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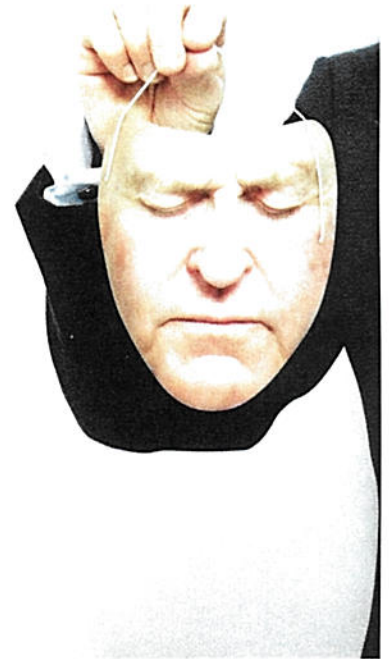
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Can a dull leader learn charisma?

Is charm an acquirable skill like any other? **Farah Dib** plays mediator



YES



DOMINIC IRVINE,
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Can dull leaders be taught charisma? If they can't, there's almost no hope for anyone. What is charisma? It's that certain something some people have that just attracts people to them. Gravitas is another example. You know when someone has either almost the moment they walk into a room.

Just as you can teach people to improve their handshake – who likes holding a wet fish of a grasp? – you can teach them other non-verbal aspects of communication. In the late 19th century, two scholars, William James and Carl Lange, identified that physiology dictates emotion: how you hold yourself affects how you feel. So if you want to feel miserable, lower your shoulders, slump and look down. Want to feel confident? Head up, look out, shoulders back, clasp your hands loosely behind your back and look people in the eye. Charisma is a set of non-verbal attributes – including tone of voice – that creates a sense of energy and attractiveness. It's

also the words you use and the interest you take in others.

Like all skills, it takes practice. If you do not have a predisposition to be charismatic, then it may take longer than for other people, but just as actors practise a role, so too can a manager practise being charismatic. However, the label of charisma is something that is given to you by others. If they are used to a dour, miserable, introverted loner, it may take them some time to appreciate the shift you have made and not simply write it off as a behavioural blip.

The more interesting question is whether the price of developing charisma is worth it. Do all leaders need to be charismatic? Given leadership is meant to be an attribute of managers at all levels of business, imagine an office filled with charismatic people. It would be like dark chocolate: one or two pieces is delicious, a bar is too much. While undoubtedly we can teach charisma, not everyone needs it.



While the board may well expect some form of development of an individual's personality, that does not mean they expect the person to turn into someone they clearly are not. People don't just become charismatic.

Still, the new chief executive has to recognise that their leadership style will need to adapt to the new circumstances in which they find themselves. And, accordingly, they may well need to find others in the senior management team more able to provide other parts of the leadership dynamic that they may find harder to provide.

The new leader will need to be able to put together a cohesive management team, which, in addition to being able to drive the business forward, will be able to fill in gaps in their own abilities. Facebook is an excellent example of this. The quiet chief executive Mark Zuckerberg works closely alongside his gregarious chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg. Just as a strong sales-orientated chief executive needs to make sure they have a strong chief financial officer, so too a leader who perhaps lacks the personal characteristics attributed to a charismatic leader, will need to find others within the management team who can provide this to the organisation. That's the strength of it: if you are not charismatic, don't try to become so, just work with someone who is. Perhaps charisma is overrated; more important is that people play to their strengths while recognising their weaknesses.



**DAVID
DUMERESQUE,**
EXECUTIVE
HEADHUNTER,
TYZACK



Just as we cannot expect a Geoffrey Boycott to bat like a Kevin Pietersen nor a Rob Andrew to tackle like a Jonny Wilkinson, we should not expect a chief executive to suddenly develop a character that is antithetic to their personality.

Marshall Goldsmith suggests in his book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* that people can and must change parts of their personality to make a success of being at the top. Yet it is entirely wrong for people to

expect someone who has attained a high position on the basis of a set of strengths and characteristics to suddenly turn into someone completely different.

Someone has risen to the role of chief executive thanks to talents that have clearly been displayed in a previous management position. They have been promoted on the basis of what they have achieved and how the board perceives that those talents and attributes can be translated into the new role.