

The Charisma Myth

How Anyone Can
Master the Art and Science
of Personal Magnetism

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Charisma Exercises

The following quick summaries bring together key exercises detailed throughout this book.

Presence (Chapter 1)

Set a timer for one minute. Close your eyes and try to focus on one of three things:

1. Sounds: Scan your environment for sound. Imagine your ears are satellite dishes, passively registering sounds.
2. Your breath: Focus on your breath and the sensations it creates in your nostrils or stomach as it goes in and out.
3. Your toes: Focus your attention on the sensations in your toes.

Responsibility Transfer (Chapter 3)

Whenever you feel your brain rehashing possible outcomes to a situation, try a transfer of responsibility to alleviate the anxiety.

1. Sit comfortably or lie down, relax, and close your eyes.
2. Take two or three deep breaths. As you inhale, imagine drawing clean air toward the top of your head. As you exhale, let it whoosh out, washing all your worries away.
3. Imagine lifting the weight of *everything* you're concerned about off your shoulders and placing it in the hands of whichever benevolent entity you'd like to put in charge.

Now that everything is taken care of, you can sit back, relax, and enjoy whatever good you can find along the way.

Destigmatizing Discomfort (Chapter 4)

The next time an uncomfortable emotion is hindering you, try this step-by-step guide to destigmatizing:

1. Remind yourself that this is normal and that we all experience it from time to time.
2. Think of others who have gone through this, especially people you admire.
3. Remember that right now, in this very moment, many others are going through this very same experience.

Neutralizing Negativity (Chapter 4)

Use these techniques anytime you're having persistent negative thoughts and you'd like to lessen their effects.

- ◆ Remember that these thoughts may be inaccurate.
- ◆ See your thoughts as graffiti on a wall or as little electrical impulses.
- ◆ Depersonalize the experience. Observe it as a scientist might: "How interesting: there are self-critical thoughts arising."
- ◆ Imagine yourself from afar. Zoom out to see planet Earth hanging in space. Zoom back in to see your tiny self having a particular experience at this particular moment.
- ◆ Imagine your mental chatter as coming from a radio; turn the volume down or put the radio to the side.

Rewriting Reality (Chapter 4)

If a persistent mental annoyance is causing irritation, use one of these techniques to imagine an alternative reality in order to regain a calm internal state:

- ◆ Ask yourself a few times, *What if this experience is, in fact, a good thing for me?* and watch how creative your mind can get with its answers.

- ◆ When you're dealing with more serious situations, write down your new realities by hand. Write: "The presentation is going well . . ." Or, better yet, use past tense: "The presentation was a complete success . . ."

Getting Satisfaction (Chapter 4)

No matter the cause of your resentment, you can prevent it from dimming your charisma—and the following exercise is one way to obtain relief by reshaping your perspective.

- ◆ Think of someone who has aggrieved you.
- ◆ Take a blank page and write them a letter saying everything you wish you had ever told them. Make sure you write it out by hand.
- ◆ When you've gotten absolutely everything off your mind, put the letter aside.
- ◆ Now write their answer, apologizing for everything they've done and taking responsibility for all their hurtful actions.
- ◆ For maximum effect, reread their apology a few times over the course of a week.

Delving into Sensations (Chapter 4)

To practice your endurance in uncomfortable situations, find a quiet, comfortable spot to sit with a partner, and set a timer for thirty seconds.

- ◆ Look into your partner's eyes. As soon as you become aware of discomfort, notice where the feelings are located in your body.
- ◆ Delve into each sensation as much as you can; feel its texture. Describe each as if you were a chef describing a featured dish.
- ◆ Let the discomfort build. Observe and name the sensations you feel: hot, cold, tightness in your jaw, a knot in your stomach.
- ◆ Resist the urge to laugh, talk, or relieve the discomfort.
- ◆ Try the same practice again, this time giving yourself continuous encouragement. Remind yourself that your efforts will reap rewards and that the discomfort *will* pass.

Stretching Your Comfort Zone (Chapter 4)

Strike up a conversation with a complete stranger. When you're standing or sitting near someone, see if there's something they're looking at that could give you something with which to start the conversation.

Let's say you're in a coffee shop waiting in line. You could make any small comment about the pastries, and follow with an open-ended question (one that cannot be answered with a yes or no). Say something like "I'm trying to decide which is most sinful: the muffin, the brownie, or the coffee cake. How would you rank them?"

Visualization (Chapter 5)

Visualization can be an incredibly effective tool anytime you want to get into a specific mental state (whichever would be most useful to you in that particular moment or situation.) For example, if you want to feel confident, you might remember the day you won a contest or award while employing all five senses:

- ◆ First, close your eyes and relax.
- ◆ *Hear* the sounds in the room: the murmurs of approval, the swell of applause.
- ◆ See people's smiles and expressions of warmth and admiration.
- ◆ *Feel* your feet on the ground and the congratulatory handshakes.
- ◆ Above all, *experience* your feelings, the warm glow of confidence rising within you.

Gratitude (Chapter 5)

For quick gratitude access, find three things you can approve of right now. Scan your body and your environment for little, tangible things you could be grateful for.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Compassion (Chapter 5)

Follow the three steps below to practice compassion for someone:

1. Imagine their past. What was it like growing up in their family and experiencing their childhood?
2. Imagine their present. Put yourself in their place. See through their eyes. Imagine what they might be feeling right now.
3. Imagine delivering their eulogy.

Self-Compassion (Chapter 5)

Keep a self-compassion list. Jot down five ways that you already care for yourself when you're having a hard time. If you're on a roll, go for ten. Star those that are particularly effective.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Metta (Chapter 5)

The visualization below will guide you through Metta step by step. If you'd prefer to be guided through this exercise, you'll find a recording online at thecharismamyth.com.

- ◆ Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take two or three deep breaths, letting them wash all your worries away.
- ◆ Think of any occasion in your life when you performed a good deed, however great or small.
- ◆ Now think of a being—present, past, mythical, or actual; person, pet, or even stuffed animal—that you can imagine having warm affection for you.
- ◆ Picture this being in your mind, and see their warmth, kindness, and compassion. Imagine their affection and let it envelop you.

- ◆ Feel them give you complete forgiveness for everything your inner critic says isn't good enough about you or your life.
- ◆ Feel them giving you complete acceptance as you are right now, with all your imperfections, at this stage of your progression.

Using Your Body to Change Your Mind (Chapter 5)

Try out the following postures to see for yourself just how powerfully the position of your body can affect your mind and your feelings:

- ◆ Adopt the body language of someone who's depressed. Let your shoulders slump, head hang, and face sag. *Without moving a muscle*, try to feel really, truly excited. It's nearly impossible.
- ◆ Now do the opposite. Physically spring into excitement. Jump up and down, smile the biggest smile you can, wave your arms in the air, and while doing all this, try to feel depressed. Again, it's nearly impossible.

Warming Up (Chapter 5)

Prepare your mindset and energy for important events by intentionally shaping the hours leading up to them.

- ◆ Review your schedule for the hours leading up to the event. Think about how the activities and meetings you have planned will affect you.
- ◆ Avoid difficult encounters if possible and aim for confidence- or warmth-boosting experiences instead.
- ◆ Create your own music playlist for the internal state you'd like to have. You could make one for energy and confidence, one that makes you feel warm and empathetic, and another that makes you feel calm and serene.

Working with Introversion (Chapter 6)

If you're naturally uncomfortable in large social gatherings, don't force yourself to be sociable right away or to be "on" for the whole evening.

- ◆ Give yourself five minutes after you arrive to hang back and observe.
- ◆ Give yourself little “introversion breaks” during the party; even just a few minutes can make a difference.

The Perfect Handshake (Chapter 7)

Follow the recommendations below to perform a gold-star handshake.

1. Keep your right hand free.
2. Use plenty of eye contact, and smile warmly but briefly.
3. Keep your head straight and face the other person.
4. Keep your hand perpendicular to the floor, thumb pointing straight to the ceiling.
5. Get full palm contact by draping your hand diagonally downward.
6. Wrap your fingers around your counterpart's hand.
7. Once you make full contact, squeeze to their level of firmness.
8. Shake from the elbow, step back, and then let go.

Voice Fluctuation (Chapter 8)

You can gain great insights into your own voice fluctuation by practicing sentences with a tape recorder. Repeat a sentence several times with as wide a variation in styles as you can. Say it with authority, with anger, with sorrow, with empathetic care and concern, with warmth, and with enthusiasm.

Vocal Power (Chapter 8)

The guidelines below will help you broadcast power through your voice.

1. Speak slowly. Visualize the contrast between a nervous, squeaky-voiced teenager speaking at high speed and the slow, emphatic tone of a judge delivering a verdict.
2. Pause. People who broadcast confidence often pause while speaking. They will pause for a second or two between sentences or even in the middle of a sentence. This conveys the

feeling that they're so confident in their power, they trust that people won't interrupt.

3. Drop intonation. You know how a voice rises at the end of a question? Just reread the last sentence and hear your voice go up at the end. Now imagine an assertion: a judge saying, "This case is closed." Feel how the intonation of the word *closed* drops. Lowering the intonation of your voice at the end of a sentence broadcasts power. When you want to sound super confident, you can even lower your intonation mid-sentence.
4. Check your breathing. Make sure you're breathing deeply into your belly, and inhale and exhale through your nose rather than your mouth. Breathing through your mouth can make you sound breathless and anxious.

Charismatic Seating Choices (Chapter 9)

The next time you want to establish warm rapport with someone, avoid a confrontational seating arrangement and instead sit either next to or at a ninety-degree angle from them. These are the positions in which we feel most comfortable. In fact, this is an exercise you can try out with a partner.

- ◆ Start a conversation at a ninety-degree angle.
- ◆ After five minutes, change positions so that you're sitting across from each other. You'll likely feel a clear difference in comfort level.
- ◆ After another five minutes, move back to a ninety-degree angle, and feel the difference.
- ◆ Finally, come back to your original position sitting next to each other.

Pay close attention to the rise and fall of feelings of trust and comfort throughout the exercise.

Charismatic Eyes (Chapter 9)

Use this mirror exercise to observe how your emotions visibly shape your expression—and to access more intentional states.

- ◆ Find a room with a mirror where you won't be disturbed for a few minutes.

- ◆ Close your eyes and think of a recent annoyance or an unpleasant task.
- ◆ When you feel the irritation take hold, open your eyes and look closely in the mirror. Note the tension around your eyes, their narrowness.
- ◆ Now close your eyes and think of something that would induce warm feelings.
- ◆ When the warmth has arisen, open your eyes and note the relaxation around your eyes.
- ◆ Close your eyes once more and think of an exciting time when you felt full of confidence.
- ◆ When you've accessed the feeling of confidence, open your eyes again and note closely what they look like now.

Being the Big Gorilla (Chapter 9)

Use this exercise when you want to both feel and broadcast confidence—for instance, before a key meeting, or with someone who's a bit intimidating.

1. Make sure you can breathe. Loosen any clothing if need be.
2. Stand up and shake up your body.
3. Take a wide stance and plant your feet firmly on the ground.
4. Stretch your arms to the ceiling.
5. Stretch your arms to the walls on either side of you.
6. Roll your shoulders up and then back.
7. INFLATE. Try to take up as much space as possible.
8. Imagine yourself as a four-star general reviewing his troops. Puff up your chest, broaden your shoulders, and put your arms behind your back.

Seven Secrets to Great Online Charisma (Chapter 10)

Seven secrets for online charisma:

1. Keep gesturing—your voice reflects it.
2. Prioritize audio over video if you have a weak connection.
3. Stand while speaking to project control and energy.
4. Ensure that your face is large and well-lit on screen.
5. Use a high-quality mic with a flat frequency response.

6. Avoid the loud, artificial “phone voice.”
7. Use visual tricks (e.g., a toy near the camera) to simulate in-person connection.

Mid-Course Corrections (Chapter 12)

Use this exercise to get “back in the zone” whenever something throws you off your game.

- ◆ Check your body. Make sure no tense posture is worsening your internal state.
- ◆ Take a deep breath; relax your body.
- ◆ Destigmatize and dedramatize. This happens to everyone, and it will pass.
- ◆ If any negative thoughts are present, remember that they’re just thoughts, and not necessarily valid.
- ◆ Find little things to be grateful for: your ability to breathe, the fact that you will still be alive by the end of this.
- ◆ Imagine getting a great hug from someone you trust for twenty seconds (of course, you may not have twenty seconds, but if you do, this is remarkably effective).

Once your threat response is quieted down, to bring yourself back into a state of confidence, remember a moment in your life when you felt absolute triumph. Thanks to your brain’s inability to distinguish imagination from reality, your body will be filled with the same cocktail of chemicals as it was during that confidence-filled moment, thereby changing your body language into exactly what you need to be impressive, persuasive, and inspiring again.

Speech Day Checklist (Chapter 12)

Use this checklist to ground yourself before, during, and after your presentation—so you show up with presence, warmth, and resilience.

- ◆ Arrive early if you can; walk the stage to visualize and own the stage.
- ◆ Go into a quiet room nearby and use internal tools such as visualization to get into a state of confidence and warmth.
- ◆ Pause before you start. Count three beats, facing the audience, before you begin to speak.

- ◆ During the presentation, *expect* things to go wrong—whether an external disruption or misspeaking.
- ◆ Use the mid-course correction tools you’ve just learned. Invite the audience into this mistake as a shared joke.
- ◆ Throughout your speech, remember to pause, breathe, and slow down.
- ◆ Don’t run offstage; pause after your last words.

Showing Vulnerability (Chapter 15)

Think of the next low-stakes conversation you’re going to have and follow the steps below to show a little vulnerability:

- ◆ Select a small vulnerability you could share.
- ◆ To prepare, perform a responsibility transfer for the outcome of this exercise.
- ◆ During the conversation, ease into the sharing by saying, “You know, I have to tell you . . .” Or prepare the terrain with “I’m feeling a bit nervous about saying this, but . . .”
- ◆ Ask for their confidentiality. Not only will this make you feel safer, it will make people treasure the moment. People love secrets.
- ◆ Perform a quick responsibility transfer immediately after sharing the vulnerability.

Recommended Resources

Books

- Brach, Tara. *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*. Bantam, 2004. A great resource for emotional training; I've often called this one "graduate school for the heart."
- Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence, New and Expanded: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Harper Business, 2021. Considered the "bible" of influence, Cialdini's book is required reading in most MBA programs.
- Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Rev. ed. Pocket Books, 1997. A great help in gaining equanimity; a worthwhile read for anyone facing a crisis. Few books can give you perspective like this one (and in so few pages).
- Germer, Christopher K. *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*. Guilford Press, 2009. A great resource if you'd like to focus on self-compassion.
- Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Basic Books, 2006. Best science I've found on the scientific study of happiness. Fascinating.
- Hayes, Steven C. *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*. New Harbinger Publications, 2005. The best book I've found on how to handle your own mind.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. 10th anniv. ed. Hyperion, 2005. The best introduction to mindfulness I've ever found.
- Price, Devon. *Unmasking Autism: Discovering the New Faces of Neurodiversity and Unmasking for Life*. Harmony, 2022. An incredibly inclusive welcome to anyone discovering or further exploring their neurodivergence.
- Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen, and Roger Fisher. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. Penguin

- Non-Classics, 2000. The best framework I've found on difficult conversations.
- Stone, Hal, and Sidra Stone. *Embracing Your Inner Critic*. HarperOne, 1993. A great first start on getting to know the inner critic, and an easy read.
- Williams, Mark, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn. *The Mindful Way Through Depression*. Guilford Press, 2007. The best of the best on this difficult topic.

Online Resources

Visit thecharismamyth.com to access downloadable resources, such as a PDF workbook, audio recordings of all the visualization exercises, and many more resources to help you get the most out of this book.

Coaching and Training

Dr. Oliver Niebuhr developed the Acoustic Voice Profiling technology to measure and train charismatic speaking skills, an innovation awarded the 2018 BHJ Innovation Award and a key technology behind the speech-technology startup AllGoodSpeakers (allgoodspeakers.com), which he founded and leads as CEO. His research focuses on the impact of nonverbal communication signals on human behavior. Professor Niebuhr has authored more than 150 peer-reviewed publications over the course of twenty years of research and was awarded the 2022 Research Dissemination Prize from the faculty of engineering at the University of Southern Denmark.

Dr. Liliya T. Bakiyeva Wheatcraft is an expert in neurodivergence and neurodevelopmental conditions, currently researching at Cultural Autism Studies at Yale (CASY). A pioneering provider of therapy for neurodivergent adults, she developed the AUTISTIC from First Principles framework to help individuals with autism, ADHD, and AuDHD better understand themselves. With qualifi-

cations from the University of Cambridge, she is a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and has taught at Yale and Oxford. Dr. Bakiyeva Wheatcraft also delivers keynote talks globally on neurodiversity. You can read more about her at bio.site/doctorliliya.

Vivek Pandit is the cofounder of PeduL, a Forbes 30 Under 30 company transforming how businesses attract, engage, and retain Gen Z talent. Through innovative strategies and deep generational insights, Vivek helps companies future-proof their workforce, delivering high-impact workshops that empower organizations to connect with and cultivate the next generation of leaders. Beyond corporate boardrooms, he also developed “The Machine of Life,” a curriculum designed to help Gen Z navigate uncertainty, break through self-doubt, and turn their crises into comebacks.