

“A fascinating look at how to improve our leadership skills and philosophy.” —Marissa Mayer, CEO, Yahoo!

# The **Charisma** Myth

How Anyone Can  
Master the Art and Science  
of Personal Magnetism



**Olivia Fox Cabane**

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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 Jean Baker. On the subway, she was Norma Jean. 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."

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.<sup>1</sup>

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 Bill Clinton or as captivating as Steve Jobs was? 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.

Charisma gets people to like you, trust you, and want to be led by you. It can determine whether you're seen as a follower or 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.

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup>

Charisma is what enables one successful salesman to sell five times more than his colleagues in the same region. It's the difference between

entrepreneurs 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 mom who needs to influence her children, their teachers, or other community members. It can be an invaluable tool for high school students who'd like to ace their college interviews or are running for leadership roles in student organizations. It can help individuals become more popular with their peers and 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. They're also less likely to be sued when things go wrong. Charisma matters even in research and academia: charismatic individuals are more likely to get published, to attract research funding from industry grants, or to teach the most desirable courses. The professor who is always surrounded by admiring students after lectures—that's charisma, too.

### **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 nonverbal behaviors,<sup>5</sup> 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, master of a situation? 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.

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.

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. The subjects of these studies have been presidents, military leaders, students of all ages, and business executives from low-level managers to CEOs. Thanks to such research, we now understand charisma as a set of behaviors.

## **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.

The equation that produces charisma is actually fairly simple. All you have to do is give the impression that you possess both high power and high warmth, since charismatic behaviors project a combination of these two

qualities. “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 Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, or the Dalai Lama, they often mention the individual’s extraordinary “presence.”

Presence is the single most requested aspect of charisma when I’m coaching executives. They want to increase their *executive presence* or *boardroom presence*. And they’re right to focus on it: presence turns out to be the real core component of charisma, the foundation upon which all else is built. When you’re with a charismatic master—take Bill Clinton, for example—you not only feel his power and a sense of warm engagement, you also feel that he’s completely here with you, in this moment. Present.

## 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 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.

You'll get an inside peek at what goes on in the minds—and bodies—of charismatic people. I'll give you insights into what the CEOs I coach wrestle with behind closed doors.

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 both the insights and the techniques you need to apply this knowledge. 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*?”

## Charisma Demystified

IN THE TORRID London summer of 1886, 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 handicap. 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 charisma 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:

- Lower the intonation of your voice at the end 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. 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.

I know that a person's charisma level can be changed through conscious practice because I've helped countless clients increase theirs in this way. Interviewing people close to my clients before and after our work together confirmed that they were able to change how people perceived them. I've also taught these charisma tools at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, after UC Berkeley's business school asked me to create a complete curriculum for charisma and leadership.

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 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.

When I'm asked how soon my coaching produces results, I answer: In one session, you'll feel the difference. In two sessions, others will see the difference. In three sessions, you'll have a whole new presence.

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.

This is the very challenge I bring into the office of every executive who's ever hired me. 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.

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.

When I asked one of my clients what advice he would give others about to start this work, he said: "Tell them that: even though it can seem intimidating at first, and you'll be taken out of your comfort zone, it's worth it." Commit, and do your homework.

## The Charismatic Behaviors

### Presence, Power, and Warmth

CHARISMATIC BEHAVIOR CAN be broken down into three core elements: presence, power, and warmth. 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

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,<sup>1</sup> 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. Somehow, they didn't seem to be paying full attention. How did you feel then? Brushed off? Annoyed? Just plain bad? As a student in one of my Harvard lectures told me: "It happened recently when I was talking to someone—I felt she wasn't really present. I felt resentful, inferior to whatever was more important to her than our 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.

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.

### **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.

The second reason is that our society encourages distraction. The constant influx of stimulation we receive worsens our natural tendencies. 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."<sup>2</sup> 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 are such things 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 breath or your toes for just a second, and then get back to focusing on the other person.

One of my clients, after trying this exercise for the first time, reported: "I found myself relaxing, smiling, and others suddenly noticed me and smiled back without my saying a word."

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.

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. When you're fully present, it shows in your body language in a highly charisma-enhancing way.

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 client 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 these focus exercises to work, he reported, “I learned how valuable it was to give them my full attention even for just a few moments, and the techniques helped me stay present in that moment. As a result, people left my office feeling cared for, special.” This, he told me, was one of the most valuable lessons he’d learned from all our work together.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Today, there are many ways to be perceived as powerful, from displaying intelligence (think Bill Gates) to displaying kindness (think the Dalai Lama). 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 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 fat and sugar. Our ancestors survived by

having a strong positive reaction to fat 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 1886 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.

## **Charismatic Body Language**

After extensive studies, the MIT Media Lab concluded that it could predict the outcome of negotiations, telephone sales calls, and business plan pitches with 87 percent accuracy simply by analyzing participants' body language, without listening to a single word of content.<sup>4</sup>

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

For charisma, your body language matters far more than your 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. Projecting presence, power, and warmth through your body language is often all you need to be perceived as charismatic.

### ***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?

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. We can't micromanage charismatic body language. 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.\*

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 zygomatic major) is used. The smile does not reach the eyes, or at least not in the same way a real smile would,<sup>6</sup> and people can spot the difference.

Because what's in your mind shows up in your body and because people will catch even the briefest microexpression, to be effective, *charismatic behaviors must originate in your mind*.

If your internal state is anticharismatic, no amount of effort and willpower can make up for it. Sooner or later, some of your underlying thoughts and feelings will show through. On the other hand, if your internal state *is* charismatic, then the right body language will flow forth effortlessly. Thus, the first step in learning charisma—and what the first part of this book is all about—is developing the various mental states that produce charismatic body language and behaviors.

We will start by gaining some insight into charismatic mental states—what they are, how to best access them, and how to fully integrate them so they become effortless. Only afterward will we start practicing external charismatic behaviors. Learning these skills in the reverse order could lead to embarrassing results. Imagine that you're giving an important presentation. You're doing well, using all the great new tools you've learned, being incredibly charismatic. And then suddenly, someone says