

Charisma

For some, charisma is a mysterious attribute. It's challenging to describe someone who exudes charisma because there's really no way to quantify the effect this kind of person seems to have on others. It seems it's a black or white issue; that is, you either have charisma or you don't. Charisma is not leadership, assertiveness or enthusiasm nor is it exactly personality either. It's its own unique characteristic. Charisma empowers others to like you, even if they don't know much about you and even when there hasn't been enough time to develop trust in you. If you have charisma, not only do people want to be around you, but whether they realize it or not, they also want to be influenced by you. Charisma gives you power over, allegiance toward and devotion with your audience, without leaving them feeling powerless. At the same time, it creates instant support. So, the question remains, are you born with charisma or is it learned? The answer is both! Some attributes are inherent, while others can be acquired.

Defining the Indefinable

The word "charisma" comes from the Greek goddess Charis. Charis's character was one of total beauty and charity. Today, the word has to do with an individual's magnetism, intensity, vivaciousness and so on. Gerry Spence has perhaps summed up the concept of charisma best:

Charisma is energy from the heart zone. If the speaker has no feeling, there is nothing to transfer. Charisma occurs when the speaker's feelings are transferred in the purest form to another. Charisma is not a diluted feeling. It is not disguised. It is a raw feeling. Charisma is the passing of our pure energy, our pure passion, to the other.

People who are charismatic often hold us in awe. Their energy prods us, motivates us and inspires us. They fulfill our need for heroes. We feel better for having met them, seen them, listened to them and interacted with them. Why and how do charismatic people have this effect on us?

Jay Conger has identified four general characteristics of charismatic leaders:

1. They have a strong and clear vision, and they know how to present it so it best fits the context of their audience's needs.
2. They know how to present their vision so that the weaknesses of the present condition are apparent and the recommended changes are not only justifiable but also desired.
3. They have a history of success, expertise and vision to make educated departures from old traditions that may be less effective.
4. They possess the behavior they encourage others to have. They model the results of change themselves and thus help their audience feel motivated and empowered to do likewise.

So, how would one go about developing charisma? The following are eight ways to do so:

1. Develop self-confidence in yourself and in your message. Don't appear nervous or out of balance. Be confident that you possess self-worth and that you know your message.
2. Show a lighter side. Find your sense of humor and happiness and have fun. Don't take life too seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself.
3. Have great presence and energy. Project a presence of the Five Cs of Trust: character, competence, confidence, credibility and congruence.
4. Have a definite opinion about your subject. Be knowledgeable about your subject matter and make sure that knowledge is based on a solid foundation. Develop a sense of your audience's emotion and conviction for your subject.

5. Look good. Make sure your clothing, hair, shoes and jewelry match your message's tone. Dress the part.
6. Be able to inspire and uplift others. Be sensitive to people and their needs. Develop rapport with your audience. Connect with them and become a great listener.
7. Be organized and easy to follow. Make your points connected and your structure clear.
8. Be dramatic, unique and enticing. Be interesting to be around. Make sure the things you talk about are exciting. Tell spellbinding stories.