



## Don't Fear the L-Factor

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Likeability's as important in national politics as it is in office politics. Join Tim Sanders for an exclusive look into the L-Factor.

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By David Berkowitz

There's a strange effect that happens when talking with Tim Sanders. After getting off the phone with him, I start acting like a nicer, more likeable person. My blood pressure drops a couple notches. I rethink sending an irate e-mail to my wireless carrier about their customer service. I consider mailing someone a hand-written thank you note.

It's little wonder that Tim is so enamored with the concept of likeability and the benefits that being likeable can bring at the bargaining table and at the dinner table, or anywhere else for that matter. The author of *Love is the Killer App*, the acclaimed best-seller that made many let their lovecats loose at the office, is now amassing scientific evidence and myriad anecdotes in writing *The L-Factor*, which should provide both a serious look at why likeability works along with a crash course in how to up your own L-Factor. It's due in spring 2005, if not sooner.



This book is needed even more in light of another of Tim's projects. He is documenting and spreading awareness of New Economy Depression Syndrome, or NEDS (the name is amusing, but it deserves to be taken seriously). For more information, along with a quick survey to see if you suffer from NEDS, go to [gotneds.com](http://gotneds.com).

Tim's too humble to boast that his L-Factor is through the roof, but there's hardly been a better match between author and subject matter. eMarketer spoke with Tim to find out why this subject matters so much.

**Tim Sanders:** I'm spending an enormous amount of daily time writing my book.

At Yahoo!, I've stepped down from my role as Chief Solutions Officer. I've taken a lighter role, about a half-time role, as the leadership coach at Yahoo!, so I work on everything from leadership courses for new hires all the way up to executive presentation skills.

**eMarketer:** That sounds like it fits in with what you enjoy doing.

**TS:** Yeah. I have this curiosity and excitement about this brand Yahoo!, and I want to stick around and add value. I think that leadership work is probably the best place for me.

**eMarketer:** What's this book about?

**TS:** The new book is called The L-Factor. It's about the amazing power of being likeable. Basically, it's an advice book on how to maintain long-term likeability personally, socially and professionally. The premise of the book is that likeability makes a huge difference in your life everywhere you look and that at best, we learn short-term likeability, like the art of the good first impression. What we really have never learned is how a person can maintain an L-Factor for their life. It ends up being more a book on how to be friendly, how to maintain relevance, how to show empathy, how to keep it real -- those four building blocks for long-term likeability.

**eMarketer:** It strikes me on one level that it's sad that we need a book on this.

**TS:** It's really sad. Likeability has a PR problem. It's been positioned as kissing your sister. It's been positioned as trying to please everybody, or being fake. As a result, it hasn't been an exciting class. It's right up there with home economics. But on the statistics and studies on everything -- politics, advertising, divorce and relationships -- this likeability thing is a big deal.

I also think that we live in a reality-based culture now where the idea of Dale Carnegie's 12 ways to get people to like you just doesn't work. People would want more of a discussion of being something like, "I'd like to be a likeable person but I don't want to work on likeability."

That's the challenge of the book. Likeability has a huge PR problem. It needs to be repositioned. That's why I reposition it as L-Factor. Every person has an L-Factor, from -10 to +10. If I neither like you nor dislike you, you're a 0. If I like you a bunch, you're a 9, and if I dislike you, you're a -9. Everybody's got one. They need to work on it.

**eMarketer:** According to your description, not only does everyone have an L-Factor, but they have a thousand of them.

**TS:** For all different situations, right?

**eMarketer:** Depending on the situation, and also depending on everyone's individual perception of you.

**TS:** And it's as dynamic as the stock market and as individualized as My Yahoo!. You can meet two people back to back. With one, you have an L-Factor of 9; with the other, you have an L-Factor of -3. What I've learned though, through all this work -- the psychology research alone is just amazing -- is there are a few people who have maintained high L-Factors throughout their lives because they found an

effortless way to do it. They found a likeable person that's true deep inside them, and they maintained relevance and nourished that.

One great example is Mary Kay -- what a high L-Factor person everywhere you look. How she was at home was how she was at work. George Foreman is a surprising case study of what can happen when you turn around your L-Factor. He makes more money than Michael Jordan; he's a very authentic guy. The late David Bloom, the reporter, what a great example of a guy who was skyrocketing on L-Factor. We're studying people like that.



**eMarketer:** Will you contend that a positive L-Factor gets you further?

**TS:** It makes a significant contribution to things like job interviews, court settlements -- they've proven that everywhere, criminal, civil, you name it, a likeable plaintiff always gets more money, an unlikeable defendant gets convicted more often than not -- merit raises, likeable people have lower divorce rates, lower blood pressure rates, lower churn rates of 'core' friends that they see more than four times in a month. They get better service at restaurants. Doctors spend more time with likeable patients, give them more advice and allow more free service.

I've studied how our life works, and everywhere you turn it's affecting your job, your friends, your marriage -- it's everywhere. It's interesting how hidden it is.

**eMarketer:** Is there 'get likeable quick' scheme?

**TS:** I think there's a 'get yourself in shape quick scheme,' meaning that I look at the book like a social fitness program. What I'm saying is we're flabby in the area of likeability in this nation. We accept unfriendliness, which is like accepting toxic rain. We think it's a way to get stuff done. You live in New York, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

The book's about social fitness. There are some get fit quick schemes that a person can do that would immediately show results in their L-Factor, and one of them is to get a buddy, a lifeline, an objective third party, a person you trust. It could be a spouse, a friend, your brother -- just make sure they're not compromised, that they don't have a vested interest in telling you what you want to hear. Have them do a friendliness survey on you. Don't you think Howard Dean, who lost the caucus in Iowa, could have used a buddy? The buddy could sit down and say, "Look, Howard, here's the research. When you have an angry outburst, even if it isn't directed toward me, I think you're an unfriendly person. It's statistically true. You lost Iowa because your L-Factor sucks. You have a tremendous inspiration factor because of the way you came up with that whole Internet angle, so your I-Factor's great, but your L-Factor sucks." He needs a buddy.



When I was advising this guy in my book, this is the first thing I told him -- to get a buddy. His buddies found out a few things. One, his outgoing voicemail message

was rude and hostile. He never thought so. Two, he never smiled anywhere. Three, when he was observed interacting with people at work, he basically gave the message, "Go away. I don't like you." The buddy system works great at adjusting things like your failure to be friendly.

The other thing is I would do a self-survey about what it is about you people like. It's a hard conversation to have with yourself unless you're an egomaniac, but it's an important conversation. If you actually took time to think about it -- and I won't use myself because the book's not about me, I'm just an advisor, I'm not the L-Factor Guy, meaning I'm not the most likeable guy, but I try to be -- but you have to sit down and say, "Who likes me? Who's liked me for a long time? Do I work with a certain group of people?" Once you've identified people who have an affinity toward you, now you've got to really ask yourself why. I don't like to use a buddy for this; I like to have this conversation privately. You're just fishing with a buddy. It's easy for them to tell you how you're unlikeable. It's much harder for them to tell you why you're likeable.

You can figure this out. One great example is where a guy sits down -- he's been an engineer for a long time, that's his core group of people -- he figured out three things. He figured out he was hilarious in brevity -- he could kill you with two words -- he never thought of that before. He was consistently reliable -- when he showed up, he'd say something that would lighten the mood. That made him a likeable guy. And he was the Simon Cowell of his group -- he was brutally honest in a way that people admired. He had to think about it for days to realize that, but once he realized that he was a dependable, funny guy with brevity and frankly honest, then he had something to work on. One of the keys to becoming a more likeable person is figuring out the things you do.

One comment, on an editorial basis -- when you find that thing you do, if that's not who you are, you're in big trouble. Sometimes that will happen. Maybe he goes through that exercise and he says, "I don't mean to be funny. I'm actually stupid and they're laughing at me." That could be disturbing. Some of us don't have what I call an authentic source of likeability inside, but most of us do. Once you find that, and then you become aware of not breaking these core rules, you go a long way. Beyond that, it's a lifelong struggle. It's something you'll have to think about every day, but not in terms of "How did I act?" and "Will they like me?", but thinking about four things: "Am I friendly? Am I still relevant? Am I empathetic? Am I real?" That's the stuff you have to think about every day.

**eMarketer:** It sounds like there can be some great pressure to start out, when you've found your strengths. With the example you provided, the next time that person goes into a room, he may feel he has to live up to his persona and say one of these brutally honest or witty remarks.

**TS:** Yeah, and I think that pressure's importance because that pressure's the secret to maintaining relevance. When you feel pressure, you stockpile and evolve. When you're in a comfort zone, you're going to stay the way you are. Irrelevance is the idea of staying the same as the contexts change. What happens with a guy like him is if he doesn't even know this, he's going to run out of material. If he does feel that pressure, he's going to have to figure out what it was about him that made him funny. That's an extreme example.

Sometimes people say the reason they like you is because you have a calming effect on them. You have friends like that, who give you that feeling when they show up that the wolf's here, everything's under control. That person, when they make that realization, yeah, they should feel pressured to do that, because that's a wonderful thing they do to people.

If you'll notice, I keep using feelings to describe likeability because to me, likeability's an attitude. If you're a likeable person, it's because you deliver strong psychological benefits to people. That's what it is. A lot of times, when I measure what makes you likeable, I usually measure what delivers those psychological benefits. That's why friendliness is so important. That's the first thing a person has to really work on -- how to develop authentic friends, how to avoid unfriendliness, how to resolve damage done by unfriendliness. We are so hardwired as a human species to look for friend or foe; it's our first brain. When a person violates the friendly rule with us, we try to shut down. That's why friendliness is so important.