

**HOME**

[Site Map](#)

**Print Edition**

- [Front Page](#)
- [Column One](#)
- [Inside "A" California](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Opinion](#)

- [Weekly Food](#)
- [Health Highway 1](#)
- [Home](#)
- [Sunday](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Magazine](#)
- [Current](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Travel](#)

**NEWS**

- [California | Local](#)
- [National](#)
- [World](#)
- [Entertainment News](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Print Edition](#)
- [RSS: What is RSS?](#)

- [Calendar](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [West Magazine](#)
- [House & Garden](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Car Culture](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Crossword, Sudoku](#)
- [A Sections](#)
- [Corrections](#)

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## Charm, graciousness -- and attitude

**True charisma comes from within. But experts say you can develop it by focusing more on the people around you.**

By Janet Cromley, Times Staff Writer  
May 29, 2006

Want to boost your charisma? Although researchers believe the quality is largely innate, they also think it's teachable. Just how much so remains the subject of debate.

Howard Friedman, a psychology professor at UC Riverside, believes that personal charisma remains fairly stable over the years, especially for people whose lives remain stable.

**ADVERTISEMENT** Even in preschool, charisma can be observed as kids pick out leaders on the playground — and it's fully evident by high school, when social groups solidify and kids start dating. By the time those same kids begin choosing mates as adults, their charisma quotient will be fairly apparent, and even roughly measurable on personality scales.

That innate quality even seems to dictate the careers that people choose. Professions with a high amount of social interaction attract, or select for, charismatic people — sales, entertainment, and, of course, politics.

"Charismatic people are more likely to become actors or public speakers," says Friedman, editor of the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior. "Ronald Reagan is my favorite example."

Tony Alessandra, a motivational speaker and author of more than a dozen books on sales and personality, believes that charisma is generally inherent, but that it's also infinitely teachable.

And even Friedman agrees that people who become actors or public speakers can become more charismatic through training.

"Many people have developed it," says Alessandra. "Just look at Arnold Schwarzenegger and George Foreman. Did they have charisma when they were younger? Nope. And look at the late Princess Diana. They used to call her 'Shy Di.'"

The first step in boosting your charisma quotient, say media coaches and matchmakers, is to adopt certain behaviors, such as demonstrating enthusiasm and optimism, maintaining eye contact, speaking with authority, standing erect with shoulders back but muscles relaxed and mirroring body language.

But true charisma starts from within. If you adopt certain attitudes, charisma will flow naturally. "Charisma begins with what I call 'graciousness,'" says Jackson Bain, who has taught media skills to executives and politicians for more than 20 years. This means listening carefully and focusing one's attention on what others are saying.

"This isn't acting," he says. "This is changing your attitude toward the world around you and the humans around you. You need to begin by asking yourself, 'How much do I really care about these people I'm with?'" Once you establish that, he says, you become more gracious and by extension, more charismatic.

"Here's the way Bill Clinton does it," Bain says. "When you are meeting with Clinton, he focuses just on you. It's as if you're the only person in the room with him. Your estimation of yourself is higher than it was before you shook hands with him."

The genuinely charismatic person has learned to banish, or at least ignore, internal dialogue and chatter.

"There's an expression in sports known as 'playing out of your mind,'" says Tom Jaffee, founder and chief executive of 8minuteDating.com. "That means you're not internalizing, you're not thinking about yourself. Your focus is external. An animal in the jungle knows when he leaps off a branch that he will land safely because he's not thinking about it."

Charisma, he says, works the same way. "When you eliminate the internal chatter, you naturally become more focused, engaged, and, by extension, charismatic."

If all else fails, pick up a book. "The most charismatic people are avid readers," Jaffee says. "Reading gives them knowledge of many things and an ability to connect with people because they're interested and involved."

Charisma can be learned, he says, but it starts inside. "If you learn to listen and focus on others, the behaviors will follow."

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