

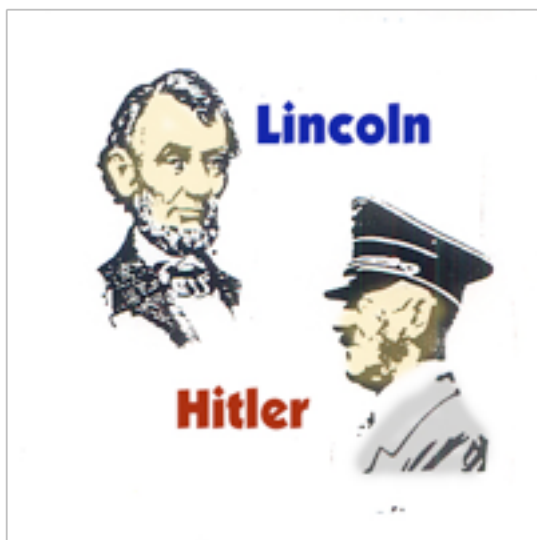
# A LINE ON LIFE

11/11/91, Revised 11/3/02

## Charismatic Leaders \*

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Throughout history, some leaders have been outstandingly successful in getting others to follow them – to transform their societies and to achieve a new order. These leaders have often been called **charismatic leaders**. What makes these leaders special? How do they get others to accept their views and follow their orders so willingly?



Charisma seems to be the result of specific behaviors on the part of the leaders, which – in turn – leads the followers to view them as charismatic. In essence, charismatic leaders have a powerful message, an arousing personality style and the needed interpersonal skills to make them a major force in effecting change. Specifically, leaders are more likely to be viewed as charismatic when the following conditions exist.

1. **Intolerable conditions** exist currently within the state or organization.
2. There is an **emotion-arousing vision** of another, far better condition.
3. Charismatic leaders have **outstanding social skills**. (In other words, they can "read" the reactions of others quickly and accurately, and they excel in impression management and other associated activities.)

Although we tend to think of charismatic leaders in relation to large political movements or military engagements, charismatic leaders can occur in everyday settings. They can make large contributions to the productivity and success of many organizations.

In a 1989 psychological study, Howell and Frost explored three contrasting leadership styles – *charismatic*, *structuring* and *considerate*. (The leaders were played by professional actors or actresses, who had been rehearsed to play these roles exactly.)

1. **Charismatic leaders** communicated an overall goal, indicated high performance expectations and demonstrated high confidence in their followers. They were dynamic and full of energy. (The actors indicated this by pacing back and forth or sitting on their desk while giving directions. They also used an engaging but relaxed tone of voice.)
2. **Structuring leaders**, in contrast, indicated that their main concern was for the task at hand. (Sitting behind their desks, the actors directed their followers in a cool, factual tone – acting in a very business-like way.)
3. **Considerate leaders**, on the other hand, were very friendly toward their followers. They indicated a high level of interest in their followers and their satisfaction on the job.

Charismatic leadership was compared to these other two styles, because actual leaders vary considerably in their levels of structuring and consideration. Within these leadership styles, specific leaders can be high, low or moderate in their relationship to their followers.

In Howell and Frost's research, both men and women subjects worked on an "*in-basket*" task. Each acted as a manager and worked on specific items (letters reports and memos) that managers typically would find in their baskets. The managers worked on these tasks under the direct supervision of leaders trained in one of the three leadership styles mentioned.

Howell and Frost predicted that the charismatic leaders would generate the highest levels of **productivity** and the highest levels of **satisfaction** among the subjects. In other words, they would produce the most favorable results overall. This is exactly what they found. Charismatic leaders seem to offer substance as well as style. They captured and maintained the interest and enthusiasm of their followers. Beside that, they also promoted high levels of effort and output in their followers.

However, there is another important finding in this research. The actors and actresses had been *trained* to demonstrate the leadership styles – including *social skills* needed for the charismatic one. This suggests that charisma may not be as innate or unalterable as some people believe. The research suggests that the quality of the charisma is a pattern of behavior that can be learned by many people.

In terms of many organizations, this can be taken one step further. Most organizations strive for increased productivity from their workers. Some of these are interested in higher employee satisfaction. A new answer to their problem seems to stem logically from this research. These companies do not need to search for new and charismatic leaders. In contrast, they can concentrate their efforts on increasing the social skills of the leaders they already have.

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\* Adapted from Robert Baron and Donn Byrne's *Social Psychology: Understanding Human Interaction*, Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 1991, pages 469-471.