

## CHARISMA: YOU CAN'T FAKE IT, BUT CAN YOU MAKE IT?

Many people find the idea, that charisma is a positive personal character trait a difficult one to accept. The word can conjure up negative stereotypes of self-serving individuals who often manipulate others into doing or thinking things they don't really want to do using slick words and false smiles. In the media, charisma is regularly associated with career politicians and even infamous criminals.

But there is much more to charisma than the bad PR. Charisma is about relationship building and for advocates trying to impact and influence stakeholders in order to secure outcomes for services users or effect change within health care settings, charisma offers a powerful and positive tool.

### WHAT IS CHARISMA?

Charisma is often described as the 'it' factor which makes others stop and take notice of what is being said.

But how do you define the 'it' factor? How do you label that quality which makes personalities infectious, attractive and interesting to be around?

We know that charisma is strongly associated with emotional intelligence: that is the ability to read the emotional states of other people and maintain a degree of control within their own, but there are other elements of charisma that advocates can nurture and develop....



***Should advocates be charismatic?***

### BEING OPTIMISTIC

People like spending time with charismatic people – often because they are fun and have an uncanny ability to see (and sell) visions of a future which is better than the current one. And most people prefer to see the future as a place where things will be better.

Whilst decision making should of course consider what might go wrong with any decision, charismatic advocates are equally adept at highlighting positive qualities and 'what if' options. The benefit of the optimistic approach, is that it encourages others to think creatively and get excited about the range of possible options. Especially outcomes favoured by the service user which are often overlooked because decision makers are pre-occupied with what risks they must avoid.

In other words, being able to communicate vision with an optimistic tone, is an infectious way to turn the tone of a meeting or decision into one where professionals begin to imagine what they could do, before making interesting things happen.

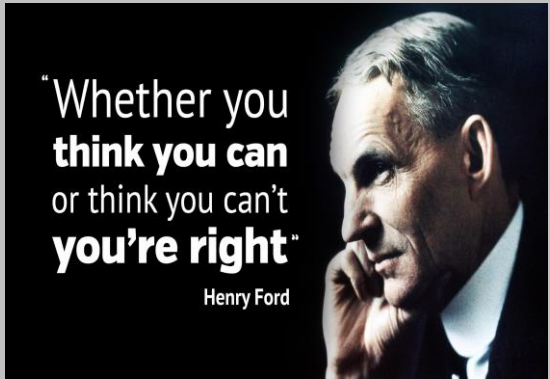
### BEING INTERESTED IN OTHERS

Charismatic people are always interested in others. They take time to get to know the individual person and can adapt their own personality to develop rapport.

This is crucial when building relationships with individual service users – but also crucial when influencing decision makers and staff. If as an advocate you know what motivates the social worker or doctor, you can think more cleverly about how to frame your client's outcome, or which benefits/risks to emphasise/avoid.

However being interested in others cannot be a pretence – otherwise the advocate will appear as manipulative and self serving. Genuine interest is the only way to develop congruent relationships where the advocate can go on to exert influence.

Genuine interest in others will of course, also ensure you pick up on non verbal cues from people which provide an enormous amount of information about their goals and feedback on whether your approach is working.



“Whether you  
**think you can**  
or think you can't  
**you're right**”

Henry Ford

*Ultimately Charisma is the  
result of excellent  
communication and  
interpersonal skills, as these  
skills can be learned and  
developed – so developing your  
charisma is possible*



***Is it okay to be vulnerable?***

## **BEING VULNERABLE**

Perfection is an unattainable human quality – and yet we spend so much of our time having unrealistically high expectations of ourselves and beating ourselves up when we get it wrong.

We might say we welcome feedback on our performance but the truth is when someone says ‘Hey, I want to make a complaint about you’ the last thing on our mind is ‘gee, oh thank you, this is going to be a great learning opportunity’.

Yet being vulnerable is a beautiful human quality. Truly not knowing an answer and being comfortable with this creates a space within decision making for people to put the service user and their experiences at the heart of the decision.

### ***Can others be vulnerable in your presence?***

A poor leader creates relationships where people are terrified of making mistakes. Charismatic leaders on the other hand are able to share times when they have got it wrong and communicate that they do not expect everyone to get everything right all of the time.

Vulnerability creates cultures which are able to cope when things go wrong. Consider for a moment what happens within your advocacy team when someone gets it wrong. How does your service cope? Is it one of criticism and incredulity with people asking ‘I can’t believe they did that’ or is it one of acceptance with people saying ‘it’s okay, let’s take responsibility, how do we make it right’?

Similarly, consider your relationships with professionals. Allowing them to be vulnerable can prevent defensive barriers from taking hold and instead help you to unlock innovative solutions.

It can also help avoid parties taking entrenched positions when different opinions exist. Remembering that people are not perfect can help you to raise your concerns and represent your partner in ways which do not alienate you from the people you need to influence.

So unless the concerns are so serious that people are at risk of being hurt, perhaps advocates should be less critical judge and jury and more charismatic influencer within their relationships.

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

Who do you know who is charismatic?

How would you describe your relationship?

What elements of charisma do you already possess?

When you want to challenge a decision (or system), how important is it to be charismatic?

***Do you agree with the following statements? Why?***

*Charisma can be learnt*

*Advocates who are charismatic take focus away from their client*

*Advocacy needs more charismatic people.*

**How would you rate the charisma of the following people. Why?:**

David and Ed Milliband,

Margaret Thatcher and John Major,

Marilyn Monroe and Angelina Jolie.