



CREATING CHARISMA

From Gandhi to Martin Luther King, charismatic leaders down the ages have inspired and rallied entire peoples to action. A flurry of recent research, however, casts doubt on the value of charismatic leadership. In Jim Collin's book 'Good to Great' (2001), he uses the term 'Level 5 leadership' as one of the most important factors to differentiate good companies from great companies. Collins goes on to describe Level 5 leadership as an individual who blends extreme personal humility with professional will, and this, of course, runs contrary to the popular belief that a good company needs a big, larger than life, charismatic personality to transform it into a great company. However, charisma can be manifested in more subtle ways.

What is Charisma?

Derived from the Greek work meaning 'magical gift', charisma today is seen as an aura or personal magnetism, or an ability to inspire followers with enthusiasm or the ability to create an emotional connection between follower and leader so that the followers want to follow.

Why does it matter in business?

Charismatic business leaders are able to galvanise support from peers, employees, and customers, often when it is most required; for this reason, charismatic leaders excel in start-ups, turnarounds, corporate change situations, new marketing initiatives.

How can it be created?

Acquiring charisma isn't easy – who hasn't cringed at the sight of an awkward colleague trying to be a live wire? But there are aspects of charisma, which can be applied in different ways, that are very useful and which, if understood, can help anyone become a better leader.

- **look the part**

People who are vivid – whether in appearance, manner or speech – are more salient, hence, attract more attention than those who are not.

- **keep it simple**

Charismatic people have a remarkable ability to distil complex ideas into simple concrete image-based messages that followers can easily comprehend; by communicating through symbols, analogies, flowcharts, pictures, metaphors and stories; for example, the charismatic executive may present their findings on a one page chart rather than a written report.

- **speak emotion**

Again, words that evoke mental images are more closely associated with emotional events, people, and other stimuli from our past; the charismatic manager will work on hearts as well as minds, choosing language aimed at evoking an emotional rather than rational response.

- **challenge the status quo**

Charismatics are rebels who relish risk and fight convention; they prefer to create new traditions rather than promoting old ones; as a result they may seem idiosyncratic, but their often 'different' image augments their charisma.