

# CHARISMA:

## WHAT IS IT? WHAT WILL IT DO FOR YOU?

Charisma is easy to spot but hard to describe. Nailing down a definition is like trying to define America. And the effort is made more frustrating because we all tend to overuse the term, lavishing it indiscriminately on insolent athletes, glamorous film stars, and fanatic cultists, as well as on genuinely enchanting and inspirational personalities like, say, John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Princess Diana.

### Here's my definition:

Charisma is the ability to influence others positively by connecting with them physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

I'm convinced that, popular wisdom to the contrary, charisma is not in your genes—and it's not beyond your grasp. You already have charisma, but it's not configured the same way in you as it is in the person next to you.

Think of it this way: Each of our personalities consists, let's say, of a series of containers, like cups or glasses. If all the glasses were filled to the top, you'd be so charismatic people would think you were a god—and you'd probably think so, too. Some really, really gifted people

may come close to this ideal. But, for most of us, some of the glasses are nearly empty, some brimming, yet others are partially filled to varying degrees.

Together they constitute our charisma, or at least our potential charisma.

Still, I've wanted to be able to describe charisma more concretely. So I've thought a lot about it, done applied research and formed some opinions. I've also studied the literature, going back decades, and compared the conclusions of scholars with my own observations.

Though the results may not be strictly scientific, I've sought to reduce charisma to its bedrock. What I've come up with are seven qualities that I'm convinced are at its core.

Here's how I see those seven main components of charisma—or, the “glasses,” if you will:

- Your silent messages. You make a statement about yourself even before you open your mouth. This is your “silent message.” It's the way you carry yourself, physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

- Your ability to speak well. You may have a terrific idea, but who will know if you can't articulate it?
- Your listening skills. Rarely taught and infrequently practiced, listening is nonetheless a key to communicating and making others feel special in your presence.
- Your persuasiveness. This is your skill at motivating others to follow your lead or adopt your idea. No idea, however great, ever gets anywhere until it's adopted.
- Your time and territory smarts. How you honor or violate another person's personal space and time will affect the amount of tension or trust between you.
- Your adaptability. Building bridges to others is impossible without understanding how to treat others the way they would like to be treated.
- Your vision. What do you feel passionately about? What do you care really deeply about? Whatever your objective, you'll never influence anyone to change their ideas or take action if you don't feel strongly about it yourself.

You can apply these seven elements of charisma to your personal life, your job, or in any setting where the ability to influence others positively is beneficial.

And the wonderful thing about charisma is that it makes you powerful without making others less so. That's because the kind of power I'm talking about is personal power, rather than position power, the kind of power that doesn't take power away from others, but gives you and them the power to achieve favorable outcomes.

The potential to be more charismatic is within you. And the payoff for doing so has never been higher.

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