the seller said, "I trust you more than anyone else who's approached me."

Lesson: Reliability compounds into authority.

10. Exercises to Strengthen Your Confidence and Authority

Exercise 1: The Confidence Audit

List five dealmaking situations that make you nervous (e.g., first call, discussing valuation, presenting offer).

For each, write:

- What specifically triggers the anxiety?
- What would a confident version of you do differently?
- One practical step to bridge that gap (e.g., rehearse phrasing, role-play with a peer).

Exercise 2: Record and Review

Record yourself explaining your acquisition process as if to a seller. Play it back. Note tone, pacing, and clarity. Refine until you sound calm, clear, and assured.

Exercise 3: Authority Journal

After every seller interaction, note one moment when you felt confident and one when you didn't. Reflect on why. Awareness builds faster improvement than any book.

Exercise 4: "As If" Mindset

Before each meeting, take 60 seconds to visualise yourself as an experienced acquirer who's completed multiple successful deals. Your posture, tone, and confidence will shift automatically.

11. Key Takeaways and Action Plan

Confidence is not arrogance. Authority is not dominance. They're about presence, preparation, and reliability.

Your confidence toolkit:

- Knowledge: Understand your process, your sector, and your numbers.
- Communication: Speak clearly, listen deeply, and use deliberate pauses.
- Consistency: Keep promises and follow through.
- Composure: Stay calm under pressure — emotion is contagious.
- Integrity: Authority built on honesty endures; anything else crumbles.

Your 7-Day Confidence Challenge

1. Rehearse your acquisition pitch aloud every morning.

2. Make one seller call — even if it scares you.
3. Attend a networking event and introduce yourself as a business buyer.
4. Read a trade article daily to deepen sector knowledge.
5. Practise body language in the mirror before meetings.
6. Review one recorded call to assess tone and pacing.
7. End the week by writing your personal definition of confidence.

Confidence and authority aren't things you *find* — they're things you *build*. Every email you send, every conversation you hold, and every commitment you honour strengthens the foundation.

As Jonathan often says:

"You don't need to look like you've done a hundred deals. You just need to look like you'll complete the one in front of you."

Walk into every meeting with that mindset, and you'll already be halfway to a 'yes.'