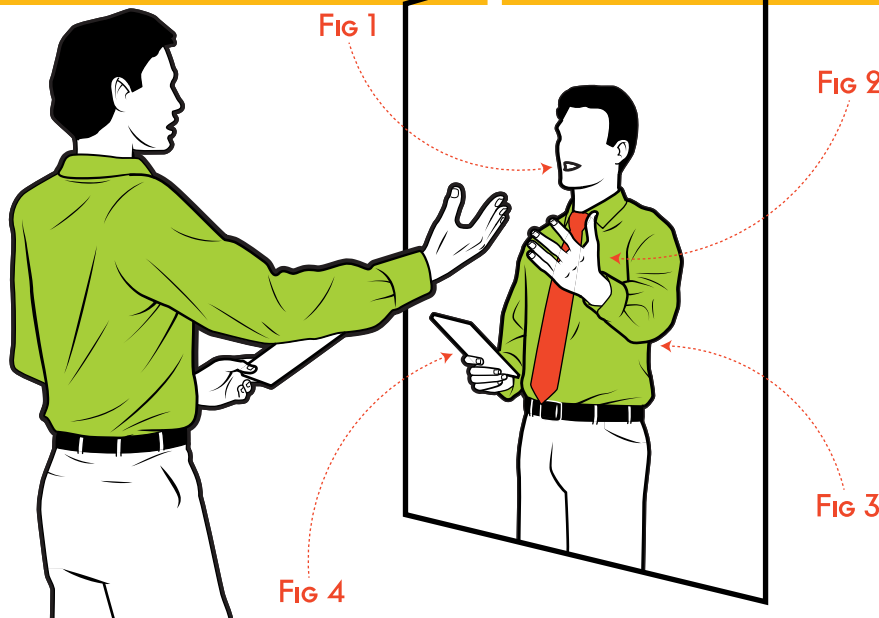


# Experience

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MANAGING YOURSELF

## Learning Charisma

Transform yourself into the person others want to follow.

by John Antonakis, Marika Fenley, and Sue Liechti

**J**ana 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-

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

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.

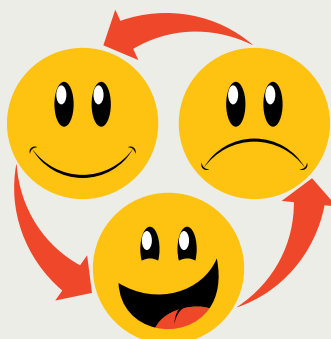
*Contrasts* are a key CLT because they combine reason and passion; they clarify

## 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.

your position by pitting it against the opposite, often to dramatic effect. Think of John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." In our experience, contrasts are one of the easiest tactics to learn and use, and yet they aren't used enough. Here are some examples from managers newly trained in the CLTs. Gilles, a senior VP, speaking to a direct report managing a stagnant team: "It seems to me that you're playing too much defense when you need to be playing more offense." (That's also a metaphor.) And Sally, introducing herself to her new team: "I asked to lead the medical division not because it has the best location but because I believe we can accomplish something great for our company and at the same time help save lives."

#### Engage and Distill

*Rhetorical questions* might seem hackneyed, but charismatic leaders use them all the time to encourage engagement. Questions can have an obvious answer or pose a puzzle to be answered later. Think again of Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, 'When will you be satisfied?'" and then went on to show that oppressed people can never be satisfied. Anita Roddick—founder of the Body Shop—once used three rhetorical questions to explain what led her to help start the social responsibility movement. The thinking, she said, "was really simple: How do you make

business kinder? How do you embed it in the community? How do you make community a social purpose for business?"

This tactic works just as well in private conversations. Take Mika, a manager in our study, who effectively motivated an underperforming subordinate by asking, "So, where do you want to go from here? Will it be back to your office feeling sorry for yourself? Or do you want to show what you are capable of achieving?" Here's another question (also employing metaphor) used by Frank, an IT executive who needed to push back at the unrealistic goals being set for him: "How can you expect me to change an engine in a plane midflight?"

*Three-part lists* are another old trick of effective persuasion because they distill any message into key takeaways. Why three? Because most people can remember three things; three is sufficient to provide proof of a pattern, and three gives an impression of completeness. Three-part lists can be announced—as in "There are three things we need to do to get our bottom line back into the black"—or they can be under the radar, as in the sentence before this one.

Here's a list that Serge, a midlevel manager, used at a team meeting: "We have the best product on the market. We have the best team. Yet we did not make the sales target." And here's one that Karin, division head of a manufacturing company, employed in a speech to her staff: "We can turn this around with a three-point

strategy: First, we need to look back and see what we did right. Next, we need to see where we went wrong. Then, we need to come up with a plan that will convince the board to give us the resources to get it right the next time."

#### Show Integrity, Authority, And Passion

*Expressions of moral conviction and statements that reflect the sentiments of the group*—even when the sentiments are negative—establish your credibility by revealing the quality of your character to your listeners and making them identify and align themselves with you. On Victory Day at the end of the Second World War, Winston Churchill brilliantly captured the feelings of the British people and also conveyed a spirit of honor, courage, and compassion. He said: "This is your hour. This is not victory of a party or of any class. It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole. We were the first, in this ancient island, to draw the sword against tyranny.... There we stood, alone. The lights went out and the bombs came down. But every man, woman, and child in the country had no thought of quitting the struggle.... Now we have emerged from one deadly struggle—a terrible foe has been cast on the ground and awaits our judgment and our mercy."

Another nice example of moral conviction (plus a number of other CLTs) comes from Tina, a manager in an NGO pushing

for a needed supply-chain change: “Who do you think will pay for the logistical mess we’ve created? It is not our donors who’ll feel it, but the children we’re supposed to be feeding that will go to bed one more time with an empty belly and who may not make it through the night. Apart from wasting money, this is not right, especially because the fix is so simple.” And here’s Rami, a senior IT director trained in the CLTs, expertly reflecting the sentiments of his disheartened team: “I know what is going through your minds, because the same thing is going through mine. We all feel disappointed and demotivated. Some of you have told me you have had sleepless nights; others, that there are tensions in the team, even at home because of this. Personally, life to me has become dull and tasteless. I know how hard we have all worked and the bitterness we feel because success just slipped out of our reach. But it’s not going to be like this for much longer. I have a plan.”

Another CLT, which helps charismatic leaders demonstrate passion—and inspire it in their followers—is *setting high goals*. Gandhi set the almost impossible (and moral) goal of liberating India from British rule without using violence, as laid out in his famous “quit India” speech. An example from the business world that we often cite is the former CEO of Sharp, Katsuhiko Machida. In 1998, at a time when Sharp faced collapse, cathode-ray tubes dominated the TV market, and the idea of using LCD technology was commercially unviable, he energized his employees by stating the unthinkable: “By 2005, all TVs we sell in Japan will be LCD models.”

But one must also *convey confidence that the goals can be achieved*. Gandhi noted: “I know the British Government will not be able to withhold freedom from us, when we have made enough self-sacrifice.” In a later speech he expressed his conviction more forcefully: “Even if all the United Nations opposes me, even if the whole of India forsakes me, I will say, ‘You are wrong. India will wrench with nonviolence her liberty from

unwilling hands.’ I will go ahead not for India’s sake alone but for the sake of the world. Even if my eyes close before there is freedom, nonviolence will not end.”

Machida personally took his vision to Sharp’s engineers to convince them that they could realize his risky goal; he made it the company’s most important project, brought together cross-functional teams from LCD and TV development to work on it, and told them plainly that it was crucial to Sharp’s survival. Or take Ray, an engineer we know, addressing his team after a setback: “The deadline the CEO gave us is daunting. Other teams would be right to tremble at the knees, but we are not just another team. I know you can rise to the challenge. I believe in each one of you, which means that I believe that we can get the prototype to manufacturing in three months. Let’s commit to do what it takes to get the job done: We have the smarts. We have the experience. All we need is the will, and that’s something only great teams have.” Passion cannot emerge unless the leader truly believes that the vision and strategic goal can be reached.

The three nonverbal cues—*expressions of voice, body, and face*—are also key to charisma. They don’t come naturally to everyone, however, and they are the most culturally sensitive tactics: What’s perceived as too much passion in certain Asian contexts might be perceived as too muted in southern European ones. But they are nonetheless important to learn and practice because they are easier for your followers to process than the verbal CLTs, and they help you hold people’s attention by punctuating your speech. (For more on these, see the exhibit “Charisma in Voice and Body.”)

## Putting It All into Practice

Now that you’ve learned the CLTs, how do you start using them? Simple: Preparation and practice. When you’re mapping out a speech or a presentation, you should certainly plan to incorporate the tactics and rehearse them. We also encourage leaders to think about them before one-

on-one conversations or team meetings in which they need to be persuasive. The idea is to arm yourself with a few key CLTs that feel comfortable to you and therefore will come out spontaneously—or at least look as if they did. The leaders we’ve trained worked on improving their charisma in groups and got feedback from one another; you could ask your spouse or a friendly colleague to do the same, or videotape yourself and do a self-critique.

The goal isn’t to employ all the tactics in every conversation but to use a balanced combination. With time and practice, they will start to come out on the fly. One manager we know, who met his wife after being trained in the CLTs, showed her his “before” videos and told us she couldn’t believe it was he. The charismatic guy in the “after” videos—the one whose CLT use had more than doubled—was the person she had married. Another manager, who learned the tactics six years ago and has since become the chief operating officer of his company, says he now uses them every day—personally and professionally—such as in a recent talk to his team about a relocation, which went “much better than expected” as a result.

If you think you can’t improve because you’re just not naturally charismatic, you’re wrong. The managers with the lowest initial charisma ratings in our studies were able to significantly narrow the gap between themselves and their peers to whom the tactics came naturally. It’s true that no amount of training or practice will turn you into Churchill or Martin Luther King Jr. But the CLTs can make you more charismatic in the eyes of your followers, and that will invariably make you a more effective leader. ♥ **HBR Reprint R1206K**

 **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.