

Leadership Charisma

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with Deiric McCann



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Dedication

WE WERE JUST three months into writing this book when Jim Sirbasku, my business partner and best friend of 40 years, passed away suddenly.

Jim had an enormous impact on the lives of everyone he came to know. In announcing Jim Sirbasku Day, Terry Stephens, chairman of the Waco Chamber of Commerce, opened his talk with words that summed Jim up perfectly:

The thing I remember most about Jim Sirbasku was his enthusiasm. When you met Jim Sirbasku, whether it was the first time or the hundredth time, he was glad to see you – and you knew he was glad to see you.

His persona was one of enthusiasm and high energy, and he poured that energy into the people he met and the people he worked with ...

There is no act more charismatic than making people enthusiastic and hungry for life.

Jim's energy and enthusiasm were some of the classic charismatic qualities this book talks about, and his larger-than-life and hugely charismatic spirit lives on in each and every one of these pages.

This book is dedicated to Jim's memory on behalf of the tens of thousands of people whose lives he touched – and who will always feel his loss deeply.

Bud Haney
January 3, 2011

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The Importance of Leadership Charisma

1



WOULD YOU LIKE to dramatically improve the results you get from the people who work for you, become dramatically more productive and successful, and at the same time develop an impact on others that sets you apart from all other leaders around you?

Would you like to be one of those leaders who seem to have a natural gift with everyone they meet, which makes them more successful in all aspects of their business and personal lives? That's what leadership charisma can do for you.

The world of business has seen some tough times over the last few years, and in these challenging times all of us have struggled to come up with a magic formula for success. There is just one formula for achievement in modern business – get your people onboard and invested in your success and the success of your organization. All other things being equal, business success comes down to people.

If your employees are totally dedicated to the business, if they buy into the organization's vision and are prepared to do all that they can to ensure that this vision comes to pass, then the business is more likely to be successful.

This is why the concept of “employee engagement” has garnered so much attention over the last few years. As you'll see shortly, leadership charisma and employee engagement are inextricably linked. In fact, it is extraordinary that this is the first book ever to identify that link and to detail how forward-looking leaders can exploit it to extract tremendous productivity from willing people.

The Conference Board defines employee engagement perfectly as: “a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.”

The Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study surveyed nearly 90,000 employees in 18 countries. They observed:

In one recent study we looked at fifty global companies over a year, correlating their employee engagement levels with their financial results. The companies with high employee engagement had a 19% increase in operating income and 28% growth in earnings per share. Conversely, companies with low levels of engagement saw operating income drop more than 32% and earnings per share decline 11%.

Chicago-based researcher ISR conducted a study among more than 664,000 employees in 71 companies worldwide and found that there was a difference of almost 52 percent in one-year performance improvement in operating income between companies with low employee engagement and companies with high employee engagement. The high-engagement organizations improved by 19.2 percent, while the operating income of the low-engagement organizations declined by 32.7 percent over the period of the study.

Gallup Management Journal's Employee Engagement Index reported that in the USA 17 percent of employees are positively disengaged, 54 percent of employees are not engaged, and a disappointing 29 percent are engaged. They estimated that the cost of disengaged employees was between \$250 and \$350 billion *per annum*.

What's clear is that organizations with high employee engagement are dramatically more successful than those with low employee engagement (not to mention actual disengagement) where it counts most – on the bottom line.



Employee engagement is essential for success in our challenging modern business environment – it's all about people.


One of the questions at the forefront of every results-oriented business leader's mind must therefore be: how do I develop higher levels of engagement in my people?

There are many measures of just what it is that creates an environment where employees are engaged in this manner, and almost as many programs

for developing such an environment. Most are aimed at making direct changes in the employees' environment and work conditions. This is all valuable, but it ignores an extremely important piece of this complex puzzle.

The Missing Link

What's frequently forgotten is the prime mover in creating an environment of engagement – the leader.



Fortune magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work for" study revealed that an engaging workplace is driven by three interconnected relationships:

- The relationship between employees and management.
- The relationship between employees and their jobs/company.
- The relationship between employees and other employees.

Let's look at those first two points. This is often forgotten: employee engagement, and all the positive business benefits it brings with it, is largely driven by those we put in charge – the managers and leaders at all levels of our organizations. Anyone who supervises or leads people has an enormous impact on engagement, for better or worse. From the first two points in the *Fortune* quotation it is clear that at least two thirds of the responsibility for an engaging environment falls on the leader, and, of course, the influence of the leader can be critical in the third.

This is the often-forgotten reality of employee engagement: if the leader is not creating an engaging environment, then, no matter what else you do, your people will not be engaged.

And this is where the concept of charisma in leaders starts to become very interesting indeed.

Leadership Charisma and Employee Engagement

Arthur C. Clarke famously said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” It is a classic human tendency to describe anything we do not fully understand in magical or mystical terms.

The ancient Greeks observed that some people, generally their leaders, had what they perceived to be a mysterious quality that enthralled others and made them want to follow them. Because they didn’t understand what this quality was, and because they couldn’t quite pin it down, they decided that it must be a magical or God-given gift. They even created a special word for this mysterious attribute. They called it *kharisma* – “a divinely conferred gift or power” (www.dictionary.com).

That word from ancient Greece has found its way, largely unchanged, into many modern languages. In all of those languages you’ll find definitions of charisma similar to the one the Greeks used several thousand years ago. In one modern dictionary charisma is defined as “a gift or power believed to be divinely bestowed” (Encarta Dictionary: encarta.msn.com).

If you look at some of the other dictionary definitions of charisma, however, it becomes obvious that there is more than a passing connection between charisma and employee engagement. Look at the definitions of employee engagement and charisma below.

The observation of the closeness of these two definitions was the genesis of this book.

Employee engagement

“... a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.”

(Definition from The Conference Board)

Charisma

"... a special quality of leadership that captures the popular imagination and inspires allegiance and devotion."

(Definition from www.yourdictionary.com)

What became abundantly clear was the direct connection between a leader's charisma and business results. Employee engagement drives business results; charismatic leaders bring people onboard, driving employee engagement. So focusing on becoming a more charismatic leader is a clear way toward obtaining superior results from people.

Director of Research at the Rofley Park Institute, Jo Hennessy, put it perfectly: "Charismatic leaders can gather people behind them. They're inspiring and strong and, if they're able to engage staff, the results will follow."

The most dangerous leadership myth ... asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.

— Warren Bennis, leadership scholar

You Can Be a Charismatic Leader

The reason that most people confer magical status on charisma is that they mistakenly think of it as an attribute that an individual possesses – and nothing could be further from the truth.

Charisma is not an attribute, but a perception one person has of another whose personality he or she finds appealing. No one can be charismatic on his or her own. It takes two people – one to observe what he or she describes as charisma, and another to behave in a manner that the observer perceives as being charismatic.



Charisma is truly like beauty – in the eye of the beholder. If I find you charismatic, then, for me at least, you are.

Charisma is simply the combination of the impact of a wide variety of behaviors that people observe practiced, consciously or unconsciously, by those they term charismatic.

Ask ten people to explain why they find someone charismatic and you'll probably get ten different answers. Some will talk about the person's ability to speak in an inspiring manner. Others will describe his or her genuine friendliness. Still more will talk about the interest he or she shows in other people's well-being. And others will mention many more things, which we'll explore later in this book.

And they would all be right – charisma is whatever others observe it to be.

Charisma is a term applied to us when someone likes the combination of how we behave, the actions we take, the face we present to the world, the words we use, our body language and myriad other things. All of these contribute to a greater or lesser degree to our perceived charisma.

So charisma is not a particular quality that a person either possesses or doesn't possess; and it's based on behaviors, so it's definitely not something that is innate.

When you think of charisma in this manner then it becomes clear why some people are perceived as charismatic in one setting but not another. Someone who has developed superior oratory, presentation and performance skills may come across as a charismatic speaker when addressing a group of hundreds of people, but be singularly uncharismatic immediately afterward when talking one to one with members of the audience – because of a lack of one-on-one social and communication skills. Similarly, someone may be charismatic for one group of people who finds his or her behaviors appealing and not be at all charismatic to a group that does not.

Everything we do contributes to or detracts from our charisma. Those who are charismatic simply display more of the behaviors that promote a “charismatic

response” in those others who matter to them. Some people do this quite effortlessly – there is something in their genes or in their upbringing that makes this the most natural thing in the world; the rest of us must learn how. And learn we can.

The good news is that, because charisma is based on behavior, it can be measured – and it can be cultivated. Anyone can decide to become more charismatic and, simply by assimilating the behaviors that will be deemed charismatic by his or her target audience, that person can raise his or her perceived charisma in pretty much any situation.

This is especially good news for business leaders, for whom charisma is an absolutely indispensable element of success in modern business.

If you wish to, you can become a genuinely charismatic leader.

A Practical Model for Charisma in Business

When we set out to write this book our initial research had established that charisma was a function of others’ perceptions of behavior, so we knew that any leader could choose to raise his or her perceived charisma simply by focusing on developing appropriate behaviors.

The studies that already existed on charisma in commercial environments certainly demonstrated that a leader’s charisma inarguably plays a large role in driving the performance and productivity of his or her people. There is a large body of research that shows a direct connection between bottom-line results and leader charisma.

Having determined the intimate connection between employee engagement and the charisma of their leaders, we set about an intensive research study of everything we could find that had ever been written on the topic of charisma. Our objective was simple – to construct a model of charisma that would facilitate both its practical measurement and its practical development in leaders.

An early result of this research was the realization of the key role self-confidence plays in a leader’s charisma. Another result was our recognition of just how important a leader’s “physical charisma” – that is, movements and body language – is in the projection of a charismatic image. This provided us with two

of the critical steps in the Leadership Charisma Model introduced in Chapter 2.

Our initial version of this model was a great step forward, but it still did not achieve all we had set out to do. We still did not have the complete model needed to provide the basis for step-by-step development of charisma in any leader who desired it. We uncovered a lot of usable and credible research on charisma in general, and all of it completely backed up our belief that charisma was driven by behavior. It even helped to identify a number of the behaviors that drive the perception of charisma. However, much of the existing research was, in general, too vague or imprecise to allow for the development of a practical guide that would allow leaders to identify exactly what behaviors they must assimilate in order to increase their leadership charisma.

There was just too little usable research on *practical* approaches to developing charisma in business leaders.

Real-Life Charismatic Leaders

So we turned our attention to a wide variety of well-known business leaders who were globally acknowledged as charismatic leaders and who had had extraordinary business success.

We looked at everything we could find that they had written on leadership, and anything that had been written on their leadership styles, that would help to uncover what drove their charismatic impact on their people.



Among others, we researched:



Larry Ellison, founder of Oracle Corporation.



Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Inc.



DAILY3D

Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group.



WWW.WELCHWAY.COM

Jack Welch, former chairman and CEO of General Electric.



SILIGWALLO

Howard Schultz, founder of Starbucks.



ONINNOVATION

Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay.



AMAZON.COM

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com.



A.G. Lafley, former chairman, president and CEO of Procter & Gamble.



CHARLIE BREWER

Michael Dell, founder of Dell Inc.



Marc Benioff, founder of Salesforce.com.



MEGWHTMAN2010

Meg Whitman, former president and CEO of eBay.



Scott Cook, founder of Intuit.



John Chambers, chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems, Inc.



David Neeleman, founder of JetBlue Airways.



George Zimmer, founder of Men's Wearhouse.

From what had been written by, and about, these paragons of the art of charismatic leadership we found a great amount that clearly and definitively underlined the behavioral basis for such leadership. You'll find words from each of these leaders quoted throughout this book.

But while this did further underline that everything our research had told us to that point was borne out by real-life experience – that charisma was clearly driven by specific behaviors – it still did not give us a definitive snapshot of the key behaviors that drove leadership charisma. Without those we knew we couldn't build a practical model that anyone could use to develop his or her own charismatic appeal as a leader.

Brand New Research

If we wanted to complete our model we were left with just one option – to do all of the necessary research ourselves. This was obviously going to be a demanding and expensive exercise, but the temptation of uncovering such a model was just too much. And so we committed to taking on this huge project.

However, before we could do any research we had first to define exactly what it was we wanted to find out.

Leadership Charisma – a Definition

Not wishing to add any further confusion to the already confused topic of “general” charisma, we decided that there was need for a new term for that particular type of charisma that all business leaders must aspire to. This kind of charisma includes all of the usual attributes associated with charisma, but also focus on driving employee engagement and bottom-line results. The term we settled on was “leadership charisma.”

We defined what charismatic leaders did as follows:



Charismatic leaders create and maintain a work environment where people are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organization’s goals. They build an energetic and positive attitude in others and inspire them to do their very best. In doing so they create a common sense of purpose where people are more inclined to invest extra energy and even some of their own time in their work.

That’s leadership charisma.

With a clear definition of leadership charisma and its impact on business performance, we were then ready to undertake what we believe to be the largest global study ever undertaken on the topic of what behaviors drive this quality.

That research is detailed in Appendix I. The results you’ll read about there allowed us to build the Leadership Charisma Model we introduce in Chapter 2.