

Charisma

**The secrets of making
a lasting impression**

Andrew Leigh



Charisma

While there is some debate about how far one can increase ordinary intelligence, you can certainly develop your emotional intelligence. What sets emotional intelligence apart from ordinary people skills is the ability to read the social dynamic – or what is happening at any moment during an interaction.

Developing your emotional intelligence means you also become socially aware and this can generate personal magnetism. Having a magnetic personality is therefore potentially within the reach of all of us. You attract people because they experience you as intensely aware of them – in showbiz terms, it is the audience that counts, not oneself.

Emotional intelligence is like a special radar for reading situations and interpreting the behaviours of others, their intentions, emotional states and willingness to interact. The trouble is, we

emotional intelligence
is like a special radar

sometimes suffer from radar blind spots where we either misread a situation or do not read it at all. For example, if you feel free to walk over to someone and immediately launch

into saying how terrific your company is, regardless of whether they are ready to hear about it, then you have failed to read the radar correctly. Or if you say something that completely upsets another person and do not even realise it, then again your radar has failed.

Ways to increase your emotional intelligence

Other chapters deal with aspects of improving your emotional intelligence, in particular those on aim (Chapter 2), authenticity (Chapter 6) and presence (Chapter 5). Here we will focus on situational awareness, being able to ‘read’ the situational radar screen.

Useful tools to help you read the situation include the following:

- Space – what is the spatial picture in this situation?
- Behaviours – what do you observe in this situation?
- Advanced sensory activity – what is happening in this situation?

Space

Human beings inhabit a space and you can read a lot from how they choose to do that. For example, when you attend your next meeting, as you enter, look around at how people have chosen to spread themselves out, or not, whether they are leaning inwards or outwards, and what other signals you can pick up from the spatial picture before you.

Does the spatial arrangement seem businesslike, tranquil, alert, strained or part of a ritual? Do people look comfortable or ill at ease? Does the picture seem welcoming or not? Who sits where and why – for example, does the most senior person always sit at the head of the table? Where would it be best to place yourself in this picture and why?

Next time you enter someone's office, take a closer look at the spatial arrangements. Do they seem designed to emphasise the occupant's power? Do they promote or deter communication, or encourage or discourage any intimacy? What else can you read from the spatial arrangements?

Behaviours

When you apply emotional intelligence you observe closely other people's behaviour and consciously look for non-verbal information about the situation, including body postures, movements, gestures, facial expressions, pitch and tone of voice. These behaviours can signal all sorts of messages that once spotted you must then try to make sense of. For example, how do people in the room signal deference or authority, who touches whom, or enters the room first or last?

Try watching the TV or a film with the sound off and observe how people move and communicate without words. This kind of observation is what experienced poker players often rely on to ‘read’ their opponents.

Advanced sensory activity – what is happening?

This goes beyond overt behaviours and involves being alert to far less obvious factors that may tell you how people are feeling and what they are thinking. For example, watch people’s breathing – are they taking shallow or deep breaths, breathing rapidly or apparently calmly?

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Check out involuntary signs such as the pallor of people’s skin. What is this telling you about what is happening inside the person? For example, if someone looks flushed is it a signal of disagreement, anger or perhaps embarrassment?

Finally, assess people’s energy levels – are they high or low, rising or falling? Signs of changing energy levels may stem from many sources such as body posture, eye contact, hand or foot movements and so on.

‘Even if you’re in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or out of place, don’t try to swim against the current. Change direction. Find the flow and follow it.’

Oprah Winfrey, television presenter

Charisma generally goes hand-in-hand with confidence. It is hard to imagine someone with charisma who does not also exude a high degree of confidence, yet the two attributes are not identical. Just because you are confident does not mean you automatically acquire a powerful charisma. Equally, those with charisma may struggle to fully integrate confidence into their lives. Insecurity

may lurk in the background like a black cloud, as it did with Marilyn Monroe for example.

Despite a strong charisma, many people find their normally cast-iron self-certainty occasionally takes a dive. Actress Winona Ryder admitted to depression after splitting up with ex-fiancé Johnny Depp, who himself has suffered from anxiety disorder. Others with confidence-sapping mental states include Anthony Hopkins, Hugh Laurie, Catherine Zeta-Jones, J.K. Rowling, Mel Gibson, Jim Carrey and Cher.

The power of genuine confidence is that when you exude it you automatically transmit positive emotions to other people. They quickly detect your state of mind and unconsciously find themselves mirroring it back to you. It becomes a mutually reinforcing process, leaving everyone feeling better. Leaving people feeling better is an essential requirement of charisma.

You build self-confidence through practice. You may possess a super-high IQ, a gift for witty banter or stunning good looks, yet you may still not be bursting with self-confidence. Confidence has many facets, and you will need to explore what builds and what undermines yours.

You are more than your personality, your body, or your mind. You are part of a world of ever-changing opportunities and situations. If, in enhancing your charisma, confidence seems an issue for you, invest time in exploring some of the ways described here for moving it onto a firmer base. Use each situation where you feel a low level of confidence as a useful platform from which to change direction and try something new.



Chapter 5

Presence