

THE BIG IDEAS

Busting Myths

Charisma = skills not gifts.

3 Keys to Charisma

Presence + Power + Warmth.

What Gets in the Way

Manage internal mental states.

Turn Up Your Power

Here's how.

Turn Up Your Warmth

Here's how.

The Big Gorilla

Be your most powerful self.

"Whether you think you already have some charisma and would like to take it to the next level or you've been wishing for a bit of that magic but think that you just aren't the charismatic type, I have good news: charisma is a skill that you can learn and practice."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

The Charisma Myth

How Anyone Can Master the Art and Science of Personal Magnetism

BY OLIVIA FOX CABANE · PORTFOLIO © 2013 · 272 PAGES

"Charisma has been turned into an applied science. What this book does is translate the science into practical, immediately applicable tools, with measurable results. You'll learn charisma in a methodical, systematic way, with practical exercises immediately useful in the real world. And, unlike those of us who learned by trial and error, you won't have to waste any time figuring out what works and what doesn't. You can go straight to the tried-and-true tools that really do enhance charisma. ...

This book will guide you through that process. It will give you concrete tools for projecting the three crucial aspects of charisma: presence, power, and warmth. As you use them, you will experience an increased sense of personal magnetism—and if it was already strongly present, you'll gain finer control over that charismatic power. You'll learn how to harness it and how to skillfully wield it. You'll also learn how to choose the right kind of charisma for your personality and your goals in any situation. ...

What you'll find here is practical magic: unique knowledge, drawn from a variety of sciences, revealing what charisma really is and how it works. You'll get both the insights and the techniques you need to apply this knowledge. The world will become your lab, and every time you meet someone, you'll get an opportunity to experiment. ... You'll learn how to become more influential, more persuasive, and more inspiring. You'll learn how to exude charisma—the ability to move through a room and have people go, 'Wow, who's that?'"

~ Olivia Fox Cabane from *The Charisma Myth*

Charisma.

The idea that you're either one of the lucky few born with it or not is a MYTH.

As Seth Godin says, "Charisma is not a gift, it's a tool."

Fact is: We can all cultivate our personal magnetism.

In this fun, quick-reading, compelling book, Olivia Fox Cabane walks us through the practical application of the art and science of deliberately dialing our charisma up. (Get the book [here](#).)

The book is packed with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share some of my favorites, so let's jump in!

THE 3 PRIMARY MYTHS OF CHARISMA

"Consciously or not, charismatic individuals choose specific behaviors that make other people feel a certain way. These behaviors can be learned and perfected by anyone. In fact, in controlled laboratory experiments, researchers were able to raise and lower people's levels of charisma as if they were turning a dial.

"Charisma has three essential components: presence, power, and warmth."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

Contrary to commonly held charisma myths you don't have to be naturally outgoing, you don't have to be physically attractive, and you won't have to change your personality. No matter where you're starting from, you can significantly increase your personal charisma and reap the rewards both in business and in daily life."

Chapter 1. Time to bust some charisma myths.

First, let's start with the big one: Charisma is not something you either have or don't have. Charismatic people simply engage in certain behaviors while less charismatic people do not.

Imagine yourself in a lab working with a researcher who can systematically dial your charisma up or dial it down based on BEHAVIORS you choose to engage in. We'll get to those specific behaviors we want to cultivate in a moment. For now, let's bust a few other myths:

You don't need to be extroverted. In fact, introverts can demonstrate some very powerful charisma. You just need to lean into your strengths like an Elon Musk or Bill Gates.

You also don't need to be physically attractive. Winston Churchill was not considered handsome but he was very charismatic. (And, interestingly, cultivating your charisma will actually make you appear more attractive.)

And, finally, you don't need to change your personality.

It's all about changing some specific behaviors. Building skills.

Charisma is a SKILL: *"We understand that proficiency at chess, singing, or hitting a fastball requires conscious practice. Charisma is a skill that can also be developed through conscious practice, and because we're interacting with people all the time, we get to use our charisma tools on a daily basis."*

P.S. Reminds me of Anders Ericsson's classic book on what makes great people great: [Peak](#). He tells us: *"The main gift that these people have is the same one we all have—the adaptability of the human brain and body, which they have taken advantage of more than the rest of us."*

We all have the gift of extraordinary potential—in whatever domain we choose to cultivate. The question is: Will we choose to take advantage of our ability to optimize?

CHARISMA: 3 BEHAVIORS: PRESENCE + POWER + WARMTH

"Charismatic behavior can be broken down into three core elements: presence, power, and warmth. These elements depend on both our conscious behaviors and on factors we don't consciously control. People pick up on messages we often don't even realize we're sending through small changes in our body language. ... In order to be charismatic, we need to choose mental states that make our body language, words, and behaviors flow together and express the three core elements of charisma. Since presence is the foundation for everything, that's where we'll start."

As we now know, charisma can be learned. These are the three core elements of charismatic behavior you want to master: **PRESENCE + POWER + WARMTH**.

Let's take a quick look at each:

PRESENCE. It all starts here. Charismatic people aren't stuck in their heads and kinda-sorta-there when they're interacting with people. They are PRESENT! 100% there. Are you?

"The good news is that even a minor increase in your capacity for presence can have a major effect on those around you. Because so few of us are ever fully present, if you can manage even a few moments of full presence from time to time, you'll make quite an impact."

We're all SO DISTRACTED that simply mustering a few moments of undistracted presence reaps huge rewards on the charisma meter.

"Few things impair charisma more than bad eye contact and few things gain you charisma points more than improving your eye contact."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

Pro tip: Remember the iPhone effect? Simply having an iPhone in sight when spending time with someone diminishes the connection. (Even if you don't actually use it during your time together!) So, put it in airplane mode and put it out of sight.

Step #1 and the foundation of charisma is simple (yet not easy!): Be PRESENT.

POWER. Power is all about whether you are perceived as having the ability to affect the world.

“Being seen as powerful means being perceived as able to affect the world around us, whether through influence on or authority over others, large amounts of money, expertise, intelligence, sheer physical strength, or high social status. We look for clues of power in someone’s appearance, in others’ reaction to this person, and, most of all, in the person’s body language.”

Power. The #1 way we dial this up? Our body language. We'll talk more about this in a moment.

WARMTH. *“Warmth, simply put, is goodwill toward others. Warmth tells us whether or not people will want to use whatever power they have in our favor. Being seen as warm means being perceived as any of the following: benevolent, altruistic, caring, or willing to impact our world in a positive way. Warmth is assessed almost entirely through body language and behavior; it’s evaluated more directly than power.”*

Warmth addresses the question: Will you use your power to hurt me or to benefit me? Olivia tells us that, back in the day, we were ALWAYS on the look out for signs of power and signs of warmth (or its absence). We evolved to be highly attuned to these signals.

PRESENCE. POWER. WARMTH.

How're you doing with each of those? Any obvious opportunities to optimize?

CHARISMA: WHAT GETS IN THE WAY (+ HOW TO DEAL WITH IT)

“Remember that every time you bring yourself back to full presence, you reap major rewards: you become more impactful, more memorable, and come across as more grounded. You're laying the foundation for a charismatic presence.”

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

“You’ve already acquired important insights about the way physical and mental discomfort can handicap your personal charisma potential. In this chapter, you’ll gain the tools to put these insights into practice, surmount the obstacles, and successfully handle almost any internal discomfort. No matter what difficult feelings arise—self-doubt, impatience, annoyance, irritation—you’ll be able to confidently handle them.

Skillfully handling any difficult experience is a three-step process: destigmatize discomfort, neutralize negativity, and rewrite reality. Let’s get started.”

Presence + Power + Warmth. If we want to dial those up, we need to start by identifying what’s getting in the way. Olivia tells us that the primary culprit is “internal discomfort.”

In short, our internal mental states are driving our body language. If we're feeling self-doubt, anxiety, irritation, etc. we're going to have a really hard time emanating charismatic presence, power and warmth.

Olivia gives us three tools to overcome our internal obstacles. We need to: *1. Destigmatize discomfort + 2. Neutralize negativity + 3. Rewrite reality.*

Step 1: Destigmatize discomfort. We need to know that feeling uncomfortable is NORMAL. Nothing's wrong with you when you're feeling stress, it's part of the human experience. Shaming ourselves is NOT HELPFUL.

In *The Happiness Trap*, Russ Harris tells us we need to keep the “struggle switch” in the OFF position. Life will challenge us, we don't need to resist it when it does. He uses the metaphor of quicksand—the more you struggle, the faster you sink.

In *Self-Compassion*, Kristin Neff echoes this wisdom and gives us an equation: Suffering = Pain x Resistance. Pain will naturally arise in our lives. It's the RESISTANCE to that pain that multiplies the suffering.

"Rewrite reality by considering a few helpful alternatives to your current perspective. For maximum effect, write down your new realities by hand and describe them in vivid detail."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

Simply "destigmatizing discomfort" is a HUGE step in optimizing our internal state. We want to get comfy being uncomfy. Shame begone!

Step 2. Neutralize negativity. Once we've made it OK to feel some internal stress, it's time to neutralize the negativity.

Olivia gives us a bunch of tips on how to go about neutralizing those negative thoughts and feelings. We can imagine negative thoughts as simply graffiti on the walls of your mind. Or, we can see those negative thoughts as little electrical impulses flickering in our brain. Or, we can simply label them "There's some fear!"

(We talk about the power of labeling negative thoughts in [Your Brain at Work](#) and we chat about some great ways to accept and "defuse" from these negative thoughts and feelings in [The Happiness Trap](#) (and [The Confidence Gap](#)). Check out those Notes for some great tips.)

Step 3. Rewrite reality. Once we've destigmatized the discomfort and neutralized the negativity, we're ready to "rewrite reality."

This is a fun one. Olivia walks us through the science that establishes the fact that our brains can't really differentiate an imagined event with an actual event. Therefore, we have a lot of power to "rewrite reality" by engaging in what researchers call "cognitive reappraisal."

Sonja Lyubomirsky puts it perfectly in [The How of Happiness](#): "Write down your barrier thoughts, and then consider ways to reinterpret the situation. In the process, ask yourself questions like... What else could this situation or experience mean? Can anything good come from it? Does it present any opportunities for me? What lessons can I learn and apply to the future? Did I develop any strengths as a result?"

(Note: Olivia is ALL about the power of *writing* this stuff down!)

In sum: Know that your chief obstacle to charisma is your own internal mental discomfort. Manage your internal states well and you'll dial up your charisma. Make it OK to feel negativity by destigmatizing discomfort. Neutralize the negativity by seeing the thoughts as simply flashes in your brain and then rewrite your reality by choosing a more empowering story!

CHARISMA: HOW TO TURN UP YOUR POWER

"Because of its powerful mental and physiological effects, visualization is one of the most effective charisma-boosting tools available. The right visualization can help you increase your internal feeling of confidence as well as your ability to project it. Just by using the right mental images, your subconscious mind will send a remarkable chain reaction of confidence signals cascading through your body. In fact, you can display nearly any body language just by picking the right visualization. ..."

Visualization is indeed a powerful tool. Of all the charisma-boosting techniques, this is the one I recommend making a permanent part of your toolkit. If you gain nothing else from this book, this one technique will make a critical difference in your charisma."

Want to turn up your power?

VISUALIZE.

Try this: Close your eyes. Relax. "Imagine a past experience when you felt absolutely triumphant—for example, the day you won a contest or an award."

Hear the sounds in the room. See the smiles on the faces of those around you. Feel your feet on the ground, the high fives. Most importantly, feel the buzz of pride and triumph within your very being. You on top of the world—radiating confidence and enthusiasm.

Feel more confident? :)

"Visualization is truly a miracle method, helping you boost confidence, emanate warmth, replace anxiety with calm serenity, or gain access to whichever emotion you'd like to feel and then broadcast it through your body language."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

You can do that type of visualization any time you want to boost your power/confidence. You can do similar types of visualizations to elicit warmth or whatever other emotions you want to feel. Of course, the more you practice, the better you get.

Olivia draws parallels between this type of visualization and method acting in which *“the actors strive to become the characters they were aiming to play.”*

So... Who are YOU at your best? Imagine your 5-year vision coming to life.

SEE IT. FEEL IT. BE IT.

P.S. Reminds me of gold-medal winning Lanny Bassham and his “self-image” ideas we discuss in our Notes on [With Winning in Mind](#). He tells us: *“Controlling that change in your Self-Image may be the most important skill you will ever learn. You can change any attitude you do not like. When the Self-Image changes, performance changes.”*

His key to changing our self-image? CONSTANTLY imprinting our minds with our optimal self-image in the form of visualizations, affirmations and self-talk. Seeing ourselves performing at our best, celebrating wins “Yes! That’s like me!” all day every day. (Check out our Notes on [What to Say When You Talk to Yourself](#) for more on this as well!)

CHARISMA: HOW TO TURN UP YOUR WARMTH

“Goodwill means that you wish someone well without necessarily knowing how they’re feeling. Empathy means that you understand what they feel; perhaps you’ve had a similar experience in the past. Compassion is empathy plus goodwill: you understand how they feel, and you wish them well.”

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

“Warmth is one of the key components of charismatic behavior. It can make people like you, trust you, and want to help you. Unfortunately, for many people, warmth isn’t an obvious, easy feeling to access; it just doesn’t come naturally. Many of my clients confide in their first session that they aren’t quite sure what warmth should feel like. In fact, I often hear new clients worry: ‘But what if deep down I’m actually heartless? What if I just can’t access warmth?’ The good news is I can absolutely guarantee that you’re not heartless, and I know for sure that anyone can learn to better express warmth.”

Warmth. It’s not enough to be present and powerful. We need to show people that we care about them. Olivia gives us three ways to cultivate our warmth: *Gratitude + Goodwill + Compassion.*

Gratitude is straightforward. For what are you grateful? Count your blessings. Boost your grounded confidence + warmth.

Goodwill is essential. Basic idea: *“Goodwill is the simple state of wishing others well.”* Imagine that: Simply focusing on someone’s well-being and wanting them to experience joy boosts your warmth immediately. (Quick tip to boost goodwill: Find three things you like about the person you want to feel goodwill toward.)

Compassion is our final avenue to boosting our warmth. Olivia makes the point that compassion starts with OURSELVES and talks about Kristin Neff’s [Self-Compassion](#) quite a bit. See those Notes for more. For now, know that we can’t give what we don’t have so let’s start by dialing up the warmth we feel for ourselves and radiate that out to those around us.

Here’s to turning up our warmth via gratitude + goodwill + compassion!

THE BIG GORILLA

“Because we can’t peer into people’s hearts and minds, we assume attributes from the values we observe. When someone displays high confidence through their body language, we tend to assume they have something to be confident about: people simply accept what you project. Any increase in the amount of confidence your body language projects will bring you major charisma rewards.

Projecting power and confidence is what allows you to emanate warmth, enthusiasm, and excitement without coming across as over-eager or subservient. Because body language is wired

"To be charismatic, your vision must vividly illustrate the difference between the way things are now and the way they could be. Charismatic leaders often point out deficiencies in the status quo, contrast this picture to a glorious future, and show how they intend to get there."

~ Olivia Fox Cabane

so deeply within us, signs of confidence (or lack thereof) in someone's body language have veto power over all other signs of power. No matter how many signs of power and high status we may project through our appearance, title, or even others' deference, a body language of insecurity will kill charisma on the spot. On the other hand, a body language of confidence can endow its bearer with charisma even when no other power signs are present."

That's from a chapter called "Charismatic Body Language." Our body language, as you know, is HUGE. Insecure body language = no charisma. Period. Powerful body language = good. :)

Olivia tells us we need to practice taking up more space and encourages us to "be the gorilla"—carrying ourselves with power. (Without, obviously, being all weird about it. lol.)

We talk about this in our Notes on Amy Cuddy's great book, [Presence](#). Here's how Amy puts it: "I heard from an Olympic swimming coach who explained how he'd been using a power posing-type strategy—with great success—for years: encouraging some of his swimmers, beginning on the morning of the race, to physically behave as if they'd won their events. Swimmers, as he pointed out, are notorious for their use of dominant body language in the moments before races, not only to signal their power to their competitors but also to loosen their muscles and pump themselves up. Sometimes they will literally pound their chests, like gorillas. But the approach this coach used—encouraging swimmers to adopt 'alpha' nonverbal postures from the minute they wake up on race days—was most helpful to swimmers who'd been thrown off by a poor performance or who were feeling a wave of insecurity and self-doubt."

What's YOUR best self feel like? How do you walk, talk, breathe and move through the day?

Let's be grounded in that confidence as we show up with *presence + power + warmth* and light up the world with our radiant charisma! :)

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.