

# Experience

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tial, trustworthy, and “leaderlike” in the eyes of others. In this article we’ll explain these tactics and how we help managers master them. Just as athletes rely on hard training and the right game plan to win a competition, leaders who want to become charismatic must study the CLTs, practice them religiously, and have a good deployment strategy.

## What Is Charisma?

Charisma is rooted in values and feelings. It’s influence born of the alchemy that Aristotle called the *logos*, the *ethos*, and the *pathos*; that is, to persuade others, you must use powerful and reasoned rhetoric, establish personal and moral credibility, and then rouse followers’ emotions and passions. If a leader can do those three things well, he or she can then tap into the hopes and ideals of followers, give them a sense of purpose, and inspire them to achieve great things.

Several large-scale studies have shown that charisma can be an invaluable asset in any work context—small or large, public or private, Western or Asian. Politicians know that it’s important. Yet many business managers don’t use charisma, perhaps because they don’t know how to or because they believe it’s not as easy to master as transactional (carrot-and-stick) or instrumental (task-based) leadership. Let’s be clear: Leaders need technical expertise to win the trust of followers, manage operations, and set strategy; they also benefit from the ability to punish and reward. But the most effective leaders layer charismatic leadership on top of

## MANAGING YOURSELF

# Learning Charisma

Transform yourself into the person others want to follow.

by John Antonakis, Marika Fenley, and Sue Liechti

Jana stands at the podium, palms sweaty, looking out at hundreds of colleagues who are waiting to hear about her new initiative. Bill walks into a meeting after a failed product launch to greet an exhausted and demotivated team that desperately needs his direction. Robin gets ready to confront a brilliant but underperforming subordinate who needs to be put back on track.

We’ve all been in situations like these. What they require is charisma—the ability to communicate a clear, visionary, and inspirational message that captivates and motivates an audience. So how do you

learn charisma? Many people believe that it’s impossible. They say that charismatic people are born that way—as naturally expressive and persuasive extroverts. After all, you can’t teach someone to be Winston Churchill.

While we agree with the latter contention, we disagree with the former. Charisma is not all innate; it’s a learnable skill or, rather, a set of skills that have been practiced since antiquity. Our research with managers in the laboratory and in the field indicates that anyone trained in what we call “charismatic leadership tactics” (CLTs) can become more influen-



transactional and instrumental leadership to achieve their goals.

In our research, we have identified a dozen key CLTs. Some of them you may recognize as long-standing techniques of oratory. Nine of them are verbal: metaphors, similes, and analogies; stories and anecdotes; contrasts; rhetorical questions; three-part lists; expressions of moral conviction; reflections of the group's sentiments; the setting of high goals; and conveying confidence that they can be achieved. Three tactics are nonverbal: animated voice, facial expressions, and gestures.

There are other CLTs that leaders can use—such as creating a sense of urgency, invoking history, using repetition, talking about sacrifice, and using humor—but the 12 described in this article are the ones that have the greatest effect and can work in almost any context. In studies and experiments, we have found that people who use them appropriately can unite followers around a vision in a way that others can't. In eight of the past 10 U.S. presidential races, for instance, the candidate who deployed verbal CLTs more often won. And when we measured "good" presentation skills, such as speech structure, clear pronunciation, use of easy-to-understand language, tempo of speech, and speaker comfort, and compared their impact against that of the CLTs, we found that the CLTs played a much bigger role in determining who was perceived to be more leaderlike, competent, and trustworthy.

Still, these tactics don't seem to be widely known or taught in the business world. The managers who practice them typically learned them by trial and error, without thinking consciously about them. As one manager who attended our training remarked: "I use a lot of these tactics, some without even knowing it." Such learning should not be left to chance.

We teach managers the CLTs by outlining the concepts and then showing news and film clips that highlight examples from business, sports, and politics. Managers must then experiment with and practice

the tactics—on video, in front of peers, and on their own. A group of midlevel European executives (with an average age of 35) that did so as part of our training almost doubled their use of CLTs in presentations. As a result, they saw observers' numerical ratings of their competence as leaders jump by about 60% on average. They were then able to take the tactics back to their jobs. We saw the same thing happen with another group of executives (with an average age of 42) in a large Swiss firm. Overall, we've found that about 65% of people who have been trained in the CLTs receive above-average ratings as leaders, in contrast with only 35% of those who have not been trained.

The aim is to use the CLTs not only in public speaking but also in everyday conversations—to be more charismatic all the

## After executives were trained in these tactics, the leadership ratings observers gave them rose by about 60%.

time. The tactics work because they help you create an emotional connection with followers, even as they make you appear more powerful, competent, and worthy of respect. In Greek, the word "charisma" means special gift. Start to use the CLTs correctly, and that's what people will begin to think you have.

Let's now look at the tactics in detail.

### Connect, Compare, And Contrast

Charismatic speakers help listeners understand, relate to, and remember a message. A powerful way to do this is by using *metaphors*, *similes*, and *analogies*. Martin Luther King Jr. was a master of the metaphor. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, for example, he likened the U.S. Constitution to "a promissory note" guaranteeing the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all people but

noted that America had instead given its black citizens "a bad check," one that had come back marked "insufficient funds." Everyone knows what it means to receive a bad check. The message is crystal clear and easy to retain.

Metaphors can be effective in any professional context, too. Joe, a manager we worked with, used one to predispose his team to get behind an urgent relocation. He introduced it by saying: "When I heard about this from the board, it was like hearing about a long-awaited pregnancy. The difference is that we have four months instead of nine months to prepare." The team instantly understood it was about to experience an uncomfortable but ultimately rewarding transition.

*Stories and anecdotes* also make messages more engaging and help listeners connect with the speaker. Even people who aren't born raconteurs can employ them in a compelling way. Take this example from a speech Bill Gates gave at Harvard, urging graduates to consider their broader responsibilities: "My mother... never stopped pressing me to do more for others. A few days before my wedding, she hosted a bridal event, at which she read aloud a letter about marriage that she had written to Melinda. My mother was very ill with cancer at the time, but she saw one more opportunity to deliver her message, and at the close of the letter she [quoted]: 'From those to whom much is given, much is expected.'"

Lynn, another manager we studied, used the following story to motivate her reports during a crisis: "This reminds me of the challenge my team and I faced when climbing the Eiger peak a few years ago. We got caught in bad weather, and we could have died up there. But working together, we managed to survive. And we made what at first seemed impossible, possible. Today we are in an economic storm, but by pulling together, we can turn this situation around and succeed." The story made her team feel reassured and inspired.

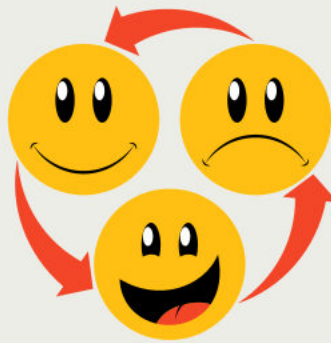
*Contrasts* are a key CLT because they combine reason and passion; they clarify

## CHARISMA IN VOICE AND BODY

## Three tactics for showing passion and winning over listeners



**ANIMATED VOICE** People who are passionate vary the volume with which they speak—whispering at appropriate points or rising to a crescendo to hammer home a point. Emotion—sadness, happiness, excitement, surprise—must come through in the voice. Pauses are also important because they convey control.



**FACIAL EXPRESSIONS** These help reinforce your message. Listeners need to see as well as hear your passion—especially when you're telling a story or reflecting their sentiments. So be sure to make eye contact (one of the givens of charisma), and get comfortable smiling, frowning, and laughing at work.



**GESTURES** These are signals for your listeners. A fist can reinforce confidence, power, and certitude. Waving a hand, pointing, or pounding a desk can help draw attention.

Show Integrity, Authority,  
And Passion

Engage and Distill

## Putting It All into Practice



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John Antonakis is a full professor on the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Lausanne; he consults regularly to companies on leadership development. Marika Fenley has a Ph.D. in management focusing on gender and leadership from the Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Lausanne. Sue Liechti has master's degree in psychology from the University of Lausanne and is an organizational development consultant.

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