

The Secrets of Charisma

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The Little Book of Charisma

& The Magic of Metaphor: Walking with the Stars

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Patterns used by charismatic people:

It is patterns we recognise. And, we're even more clever. We learn lots of chunks and can then pull these together in to bigger chunks and this helps us do very complicated things. When we first learn to drive we are swamped with so much detail we struggle. Then we start to chunk. We divide driving in to sequences of memorable chunks, one for changing gear, another for clutch control. Once we master these we chunk up and can complete a turn in the road.

Psychologist Win Wenger describes how he would tinker at a piano and leave a tape-recorder playing as he did. He had no musical training or talent. He noticed that as he played *as if he knew what he was doing* some sections were fairly pleasant. He listened for the good bits and soon put together pieces of music that had a start, middle and end.

We learn by spotting and learning patterns. We recognise sameness and difference. The patterns in leaves, clouds, faces, peanuts and buildings fascinate us. The same process applies in all of our senses and when they all come together in the form of a ballet dancer or a gymnast we are in awe of the complexity of patterns chunked together so seamlessly.

We can do the same with charisma.

'There is no special charisma pheromone or incantation. The effect is all produced by very ordinary behaviors - moving around, speaking. The trick is these ordinary behaviors are performed in specific, extraordinary sequences that taken together leave the unmistakable impression of charisma.'

Neffinger

Charisma pattern: Flow

Flow Checklist

1. *I feel completely involved, focused and clear about what I'm doing.*
2. *I feel totally confident that I have the skills/experience needed to perform the task in hand. If the unexpected happened I would welcome it as a way to further develop my understanding/growth.*
3. *I feel serene and beyond ego. (Doubting/negative Internal dialogue is switched off).*
4. *I lose all sense of time because I'm totally absorbed in the activity itself.*
5. *The great feeling I have performing the task is reward in itself (external rewards are not necessary).*

Use this checklist against activities in which you're involved. The more *yes* answers you provide equated with more flow. The most popular way to pass time is watching TV. On average we are in flow 7% of the time whilst watching TV. This is quite low, greater flow is achieved at work, doing hobbies, being with friends/family. One woman who completed the above Flow Checklist answered *yes* to all five questions when contemplating her Sunday afternoon ironing routine. I have to say ironing rarely achieves such high flow scores.

(a) Consider this list of IDENTITY WORDS.

ARTIST ATHLETE CREATOR EXPLORER FRIEND HERO HUNTER LEADER
 MAGICIAN MEDIATOR SAGE WARRIOR COACH ENTREPRENEUR
 LEARNER TEACHER VISIONARY WRITER POET PROTECTOR INVENTOR
 ORGANISER ENVIRONMENTALIST PHILANTHROPIST COACH ENGINEER
 ARCHITECT ADVISER PARENT PARTNER CHILD COMEDIAN

Highlight the most appealing words.

What attracts you to these words?

(b) PURPOSE For each word attach ways in which you could express these words in a positive way (ie it doesn't harm you or anyone else).

(c) ACTION Identify ways to do something to make this happen.

for example:

CARER & ANIMAL LOVER by PURPOSE looking after hedgehogs.

ACTION: Set up Hedgehog Hospital.

An authentic life is the foundation of happiness as well as charisma.

'Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony.'

Gandhi

Howard Hughes wrote early in his life:

'I intend to be the greatest golfer in the world, the finest film producer in Hollywood, the greatest pilot in the world and the richest man in the world.'

He got pretty close to achieving all of his ambitions. He was given a cheque for half a billion dollars in 1966, the largest cheque ever given to an individual. That's a lot of money. However, his desire to be the best meant he needed to be better than everyone else. Despite enormous success, he treated many people badly along the way, and never seemed happy to those who did get close to him. Perhaps if he'd aimed to be the best pilot, golfer, businessman and film producer *he could be* he would have had a more satisfying life. Flow is not about being the best it's about being our best. Charismatic people are being *their best* and are pleased to assist others to being the best they can be. They are guides not competition. This mindset will boost your charisma.

There are universal positive values including:

assertiveness, caring, compassion, confidence, consideration, courage, courtesy, creativity, determination, enthusiasm, hope, patience, excellence, fairness, flexibility, forgiveness, generosity and honesty.

Which of these can support us in our quest for authenticity?

Which of these are we showing to our audience?

In some primary schools these values underpin the curriculum but have a look and, as adults, how many of these do we really demonstrate on a regular basis?

Living and demonstrating positive values will have a major impact on how people judge us as these are how they form opinions on a day-to-day basis. Whilst being driven to a meeting, Greg Dyke asked his driver where he was holidaying. The driver said his holiday had fallen through so he'd be staying at home with his family. Dyke immediately offered the driver the use of his own holiday property. Within a couple of hours the news had spread around most of the BBC. The teacher Erin Gruwell called a student's parents to praise their daughter. The student said this was the first time a teacher had rung her parents with good news. The student commented: 'Wow, she really does care about me.' Our values leak out through our behaviour and charismatic people live out positive values every day.

Martin Seligman suggests there are around twenty signature strengths:

Curiosity, Love of learning, Open-mindedness, Originality, Knowledge of self/others, Perspective, Mercy, Fun, Bravery, Perseverance, Integrity, Kindness, Love, Teamwork, Fairness, Leadership, Self control, Humility, Appreciation of beauty, Gratitude, Hope/optimism and Enthusiasm.

These are *the how*, the way in which we can express our values.

'First seek to understand then to be understood.'

Stephen Covey

Business theory implores companies to identify the unique selling points (USP's) of their organisation or product. Clearly defining these benefits in comparison to competitors usually results in a clarity essential to the process of building brand identity and a focused marketing/advertising campaign. We can use this technique to better target our own communication in two ways. First, highlighting our personal credibility and second, identifying the specific needs of our audience.

Charisma pattern: Establishing our personal credibility

Why should people listen to us?

We need to offer between one and three great reasons.

More than three and we're in danger of appearing arrogant; less than one and we're in danger of appearing ignorant or irrelevant.

I work with diverse groups of professionals and despite their differing roles there is a surprising degree of consistency in their key messages:

- *I'm an expert/I know what I'm talking about*
- *I'm here to help you/I want to help you*
- *I believe in you/our team/organisation/believe in yourself*

The third of these, belief, is often expressed as hope in communication. Hope is a theme we can all buy in to. Michael Palin has travelled the world and met many people. When asked: *Is there anything unites all people?* he suggested it was hope, a universal, powerful and positive human value.

What do we need to change in order to improve our service?

What can I do to make your life better?

His technique worked because he was able to implement many of the suggestions he received.

Seeking to understand our audience provides a further gain. This is highlighted by research undertaken by a psychologist who probably liked airline food. He flew back and forth between London and New York each day for a month, always sitting in the middle seat of three. He would start conversations with his fellow travellers and focused on being interested in the person rather than offering his own biographical facts and opinions. A week later a researcher surveyed the travellers that were prepared to supply the undercover psychologist with their

contact details. They all remembered the psychologist and liked him even though they knew nothing about him. 70% even said he was one of the most interesting people they had ever met. It pays to concentrate on being interested rather than being interesting summarises Michael Heppell in *Flip It*.

Charisma pattern: Consistency

In an interesting experiment members of the public were asked to choose a favourite from two very similar wines, one German and one French. Guess what, when German music was played in the background the majority of people selected the German wine as the superior wine and more chose the French wine when French sounding music filled the background. Psychologists are confident that our desire for consistency underlies this phenomenon. This explains Christmas songs being played from November in some Department stores, making customers feel festive and staff probably feel it's time for a change of career.

We like to be consistent. Once we've started something we're far more likely to continue and try to complete. This can be seen as hapless hotel guests continually swipe a key card in a door many times before giving up and returning, crestfallen, to reception. Two different car wash loyalty cards were offered to a group of customers. The first required eight visits to qualify for a free wash; the second required ten but had the first two pre-stamped. Both required eight stamps/visits but people given the second card returned in far greater numbers, 44% compared to 28%.

Our desire for consistency doesn't apply if the steps from where we are to our destination appear too big. A year after joining a gym two-thirds of people have stopped attending, despite good intentions, the reality of the work required to create a six-pack is too far removed from the flabby sweaty figure reflected back at us in the mirror. This is why new year resolutions generally fail.

We can apply this in our communication by asking people to take small steps from where they are now to where we are suggesting they can travel. A practical way to apply this would be not to ask for a volunteer to come up to the stage in front of 200 peers at the start. We could build up to this in steps. first ask everyone to complete a simple activity from their seats. Then ask some people to come up as a group. Then later one person.

Similarly if you are promoting a controversial idea you may take your audience on a journey towards your conclusion, without implying they are wrong in their original view. Another example would be for a parent to ask a child to tidy their shoes away, or place one item in the dishwasher, before building up to bigger requests such as the classic *tidy your room*. a statement which must echo around the whole globe in a verbal mexican wave of frustrated parents standing in the doorways of their teenagers bedroom.

Charisma pattern: Reciprocation

The old saying *you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours* seems to be confirmed by research. Companies routinely offer free gifts, samples and special offers in the hope we'll return the favour. In an interesting experiment researchers wanted to test the idea of reciprocation to the limit. They set up in a restaurant and measured the level of tips over a period of weeks based on the number of free mints presented with the bill. The control group was customers offered no complimentary mint with their bill. The group offered a mint at the pay point tipped an extra 3%. The group brought a mint with the bill to their table by the waiter who had served them tipped an extra 14%. A further group were offered another mint when the waiter returned to the table by counting out an extra mint for each member of the party and suggested it was because they'd been such a good group. These groups tipped 24% more than the control group! Are we really this easy to manipulate? Well, yes. You can use this information to recognise situations in which someone is attempting to use these techniques on you and respond differently. Next time you're offered mints with your bill please don't throw them back at your waiter in disgust shouting *I know what your game is you evil manipulator*. This tends to ruin the atmosphere in most restaurants. Just tip on the basis of the quality of the service provided.

'Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind.'

Rudyard Kipling

'There's a struggle going on. I say there's a struggle going on. It's happening an ocean away but it's a struggle that touches everyone of us. Whether we know it or not. Whether we want it or not. A struggle that demands we take sides. Not between black and white. Not between rich and poor. No - it's a harder choice than that. It's a choice between dignity and servitude. Between fairness and injustice. Between commitment and indifference. A choice between right and wrong...'

This was Barack Obama's first public speech made at College speaking out against apartheid in South Africa. Before he spoke he said:

'I was hungry for words. Not words to hide behind but words that can carry a message, support an idea. If I could just find the right words. With the right words everything could change.'

The average person speaks at 125-150 words per minute whilst the average person thinks at 500-600 words per minute. So whilst we talk there is enough thinking time for a listener to contemplate their next shopping list, scan the room for interior design ideas, look for any fashion faux-pas in fellow audience members, consider their next holiday etc. So we need to be precise and accurate with the words we use and how we use them.

Charisma pattern: Edit

'I didn't have time to write a short letter so I wrote a long one!'

Mark Twain

Comedians refer to a great joke as being delivered in the fewest words possible to retain the meaning of the joke. A comedian may spend a long time editing the joke to reach this stage. They will then try different words and assess its impact on the joke. This is why comedians supposedly don't make good company as they are compulsive analysers of words. For example, seventeen is a funnier number than twelve (because in saying it the comedian smiles which encourages the audience to follow).

I told my daughter the following joke from a book I was reading:

'Every night since our washing machine broke down, my wife has washed her pants in the sink. I only wish she'd take them off first.'

'Fantastic things happen - to the way we feel, to the way we make other people feel. All this simply by using positive words.'

Leo F Buscaglia

Charisma pattern: You to Me

Have you noticed that when speakers refer to their audience as 'you' or worse 'you lot', they lose the audience. You can feel a distance open up between speaker and audience that is an unhealthy void in which charisma does not exist. When other speakers use 'us' or 'we' to make the same point, the charismatic connection remains intact and strengthens.

'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

For he today that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother.'

Shakespeare, Henry V

Would Henry have motivated his troops to fight to their death if he'd used 'you lot' rather than 'we'? Probably not.

If his speech had been as follows the play and history may have taken a different direction:

'You lot, you miserable bunch of losers, I neither know nor care about you, you vile, stinky peasants, go and die painfully for my glory, yes it'll hurt, any survivors can return with me, but don't think I'm going to keep in touch, you know how it is with these relationships you form with strangers when you're abroad.'

Charisma pattern: Stories

'Stories are the most important thing in the world, without stories we wouldn't be human at all.'

Philip Pullman

During a prolonged period of snow Alice's father had to work from home. She frequently interrupted his phone calls despite promising to stay out of his way until he'd finished. To buy peace he supplied Alice with challenges and questions based on a large map of the world as big as a rug.

'Find ten places beginning with 'B',

'Find the country surrounded by the most oceans'.

On each occasion the tenacious ten year-old returned far sooner than he'd expected. In desperation he tore up the map in to around fifty pieces and asked Alice to go away and restore it with tape like a jigsaw puzzle. She returned in minutes with the map and a big smile.

'How did you do that so quickly?' he asked.

'Well, I'd already drawn a picture of myself on the back of the map and when I put myself together the world came together.'

In this is the secret of the power of story and the role of teachers.

When we put ourselves together the world comes together. On one side of the map we find ourselves and on the other side is the story. Advisers are expert at helping people put themselves together. I've seen people walk out of an interview looking and feeling bigger, believing they can be anyone or anything they desire because of an hour with their adviser. That feeling can last a lifetime.

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