

I want to be with company that is Electric!

By Simon Pelletier

There is a certain person I always remember the most from a party. They capture my attention. They engulf most peoples attention. The charisma that radiates from them is intoxicating. And I follow each word that comes from their mouth. How are they doing this? What is it that makes me interested? I have a few theories.

Eye contact is important. The reason being is it's a subtle way of showing you are interested in the other party. Too much and it's creepy but not enough and you broadcast disinterest or passivity. Seventy percent is the number I've decided upon. In conversation the rule of thumb is that most of the time you are trying to make eye contact.

Listen more than you speak. A loose rule that is contextual. If you are telling a story you won't be following it, but on average you should be spending as much time engaged in the other persons exposition as you are in your own. This makes them feel heard, which will keep them engaged in the back and forth nature of a conversation. And it feeds into the next point.

To be interesting, be interested. Someone else said this before me, I've forgotten who... The basic premise is that people wan't to share what it is they have residing inside of themselves. If you let them do this they will appreciate you more. This appreciation will manifest as interest in you.

Pay Attention. While most of these points are about crafting charisma for yourself, fundamentally it comes back to being aware of what the other person needs in the conversation. If you are following what they are saying you can ask interesting questions pertaining to what they've said. Bonus points for integrating those questions back to points made by them earlier. That kind of move really shows you've been noticing what they have been saying and not the next thing you wan't to say.

Look for their uniqueness. Each and every person you bump into will have a part of them you cannot find anywhere else. There will be a collection of interest and skills that has combined to make them the only person in the world that can provide this specific perspective. One of your primary goals when conversing with them is to try and tease this part out of them. You will benefit from the new information and they will love you for seeing a true version of themselves.¹

Be optimistic. I'm often coming across people in conversation that I'm immediately annoyed by. If I let the annoyance settle into the conversation I begin to disengage. And humans, being social creatures, will notice the lack of enthusiasm. But if we search for redeeming characteristics we can recover from this negative perspective and, at the very least, try and find a part of this annoying

person we can appreciate.

Be more present. Mindfulness has been pitched as a way to relieve stress and anxiety. To bring more serenity and contemplation to consciousness and the lives we lead. A good conversation will bring us to the immediate present. But often we don't get to have the greatest conversations. The point I'm making here is that if we start with being present we are more apt to arrive at this great conversation. If you are engaged the other person is more likely to be engaged as well. And it is in this state that each of your unique selves can come out.

Be funny. This is a great one if you can manage to do it. Funny is a *get out of jail* card. It will transform you in the eyes of others. But it is playing with fire. It can turn on you if you make the wrong kind of joke. Also there is probably nothing worse than someone who thinks they are funny but who isn't. A powerful and considerably dangerous tool. Use wisely.

Novelty is intoxicating. There's a reason we like that new fling. Adventure and travel is a draw because of the fresh experiences that can be had from the ordinary. Going to the grocery store in Mexico is exciting because everything is not quite known. And so it is with a new person. A giant part of an exciting conversation is the uncertainty. And if you don't know the person, by definition, you don't know where the interaction will take you. You can see the inverse of this play out in old friends. All the conversations have happened. They are playing out old patterns. They know what the other person thinks without them having to say a word.

Two points from this. Be a new person in the group — this one is hard to do all the time. The next best thing is to be the kind of conversationalist that takes people to unexpected places. Say new things, posit new ideas. Come out of left field with your observations. Be creative. If your friends are surprised at what is coming out of your mouth you are on the right track.

Enthusiasm is comparable to intelligence. If you can't be intelligent then your next best attribute will be enthusiasm. Positivity draws people in, pessimism shuts them down. The world is an exciting and intriguing place when viewed through the lens of positive thinking. Often really smart people are pessimists, as Nietzsche has shown us. But in day to day conversation we label enthusiastic people as smart, sharp and charismatic.²

It might as well be a fun game. You might consider me to be self-interested if I told you I'm often thinking about how to be more charismatic. My opinion is if I'm charismatic I'm a joy to converse with. And someone else is experiencing that joy. The points above are about letting the other person express themselves. Mostly getting people to enjoy your company is getting them to feel comfortable enough to share their view of the world. And that is an admirable pursuit.

1. Kevin Kelly on his little bits of advice from a long life.
2. Kevin Kelly yet again. Highly recommended, mostly his “bits of advice.”