



charm

SCHOOL

Charm, magnetism, the X factor, charisma, *je ne sais quoi*... whatever you call it, some people just seem to have it in spades. They're the life of any party, can command anyone's attention, hold an audience – no matter how big or small – in the palm of their hand and strike up conversations easily and comfortably.

But charisma is much more than just having the confidence to stand up in front of a group of strangers. It's about those strangers wanting to listen and know more about you.

And, believe it or not, it is something you can learn. Of course, some people are born with bucket loads, but there are a few easy ways that you can develop your own charm – and make it work for you.

A LITTLE OLD-FASHIONED CHARISMA MAY BE JUST WHAT YOU NEED TO GET AHEAD IN LIFE AND LOVE. BY CHELSEA CLARK

Why it's important

Let's get one thing straight, learning how to be charismatic isn't a skill that's reserved only for salespeople or that guy at work who is always angling for a promotion. The special qualities associated with 'being charming' can be just as useful in normal, everyday life.

Arming yourself with some charm basics such as self-confidence, positive body language and good listening skills can help you to attract and influence people, no matter what the setting. And, of course, it's especially useful if you find yourself in any type of leadership position – from the school fundraising committee to coordinating a project at work.

"Charisma is an essential leadership ingredient, no matter what personality or leadership style you may have," explains leadership and communication expert Wendy

Jocum. "The word charisma could have different meanings. When you look, for example, at two different leaders such as Nelson Mandela or Richard Branson, both are charismatic, but in very different ways. Charisma is one of those unique qualities, such as their energy, humility or any other characteristic that enables them to inspire and influence others."

The charisma recipe

"If you break it down to the core things that charisma really is, self-confidence is the bottom of it," says life coach Claire Hall. "Charismatic people are confident and completely comfortable, which puts others at ease immediately."

Hall says choosing a charismatic role model is an essential first step in developing your own charisma. "Celebrities are a great place to start but, if you can, try to choose ►



someone you know as they will be more authentic and 'real' to you. Then take a look at their behaviour styles and how they communicate with other people. You'll notice charismatic people tend to be excellent listeners."

Listening is one of the three main ingredients of charisma identified by US professor Ronald Riggio from Claremont McKenna College, who is one of the few researchers to have taken a good hard look at this intangible quality.

"Charismatic people aren't always declaring how great they are," explains Hall. "A charismatic person will spend the time to let the other person talk about themselves without adding their own opinions constantly."

Riggio's other two charisma ingredients are the ability to easily convey feelings and being able to subtly adjust your persona to fit the mood and social make-up of any group. All three of these qualities can be demonstrated, according to Riggio, by the body language that charismatic people use.

When a charismatic person is listening, watch how they respond to the other person. They will lean into the conversation, conveying an interest in what is being said. They will nod, smile and encourage the other person with words like 'uh-huh' or 'sure'. And, perhaps the most difficult 'charismatic behaviour' to perfect, a charismatic person will tend to mirror the body language and gestures of the person they are talking to.

"Subtle mirroring is one of the key behaviours of a charismatic person," says Hall. "It encourages a rapport to build between two people and, when we feel a connection with someone, that's when a bond forms."

A genuine, warm smile is another trademark of a charismatic person, as is a positive persona – both qualities show you are relaxed, open and willing to 'fit in'. These traits also immediately put others at ease and, if they feel comfortable in your presence, others will begin to regard you as someone they want to spend time with.

"Having respect for others, as well as empathy, listening to others and seeing things from their point of view will all make you someone that others want to listen to," adds Jocum.

How to use it

So now you know some of the key attributes of charisma, how do you use them without coming off as fake or too much of a try-hard? Trying to remember all the subtle things that will make you a person that others are drawn to will be difficult at first.

Developing your own charisma requires practice so try out a few techniques – like subtly leaning into a conversation – on friends or relatives and see how they react.

Once you're in a real-life situation, it's also valuable to use the traits of a charismatic person in a way that

IT'S ACADEMIC

So, is charisma subjective? You might think someone is utterly alluring but your friend might not see the attraction. Enter US computer scientist Alex Pentland and his sociometer – a device that can detect the signs of charisma and measure them in action. About the size of an iPhone the sociometer features an infrared sensor and a tiny microphone to track patterns of speech and bodily movement – all in the name of measuring the elusive X factor. Studies using the sociometer have found that people who incorporate lots of the unconscious gestures and expressions that researchers associate with charisma are more likely to be successful when it comes to getting an idea across, presenting a new business proposal or negotiating a pay rise.

won't interfere with your natural personality. If you are normally a shy person, immediately trying to be the centre of attention won't sit well with you or others around you. Instead, start by striking up a one-on-one conversation with someone new.

"As important as it is to keep improving your skills, you also need to be yourself, and to be natural and sincere," says Jocum.

Hall describes this as 'being authentic'. "One of the key things people are attracted to is when someone is being authentic," she says. "People respond when you're real. Charismatic people know who they are and are comfortable with themselves... They have a purpose."

Some people claim to be wary of confidence being interpreted as

brash arrogance by others. But being genuinely confident and charismatic doesn't mean that people will consider you a know-it-all, says Hall.

"If you are truly committed to your intention – genuine charisma – arrogance can't come through," she says.

"If you find charisma starting to work for you, it's important not to hog the spotlight," advises Hall. "If your intention is to brag, you'll come across as obnoxious and people will immediately react. Instead, bring people into your journey and share with them."

5 STEPS TO BECOMING MORE CHARISMATIC

- 1 Choose a role model** and watch how they behave in group situations. Look at the things you need to do that a charismatic person already does.
- 2 Decide why you want to improve your charisma.** "Successful people always have an end-goal or purpose," says Hall. Do you want to extend your social circle, meet a future partner or get a promotion at work?
- 3 Think charismatically.** "Thoughts are the absolute cornerstone of any idea," says Hall. "You need to be thinking clear, positive and affirming thoughts about how you are charismatic. Write affirmations and picture yourself being comfortable in large groups."
- 4 Stay real.** Don't become someone else because people will see through the façade. Allow your real personality to come through when you're talking to people and listen with interest to what the other person is saying.
- 5 Practise!** Start by trying out your listening skills on friends and family and, once you gain some confidence, you can expand from there. +

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