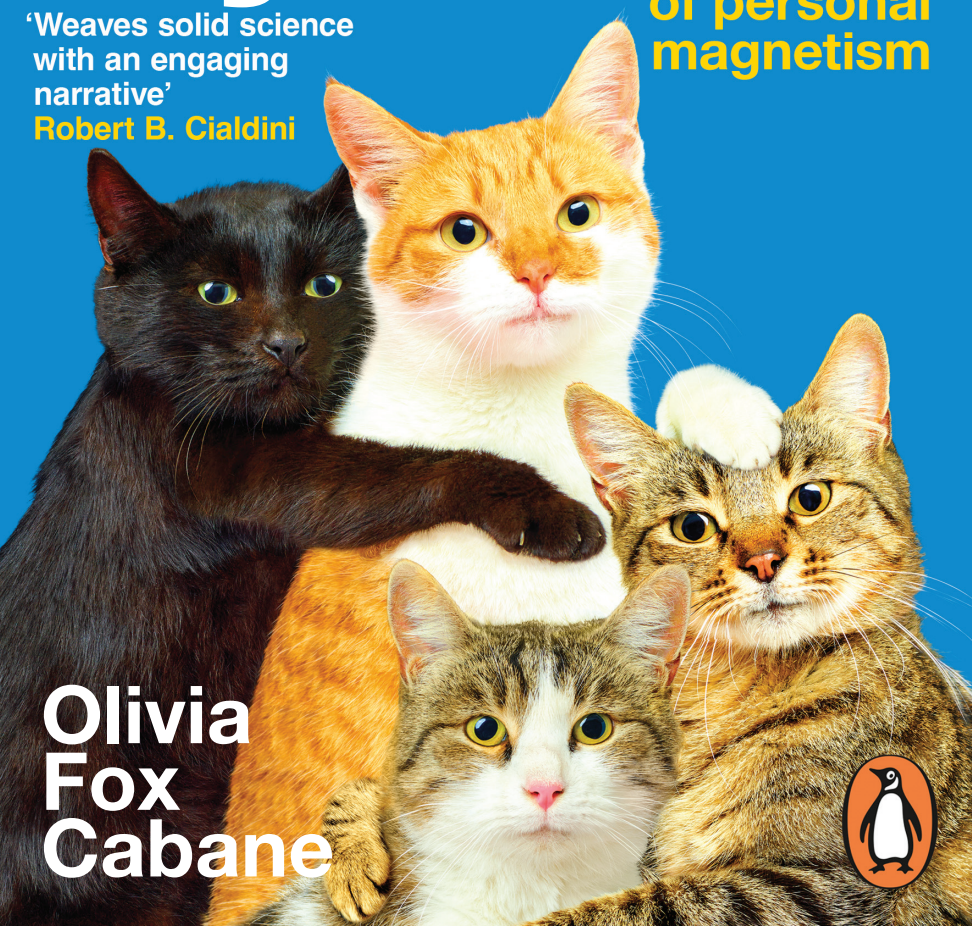
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The Charisma Myth

How anyone can master the art and science of personal magnetism

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Olivia Fox Cabane

THE CHARISMA MYTH

'*The Charisma Myth* is an easy read, effectively integrating stories and research, strategies and applications, techniques and practices' *New York Journal of Books*

'Cabane has done us a big favour. She's woven solid science and engaging narrative into an instructive treatment of the role of charisma in leadership – a topic that (until now) we only poorly understood' Robert Cialdini, author of *Influence*

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'Olivia Fox Cabane offers hands-on advice and a practical guide to humanizing leaders without compromising integrity or authority. She focuses on the "it" factors that can make a real difference' Laura Liang, former CEO, Time Inc

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The Charisma Myth

How Anyone Can
Master the Art and Science
of Personal Magnetism

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Introduction

MARILYN MONROE WANTED to prove a point.

It was a sunny summer day in New York City, 1955. With a magazine editor and a photographer in tow, Marilyn walked down into Grand Central Terminal. Though it was the middle of a busy workday and the platform was packed with people, not a single person noticed her as she stood waiting for the subway. As the photographer's camera clicked, she boarded the train and rode along quietly in a corner of the car. Nobody recognized her.

Marilyn wanted to show that just by deciding to, she could be either glamorous Marilyn Monroe or plain Norma Jeane Baker. On the subway, she was Norma Jeane. But when she resurfaced onto the busy New York sidewalks, she decided to turn into Marilyn. She looked around and teasingly asked her photographer: "Do you want to see *her*?" There were no grand gestures—she just "fluffed up her hair, and struck a pose."

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With this simple shift, she suddenly became magnetic. An aura of magic seemed to ripple out from her, and everything stopped. Time

stood still, as did the people around her, who blinked in amazement as they suddenly recognized the star standing in their midst. In an instant Marilyn was engulfed by fans, and "it took several shoving, scary minutes" for the photographer to help her to escape the growing crowd.[1]

Charisma has always been an intriguing and controversial topic. When I tell people at conferences or cocktail parties that I "teach charisma," they immediately perk up and often exclaim, "But I thought it was something that you either have or don't." Some see it as an unfair advantage, others are eager to learn, *everyone* is fascinated. And they are right to be so. Charismatic people impact the world, whether they're starting new projects, new companies, or new empires.

Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to be as magnetic as Barack Obama, Ryan Reynolds, Dolly Parton, or Oprah? Whether you think you already have some charisma and would like to take it to the next level or you've been wishing for a bit of that magic but think that you just aren't the charismatic type, I have good news: charisma is a skill that you can learn and practice.

What Will Charisma Do for You?

Imagine what your life would be like if you knew that the moment you entered a room, people would immediately take notice, want to hear what you have to say, and be eager to earn your approval.

For charismatic people, this is a way of life. Everyone is impacted by their presence. People are magnetically drawn to them and feel strangely compelled to help them in any way they can. **Charismatic people seem to lead charmed lives: they have more romantic options, they make more money, and they experience less stress**.[2]

Charisma gets people to like you, trust you, and want to be led by you. It can determine whether you're seen as a leader, whether your ideas get adopted, and how effectively your projects are implemented. Like it or not, charisma can make the world go round—**it makes people *want* to do what you want them to do.**

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Charisma is, of course, critical in business. Whether you're applying for a new job or want to advance within your organization, it will help you achieve your goal. Multiple concurring studies indicate that charismatic people receive higher performance ratings and are viewed as more effective by their superiors and subordinates.[3]

If you're a leader, or aspire to be one, charisma matters. It gives you a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining the very best talent. It makes people want to work with you, your team, and your company. Research shows that those following charismatic leaders perform better, experience their work as more meaningful, and have more trust in their leaders than those following effective but noncharismatic leaders.[4]

As Wharton School business professor Robert House notes, charismatic leaders "cause followers to become highly committed to the leader's mission, to make significant personal sacrifices, and to perform above and beyond the call of duty."[5]

Charisma is what enables one successful salesman to sell five times more than his colleagues in the same region. It's the difference between startup founders who have investors banging on their doors and those who have to beg the bank for a loan.

The power of charisma is equally valuable outside of the business environment. It's useful for the stay-at-home parent who needs to influence their children, the children's teachers, or other community members. It can be an invaluable tool for high school students running for leadership roles in student organizations. It can increase your popularity with peers and help you feel more confident in social situations. Charismatic physicians are better liked by patients and are in greater demand, and their patients are more likely to adhere to the medical treatments they prescribe.

Are there limits to the power of charisma? Yes, of course. First, charisma is most effective when the emitter and the recipient share goals and/or values,[6] or when the recipient is experiencing a need for guidance.[7] Second, cultural differences play an important role in the perception of charisma.[8]

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Nonetheless, since this book was first published in 2012, I've heard from readers around the world who applied the techniques in

an incredible variety of situations, from nailing job interviews or getting a promotion to assisting search-and-rescue teams in the aftermath of the 2023 Turkey earthquake. You'll find a few of their stories in the "Reader Report" boxes throughout the book.

It's Not Magic, It's Learned Behaviors

Contrary to popular belief, people are not simply born charismatic—innately magnetic from birth. If charisma were an inherent attribute, charismatic people would always be captivating, and that's just not the case. Even for the most engaging superstar, charisma can be present one moment and absent the next. Marilyn Monroe could "turn off" her charisma like flipping a switch and go completely unnoticed. To turn her charisma back on, she simply changed her body language.

As extensive research in recent years has shown, charisma is the result of specific behaviors,[9] not an inherent or magical personal quality. This is one of the reasons why charisma levels fluctuate: its presence depends on whether or not someone is exhibiting these behaviors.

Have you ever had the experience of feeling totally confident? A moment when people seemed impressed by you—even just one moment of the people around you going, "Wow!" We don't necessarily think of these experiences as charisma, or consider ourselves charismatic, because we assume that charismatic people are magnetic every instant of every day. They aren't.

One of the reasons charisma is mistakenly held to be innate is that, like many other social skills, charismatic behaviors are generally learned early in life. In fact, people usually don't consciously realize they are learning them. They're just trying new behaviors, seeing the results, and refining them. Eventually, the behaviors become instinctive.

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Countless well-known charismatic figures worked hard to gain their charisma, increasing it step by step. But because we come to

know them at the peak of their charisma, it can be hard to believe these superstars weren't always so impressive.

Former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, considered one of the most charismatic CEOs of the decade, did not start out that way. In fact, if you watch his earliest presentations, you'll see that he came across as bashful and awkward, veering from overly dramatic to downright nerdy. Jobs progressively increased his level of charisma over the years, and you can see the gradual improvement in his public appearances.

Just as with any other learned skill, people can become proficient to a greater or lesser degree depending on their natural predisposition and how much time they spend learning, thus leading to different degrees of charisma. How charismatic you are will depend on how many of these behaviors you exhibit and how well you exhibit them.

Of course, there are inherent qualities that allow people to learn some forms of charisma quicker than others: A naturally high degree of extroversion is useful for some forms of charisma, while a naturally high degree of compassion is useful for others. A high degree of self-awareness is useful for all forms.

Personality traits are not deterministic for charismatic performances: they will have some influence, but absolutely everyone can learn to speak and behave *more* charismatically and use a situation-specific effective communication strategy.

Charisma has come under the scrutiny of sociologists, psychologists, and cognitive and behavioral scientists. It has been studied in multiple ways, from clinical laboratory experiments and cross-sectional and longitudinal survey research to qualitative interpretative analysis.[10] The subjects of these studies have been presidents, military leaders, students of all ages, and business executives from low-level managers to CEOs.[11] Thanks to such research, we now understand charisma as a set of behaviors that can, indeed, be taught.[12]

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What Does Charismatic Behavior Look Like?

When we first meet someone, we instinctively assess whether that person is a potential friend or foe and whether they have the power to enact those intentions. Power and intentions are what we're aiming to assess. "Could you move mountains for me? And would you care to do so?" To answer the first question, we try to assess how much power he or she has. To answer the second question, we try to assess how much he or she likes us. When you meet a charismatic person, you get the impression that they have a lot of power and they like you a lot.

To be charismatic, you must give the impression that you possess both high power and high warmth, since charismatic behaviors project a combination of these two qualities.[13] **"Fight or flight?" is the power question. "Friend or foe?" is the warmth question.**

A final dimension underlies both of these qualities: **presence**. When people describe their experience of seeing charisma in action, whether they met Malcolm X or the Dalai Lama, they often mention the individual's extraordinary "presence."

The equation that produces charisma is actually fairly simple:

Presence + Power + Warmth = Charisma

In the business world, you'll hear it described as *executive presence* or *boardroom presence*. Presence turns out to be a core component of charisma, the foundation upon which all else is built.

Bill Clinton is famous for making everyone he meets feel like they are the most important person in the room, or even the most important person he's ever met. I've met ardent Republicans who told me: "I hated Clinton before I met him, I hated him after I met him, but while I met him, man, I loved the man!"

When you're with a charismatic master, not only do you feel their power and a sense of warm engagement, but you also feel that they're completely here with you, in this moment. Present.

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Why You *Shouldn't* Read This Book

First, let's be clear: you don't actually need charisma to succeed. In fact, you don't even need it to get other people to do what you want. You could just read Robert Cialdini's masterful treatise on the subject: *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. *Influence* is a fascinating and thoroughly researched book that can help you become a master of *compliance*, as the field is known.

But compliance works only as long as that particular influence button is being pushed; it's far less effective at building momentum and doesn't give you the ability to inspire others. Charisma is also a better tool for leadership and makes people *want* to do what you want them to do. It may not be necessary for success, but it sure helps.

Second: I wrote this book for the business world, not for romantic contexts. I understand it has become popular in seduction circles, but that's not what it was meant for. Use at your own risk.

Third: if you are neurodivergent, particularly if you are autistic, some of the techniques in this book will constitute forms of masking, which can come at a high cost. They're flagged with ! ∞ ! so you can decide whether to try them out. You might consider skipping ahead to chapter 14, "Neurodivergent Charisma," and returning here later.*

Last but not least: charisma is dangerous. Not just in its effect on others, which has already been covered by many of the historical/traditional books on charisma, but for the charismatic person themselves—see chapter 15 for more details.

Practical Magic

Charisma has been turned into an applied science. What this book does is translate the science into practical, immediately applicable tools with measurable results. You'll learn charisma in a methodical, systematic way, with practical exercises immediately useful in the real

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* Yes, I realize I'm asking you to read chapter 14 before chapter 1. Sorry.

world. And unlike those of us who learned by trial and error, you won't have to waste any time figuring out what works and what doesn't. *You* can go straight to the tried-and-true tools that really do enhance charisma.

Becoming more charismatic does involve work—work that is sometimes hard, uncomfortable, and even daunting. But it's also incredibly rewarding, both in terms of how you will relate to yourself and how others will relate to you. It involves managing your mental ecosystem, understanding and attending to your own needs, as well as knowing which behaviors inspire others to see you as charismatic and learning how to project them.

This book will guide you through that process. It will give you concrete tools for projecting the three crucial aspects of charisma: presence, power, and warmth. As you use them, you will experience an increased sense of personal magnetism—and if it was already strongly present, you'll gain finer control over that charismatic power. You'll learn how to harness it and how to skillfully wield it. You'll also learn how to choose the right kind of charisma for your personality and your goals in any situation.

What you'll find here is practical magic: unique knowledge, drawn from a variety of sciences, revealing what charisma really is and how it works. You'll get an inside peek at what goes on in the minds—and bodies—of charismatic people. You'll get both the knowledge and the techniques you need to apply it. **The world will become your lab, and every time you meet someone, you'll get an opportunity to experiment.**

Once you've mastered the basics, you'll be ready to learn how to be charismatic even in difficult situations, for instance when you're having a career-changing conversation, dealing with a difficult person, or delivering a presentation. And once you know how to access charisma at will, you'll get the insider secrets to living life as a charismatic person.

You'll learn how to become more influential, more persuasive, and more inspiring. You'll learn how to exude charisma—the ability to move through a room and have people go, "Wow, who's *that*?"

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1

Charisma Demystified

IN THE LONDON winter of 1874, William Gladstone was up against Benjamin Disraeli for the post of prime minister of the United Kingdom. This was the Victorian era, so whoever won was going to rule half the world. In the very last week before the election, both men happened to take the same young woman out to dinner. Naturally, the press asked her what impressions the rivals had made. She said, "After dining with Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest person in England. But after dining with Mr. Disraeli, I thought *I* was the cleverest person in England."*

Guess who won the election? It was the man who made *others* feel intelligent, impressive, and fascinating: Benjamin Disraeli.

Consciously or not, charismatic individuals choose specific behaviors that make other people feel a certain way. These behaviors can

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* The quote has been attributed to Jeanette Spencer-Churchill, who would become Winston Churchill's mother.

be learned and perfected by anyone. In fact, **in controlled laboratory experiments, researchers were able to raise and lower people's levels of charisma as if they were turning a dial.**[1]

Contrary to commonly held charisma myths, you don't have to be naturally outgoing, you don't have to be physically attractive, and you won't have to change your personality. No matter where you're starting from, you can significantly increase your personal charisma and reap the rewards both in business and in daily life.

The most common charisma myth is that you have to be naturally boisterous or outgoing to be charismatic. One of the most interesting research findings is that you can be a very charismatic introvert. In Western society, we place such emphasis on the skills and abilities of extroverts that introverts can end up feeling defective and uncool. But introversion is not a terminal drawback. In fact, as we'll see, it can be a strong advantage for certain forms of charisma.

It is also a myth that you have to be attractive to be charismatic. Countless charismatic figures were far from fitting classic standards of beauty. Churchill was not generally considered handsome and certainly not known for his sex appeal. And yet he was one of history's most influential and powerful leaders.

Yes, good looks do confer some advantage. But it's very possible to be charismatic without a striking face or figure. In fact, charisma itself will make you more attractive. When instructed to exhibit specific charismatic behaviors in controlled experiments, participants' levels of attractiveness were rated significantly higher than before.[2]

Last but not least, you won't have to change your personality. In order to become more charismatic, you don't have to force yourself into one particular personality style or do something that is against your nature.

Instead, you will learn some new skills.

Through charismatic training you will learn how to adopt a charismatic posture, how to warm up your eye contact, and how to modulate your voice in ways that make people pay attention. Three quick tips to gain an instant charisma boost in conversation:

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- Lower the intonation of your voice at the ends of your sentences.*
- Reduce how quickly and how often you nod.
- Pause for two full seconds before you speak.

As you can see, these are simple tweaks, not deep value changes. We're not trying to turn you into a different person, just giving you more tools and ways of behaving for you to experiment with; you can decide what feels right and what doesn't. Your personality will stay the same as long as you want it to.

Will these new skills and behaviors feel odd at first? They may. But then, so did brushing your teeth when you first learned how, though now (I hope) it's become a habit you perform each day without thinking. Like many new skills, charismatic behaviors might feel awkward at first, but with practice they will become second nature, like walking, talking, or driving. This book is your step-by-step guide to acquiring these behaviors and making them your own.

We understand that proficiency at chess, singing, or hitting a fastball requires conscious practice. Charisma is a skill that can also be developed through conscious practice, and because we're interacting with people all the time, we get to use our charisma tools on a daily basis.

If you follow the instructions in this book, you *will* increase your level of charisma. And once these practices become second nature, they keep operating in the background without your needing to give them any thought—and you'll keep reaping their rewards from then onward.

How This Will Work for You

I've reverse-engineered the science of charisma by learning the behavioral and cognitive science behind it and striving to extract the

* In fact, intonation is one of the most important indicators of self-confidence and thus power. The lower and steeper the fall at the end of a sentence, the more charismatic, self-confident, and trustworthy you are perceived to be.

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most practical tools and techniques. This book helps you put the science into practice so that you can accelerate your learning curve.

I am offering you the tools that will give you the highest return on your investment and the best, most effective techniques from a broad range of disciplines—from behavioral, cognitive, and neuroscience to meditation; from peak-performance athletic conditioning to Hollywood Method acting.

I'll give you the science when it's relevant (or fun or fascinating), and, more important, I'll give you the practical tools. My goal with this book is to give you techniques you can immediately apply to gain both the skills and the self-confidence that lead to outstanding performance.

However, just reading this book won't yield its full benefits. You would be shortchanging yourself if you avoided any of the exercises, as odd or even uncomfortable as they may feel at times. To be successful, you have to be willing to put in the effort of applying what you read. When an exercise asks you to close your eyes and imagine a scene, really close your eyes and do it. When I ask you to write out a scenario, grab a piece of paper and a pen that writes.

There is no substitute for doing the exercises. Skimming through them with the earnest intention of completing them "another day" is not enough, nor is doing only the exercises that seem easy or interesting. If I ask you to do something, it's for a good reason, and it will have a real impact on your level of charisma.

One essential ingredient of charisma is effort, hearkening back to the fundamental ethological "effort code." The more important something is to us, the more energy we are willing to invest to get the desired result. Even if it eventually comes to *feel* effortless, charismatic communication does take effort: the right pitch means muscle tension, gestures mean dynamic movements, volume means subglottal pressure, etc.

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READER REPORT

It's May 6, 2013, I was a shy boy of seventeen, and I heard an unfamiliar word on television for the first time: *charisma*. I googled it, and I discovered this book. For the next two weeks, I was awake until late all nights. Those were two amazing weeks. I made my personal website, I made my first long travel alone, and got a job offer from one of the leader internet sales companies in Iran. I turned into a talkative and sociable person and was meeting at least one new person a day. There was no hard situation for me anymore. Everything was easy and joyful. I could have made everybody laugh. It was really amazing: I never got angry, never got embarrassed during those two weeks. But after that, everything has disappeared. I turned into the person I used to be before those two weeks. What happened?

Muhammad Vakili
Tabriz, Iran

Over the years, different versions of this issue have been shared with me rather consistently: During the initial days after reading the book, people were full of enthusiasm and applying themselves to the exercises. Afterward, they lost the discipline, and the magic didn't come back until they rearranged their days to incorporate the discipline of the exercises again.

Over time, many, if not most, of the new tools and techniques will become second nature and will no longer require discipline; they will seem instinctive. But just like building new muscles, this will take work at first.

Some of the techniques you'll learn here will give you results immediately, such as learning how to be charismatic when presenting to audiences small or large. Others will take weeks to fully unfold. Some might be surprising, like learning how your toes can help maximize your charisma potential. Though this work can seem intimidating at first, and you'll be taken out of your comfort zone, it's worth it. Commit, and do your homework.

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2

The Charismatic Behaviors

Presence, Power, and Warmth

CHARISMATIC BEHAVIOR CAN be broken down into three core elements: presence, power, and warmth.[1] These elements depend both on our conscious behaviors and on factors we don't consciously control. People pick up on messages we often don't even realize we're sending through small changes in our body language. In this chapter, we'll explore how these signals can be influenced. In order to be charismatic, we need to choose mental states that make our body language, words, and behaviors flow together and express the three core elements of charisma. Since presence is the foundation for everything else, that's where we'll start.

Presence

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Have you ever felt, in the middle of a conversation, as if only half of your mind were present while the other half was busy doing something else? Do you think the other person noticed?

If you're not fully present in an interaction, there's a good chance that your eyes will glaze over or that your facial reactions will be a split second delayed. Since the human mind can read facial expressions in as little as seventeen milliseconds,[2] the person you're speaking with will likely notice even the tiniest delays in your reactions.

We may think that we can fake presence. We may think that we can fake listening. We believe that as long as we seem attentive, it's okay to let our brains churn on other things. But we're wrong. When we're not fully present in an interaction, people will see it. Our body language sends a clear message that other people read and react to, at least on a subconscious level.

You've surely had the experience of talking to someone who wasn't really listening. Maybe they seemed to be just "going through the motions" of listening to you so you wouldn't be offended. Perhaps they were distracted when their phone pinged. Somehow, they didn't seem to be paying full attention. How did you feel then? Brushed off? Annoyed? Resentful, inferior to whatever was more important to them than your conversation?

Not only can the lack of presence be visible, it can also be perceived as inauthentic, which has even worse emotional consequences. When you're perceived as disingenuous, it's virtually impossible to generate trust, rapport, or loyalty. And it's impossible to be charismatic.

Lack of presence *always* lowers charisma, sometimes to a vanishing point: someone who is confident and warm but totally distracted may be impressive but not charismatic.

Presence is a learnable skill. Like any other ability (from painting to playing the piano), you can increase it with practice and patience. Being present means simply having a moment-to-moment awareness of what's happening. It means paying attention to what's going on rather than being caught up in your own thoughts.

Now that you know the cost of lacking presence, try the exercise on the next page to test yourself, see how present you can be, and learn three simple techniques to immediately boost your charisma in personal interactions.

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Putting It into Practice: Presence

Here are a few techniques for remaining present, adapted from mindfulness disciplines. All you need is a reasonably quiet place where you can close your eyes (whether standing or sitting) for just one minute and a way to keep track of time.

Set the timer for one minute. Close your eyes and try to focus on one of the following three things: the sounds around you, your breathing, or the sensations in your toes.

1. Sounds: Scan your environment for sound. As a meditation teacher told me, "Imagine that your ears are satellite dishes, passively and objectively registering sounds."
2. Your breath: Focus on your breath and the sensations it creates in your nostrils or stomach as it goes in and out. Pay attention to one breath at a time, but try to notice everything about this one breath. Imagine that your breath is someone you want to give your full attention to.
3. Your toes: Focus your attention on the sensations in your toes. This forces your mind to sweep through your body, helping you to get into the physical sensations of the moment.

So how did that go? Did you find your mind constantly wandering even though you were trying your best to be present? As you've noticed, staying fully present isn't always easy. There are two main reasons for this.

First, our brains are wired to pay attention to novel stimuli, whether they be sights, smells, or sounds. We're wired to be distracted, to have our attention grabbed by any new stimulus: it could be important! It could eat us! This tendency was key to our ancestors' survival. Imagine two tribesmen hunting through the plains, searching the horizon for signs of the antelope that could feed their family. Something flickers in the distance. The tribesman whose attention wasn't immediately caught? He's not our ancestor.

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The second reason is that our society encourages distraction. The constant influx of stimulation we receive worsens our natural tendencies. The dings from our texts and social media notifications constantly pull us away from the present moment. This can eventually lead us into a state of *continuous partial attention*, in which we never give our full attention to any single thing. We're always partially distracted.

So if you often find it hard to be fully present, don't beat yourself up. This is entirely normal. Presence is hard for almost all of us. A 2,250-person study coauthored by Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert estimated that nearly half of the average person's time was spent "mind wandering."[3] Even meditation masters can find their minds wandering during their practice. In fact, this is a common subject of jokes during intensive meditation retreats (yes, there's such a thing as meditation jokes).

The good news is that even a minor increase in your capacity for presence can have a major effect on those around you. Because so few of us are ever fully present, if you can manage even a few moments of full presence from time to time, you'll make quite an impact.

The very next time you're in a conversation, try to regularly check whether your mind is fully engaged or whether it is wandering elsewhere (including preparing your next sentence). Aim to bring yourself back to the present moment as often as you can by focusing on your toes for just a second, and then get back to focusing on the other person.

Don't be discouraged if you feel that you didn't fully succeed in the one-minute exercise above. You actually did gain a charisma boost right then and there simply by practicing presence. And because you've already gained the mindset shift (awareness of the importance of presence and the cost of the lack of it), you're now already ahead of the game. If you were to stop right here and read nothing further, it would be well worth it.

Here's how this could play out for you in a practical, everyday setting. Let's say a colleague walks into your office, wanting your opinion on some matter. You have only a few minutes to spare before your next meeting, and you're worried that this might take more time than you have.

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If you let your mind continue churning away while he's talking to

you, not only will you feel anxious and have a hard time concentrating, you'll also give the impression that you're restless and not fully present. Your colleague might conclude that you don't care enough about him or his problem to really pay attention.

If instead you remember to use one of the quick fixes—focusing for just a second on your breath or your toes—this will instantly bring you back to the present moment. This full presence will show in your eyes and your face, and will be seen by the person who's talking to you. By giving them just a few moments of full presence, they will feel respected and listened to.

Being charismatic does not depend on how much time you have but on how fully present you are in each interaction.

The ability to be fully present makes you stand out from the crowd; it makes you memorable. When you're fully present, even a five-minute conversation can create a "wow" effect, as well as an emotional connection. The people you're with feel that they have your full attention and that they are the most important thing in the world to you at that moment.

One student told me that he frequently upset people when he was under pressure or dealing with multiple requests. If someone came to see him, while they talked his mind would wander back to whatever he had been working on, and as a result that person felt brushed off and unimportant. After putting some of the focus exercises to work, he reported that giving people his full attention even for just a few moments made them feel cared for and special and completely changed his interactions with them.

Increasing your ability to be present not only improves your body language, listening skills, and mental focus, it could even enhance your ability to enjoy life. Too often when a special moment arrives, such as a celebration or even a few minutes of quality time with a loved one, our mind is running in six different directions.

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Meditation teacher Tara Brach has made the practice of *being present* a lifetime study. Here's how she puts it: "In most moments we have a continuous internal commentary on what is happening and

what we should do next. We might greet a friend with a hug, but the warmth of our greeting becomes blurred by our computations about how long to embrace or what we're going to say when we're done. We rush through the motions, not fully present." Being present enables you to fully notice and drink in the good moments.

You've just gained three instant fixes to use during interactions, and through practice, they can become second nature. Remember that every time you bring yourself back to full presence, you reap major rewards: you become more impactful, more memorable, and come across as more grounded. You're laying the foundation for a charismatic presence.

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At first I just did not understand what this book meant by "presence." If I am somewhere, I am somewhere, right? But gradually it started dawning on me that we may be in one place, but in our mind we may be somewhere else.

Then I realized that my biggest challenge with presence was my deeply embedded habit to compare myself with others, the feeling of being unworthy. The feeling of shame even for the slightest mistake was pursuing me (shame is widely used in my culture as a motivator). Fear of a new mistake was dominating my thoughts when I had to make an important step. Despite being a recognized academic and scholar, I still felt inferior to most people I was communicating with.

Reading this book, it dawned on me: my concerns on how I look in the eyes of others, my fear of underperforming, distracted me from being totally present in the moment. The book helped me to see the reason, and give a name to it. But it also gave me the remedy: I started practicing all the techniques, from the simple concentration practices to deeper psychological insights. For example, sometimes I focus on listening to the surrounding sounds, or focusing on the feeling in the toes. Another thing that helped me to be present is thinking about how I can help others rather than what they will think about me.

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I just made it my habit to think differently—and changes started happening, from getting the first job to receiving rewards and recognitions.

What helped me most, I think, was the "neutralizing negativity" practice that asks to imagine the worst possible scenario of the situation—and understand that it usually is not really so bad. It helps me differentiate what really can be a threat from my groundless fears. I ask this question to others when they reach out for advice: "What is the worst thing that may happen if you do it?" And often it is an eye-opening moment.

I now have fifty-plus faculty under my supervision, and I am receiving the warmest feedback from them, telling how much I changed their lives and how they value our connection. Some of my faculty got recognitions and promotions at my recommendation. It really gives me wings to think that I can bring positive change in the lives of others! I truly love what I am doing, and getting rid of fears and concerns helped me totally enjoy it to the fullest and give value to others.

Tatiana Andrienko-Genin
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Now that you know what presence is, why it matters to charisma, and how to get it, let's look at the other two crucial charisma qualities: power and warmth.

Power and Warmth

Being seen as powerful means being perceived as able to affect the world around us, whether through influence on or authority over others, large amounts of money, expertise, intelligence, sheer physical strength, or high social status. We look for clues of power in someone's appearance, in others' reaction to this person, and, most of all, in the person's body language.

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Warmth, simply put, is goodwill toward others. Warmth tells us whether or not people will want to use whatever power they have in

our favor. Being seen as warm means being perceived as any of the following: benevolent, altruistic, caring, or willing to impact our world in a positive way. Warmth is assessed almost entirely through body language and behavior; it's evaluated more directly than power.

How do we gauge power and warmth? Imagine that you're meeting someone for the first time. In most instances you don't have the benefit of an extensive background check, interviews with friends or relatives, or even the time to wait and observe their behavior. So in most instances you have to make a quick guess.

Throughout our interactions, we instinctively look for clues with which to evaluate warmth or power, and then we adjust our assumptions accordingly. Expensive clothing leads us to *assume* wealth, friendly body language leads us to *assume* good intentions, a confident posture leads us to *assume* the person has something to be confident about. **In essence, people will tend to accept whatever you project.**

When talking to founders, I always tell them to behave with venture capitalists as if the VC had *already* invested in them. That tone of voice, body language, and word choice can be incredibly powerful. Essentially, imagine you're talking to your favorite investor, the one who's always been there for you.

Just by increasing your projection of power or your projection of warmth, you increase your level of charisma. But when you can project both power and warmth together, you really maximize your personal charisma potential.

Power is the "*Can* you move mountains for me?" question. Warmth is the "Would you *want* to move them for me?" question. Presence is the "Are you *aware* of which mountains I need moved?" question. Today, there are many ways to be perceived as powerful, from displaying intelligence (think Bill Gates, Carl Sagan, or Warren Buffett) to displaying kindness (think Mister Rogers or Princess Diana). But in the earliest days of human history, one form of power was predominant: brute force. Yes, intelligence was valuable, but much less than it is today—it's hard to imagine Bill Gates faring well in the jungle. Few of those who gained positions of power through raw strength and aggression would have also exhibited much warmth. The combination of power and warmth would have been very rare

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and very, very precious: a powerful person who also viewed us kindly could mean the difference between life and death in critical moments. Figuring out who might want to help us and who has the power to do so has always been critical to our survival.

That's why our reaction to power and warmth is wired so deep. We react to these qualities as we do to salt and sugar. Our ancestors survived by having a strong positive reaction to salt and sugar—they aided our survival and were scarce in our original environment. Though they're abundant today, our instinct remains. The same holds true for charisma: though the combination of warmth and power is far easier for people to attain today, it still plays powerfully on our instincts. From lab experiments to neuroimaging, research has consistently shown that they are the two dimensions we evaluate first and foremost in assessing other people.

Both power and warmth are necessary conditions for charisma. Someone who is powerful but not warm can be impressive but isn't necessarily perceived as charismatic and can come across as arrogant, cold, or standoffish. Someone who possesses warmth without power can be likable but isn't necessarily perceived as charismatic and can come across as overeager, subservient, or desperate to please.

William Gladstone projected power during the 1874 elections. A high-status individual of strong political weight and powerful connections, known for keen intelligence and deep knowledge, he impressed his young dinner companion with his power but lacked the warmth to make her feel special.

Disraeli was also projecting power. He, too, had a history of political power, impressive wit, and keen intelligence. But Disraeli's genius was his ability to make whomever he was speaking with feel intelligent and fascinating. He projected presence and warmth in addition to power and was handsomely rewarded for it.

Though other approaches to charisma are possible, the combination of presence, power, and warmth is one of the most effective frameworks to help maximize your full charisma potential. Since this book was first published, this central model of charisma was, in fact, directly put to the test in studies and seems to hold up rather well.[4]

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Over one year into a new job, I was trying to improve my likability and improve a relationship with a senior colleague.

Having learnt how to be fully present, I decided to practice it when interacting with this senior colleague. I tried not to look over my shoulder or fiddle with my phone when we interacted. I was also empathetic in all our interactions.

At first, I didn't get any positive responses from this colleague. But after a few weeks of intentional interactions, she walked into my office one day and just started sharing a lot of challenges she was facing with getting a promotion. Afterward she said she always felt so much better after talking to me.

Then she started talking more about my technical competence to others. I didn't expect improving my presence to have a ripple effect on how my technical skills are perceived.

P.S. I also can confirm the downside of projecting warmth: it really can cause people to overshare (even in the work environment) if not managed properly.

Daniel O.
Lagos, Nigeria

Charismatic Body Language

After extensive studies, the MIT Media Lab concluded that it could model the outcome of negotiations, telephone sales calls, and business plan pitches with remarkably high accuracy simply by analyzing participants' body language and voice tones, ignoring the actual words.[5] Though this may sound incredible—how could words carry so little weight compared to the body language of the person delivering them?—it actually makes sense. In the scope of human evolution, language is a relatively recent invention. But we've been interacting well before this through nonverbal modes of communication. As a result, nonverbal communication is hardwired into our brains much

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deeper than the more recent language-processing abilities. This is why nonverbal communication has a far greater impact.

When someone comes across as charismatic—mostly because of how they move, sound, and express themselves—it can directly activate brain regions linked to emotion and decision-making.[6]

For charisma, your voice and body language matter far more than your actual words do. No matter how powerful your message or how skillfully crafted your pitch, if your body language is wrong, you won't be charismatic. On the other hand, with the right body language you can be charismatic without saying a word.

Vocal Charisma

Let's be clear, however: your voice is crucial to your charisma, especially in today's phone- and video-based business world. In fact, though people tend to assume that the perception of competence and trust mainly come through words, our voice is also (and perhaps even more so) a carrier signal of competence and trustworthiness.

Research shows there are four key dimensions to your voice: pitch, duration (including timing and tempo), voice quality (creaky, breathy, hoarse, tense, etc.), and volume. Interestingly, though many people assume that pitch is critical, in fact it's one of the least important factors in how listeners perceive charisma. We will delve into vocal charisma further in chapter 8, "Speaking—and Listening—with Charisma."

Charisma Begins in the Mind

While you were reading the last paragraph, were you aware that your eyelids were regularly fluttering in front of your eyes?

No? Yet they were blinking at precise intervals.

Did you notice the weight of your tongue in your mouth?

Or the position of your toes?

Have you forgotten your eyelids again?

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Without our realizing it, our bodies send out thousands of signals every minute. Just like our breath and heartbeat, these signals are

part of the millions of bodily functions controlled not by our conscious mind but by our subconscious mind. There is far too much body language for us to control consciously.

This has two consequences. First, because we can't consciously control all of our body language, we can't just broadcast charismatic body language at will. To get all the signals right, we'd need to simultaneously control thousands of elements, from minute vocal fluctuations to the precise degree and kind of tension around our eyes. It's practically impossible. On the other hand, since our subconscious is responsible for most of our nonverbal signals, if we could direct our subconscious appropriately, then the issue would be solved. (Hint: we can, and you'll learn how.)

The second consequence is that our body language expresses our mental state whether we like it or not. Our facial expressions, voice, posture, and all the other components of body language reflect our mental and emotional condition every second. Because we don't control this flow consciously, whatever is in our head will show up in our body language.

Even if we control the main expression on our face or the way we hold our arms, legs, or head, if our internal state is different from what we're aiming to portray, sooner or later what's called a *microexpression* will flash across our face. These split-second microexpressions may be fleeting, but they will be caught by observers (remember, people can read your face in as little as seventeen milliseconds). And **if there's an incongruence between our main expression and that microexpression, people will feel it on a subconscious level: their gut will tell them something's not quite right.**[7]

Have you ever sensed the difference between a real smile and a fake one? There is a clear, visible difference between a *social smile* and a *true smile*. A true smile brings into play two groups of facial muscles—one lifts the corners of the mouth and the other affects the area around the eyes. In a genuine smile, while the outer corners of the mouth lift, the inner corners of the eyebrows soften and fall down. In a fake smile, only the mouth-corner muscle (the zygomaticus major) is used. The smile does not reach the eyes, or at least not in the same way a real smile would,[8] and people can spot the difference.

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