



charisma

Charisma is not about you, but about how you make others feel about themselves.

Edward, an advertising executive, strode into the room, smiled with sparkling eyes, shook my hand firmly and said, “It’s wonderful to meet you Jean!”

I knew I was going to enjoy working with Edward. How could I not? Talking with his co-workers, I realized everyone loved working with Edward. In short, he had charisma.

As a presentation coach, I often work with CEOs who seek to protect greater executive presence and charisma. They wonder if it is something they can even learn. The good news: Although charisma comes more naturally to some people, everyone can work on a few simple yet profound skills to enhance their charisma.

Use your voice to show your enjoyment of the moment. Be “all in.”

Whether you have an important presentation, a meeting in which you need to motivate others, or a social event in which you need to make a good impression, these skills will not only increase your confidence, they will also help you achieve your desired results.

Some people think of charisma as a superficial quality, a slick veneer on confident person. Yes, confidence is an important part of charisma. As consultants and author Alan Weise says, “The first sale is to yourself.” But a charismatic person also knows it’s about more than yourself. Charisma involves tapping into the best of you to bring out the best in others. A charismatic person communicates both strength and warmth. When you are charismatic, people feel good about themselves when they are with you.

So what can you do to immediately raise your “charisma quotient”?



Be present and listen.

If you are distracted, you are not charismatic. And if you think you can fake it, think again. You can tell when someone is not really listening to you. How does it feel? Listening is not just waiting for your turn to talk. Real listening happens when you are fully focused on the person speaking. When you become a better listener, others will think you are wonderful—because you make them feel valued.

I recently worked with David, an accomplished businessman who had a very challenging childhood. He fondly remembers his favorite casework from the child-welfare agency. “The way she listened to me had more impact on my current success than anything else in my life,” he told me. “She made me realize my thoughts and feelings had value.”

By listening to others, you have the ability to change lives.



Be curious.

You can't be curious and judgemental at the same time. Whereas judgment breeds defensiveness, curiosity opens people up to find creative solutions. When you show curiosity about others' ideas and experiences, you bring out the best in them, in turn demonstrating your charisma.

I recently worked with an engineer, Cynthia, who told me that the departments in her company tended to work in silos and in competition with one another. After our session, she led a meeting to brainstorm ideas for working more collaboratively. Cynthia focused on asking questions and modeling curiosity. “Rather than getting defensive, people began to approach the skills and perspectives of one another,” she recalled.

Remember, charisma is not about you, but about how you make others feel about themselves. When you are curious, you create an environment of good communication, where people feel encouraged to share their ideas. And another benefit? You end up with better solutions.

Be aware of your body language.

Your posture, gait, smile, eyes and even your breathing collectively signal whether or not you are trustworthy. Your non-verbal communication can enhance or destroy charisma. People are hired-wired to decide in milliseconds if you are a potential friend or a threat.

An attorney I worked with, Alice, worried that she'd appear unprofessional if she smiled too often. When she watched herself on video, she said, "Wow, I didn't realize I looked so unapproachable." When filmed a second time, smiling, she recognized that instead of looking goofy, like she'd imagined, she appeared open, confident, friendly and, yes, charismatic.

Be mindful of your voice.

Your voice has a huge impact on how you are perceived. A rich and resonant voice captivates people. Speaking in a monotone will put people to sleep—not exactly charismatic! Speak with the same vitality and enthusiasm you have when talking with a good friend over dinner.

Charles, who attended one of my trainings, had mastered this. Not only did he have a rich, pleasing sound to his voice, but he changed his pitch and tempo to keep us engaged. Best of all, he was completely comfortable with "The pause." We were transfixed. Because he didn't rush, he not only communicated confidence, he made us feel there was no place he would rather be.

That is the key to charisma. Use your voice to show your enjoyment of the moment. Be "all in." As you focus on enhancing your charisma, find your own style. Allow your body and voice to become more expressive. Be present. Take joy in your discovery.



Jean Hamilton, founder and principal of Speaking Results, offers coaching and training on communication, storytelling and public speaking to executives and leaders. *Charisma* appeared in *Alaska Beyond Magazine*, January 2017.

Successful people love what they do. Their passion draws people in. We all want to feel more of that. Just like I did with Edward.