



CHARISMA AS A WAY OF LIFE

Writer Charles Dickens said in his book, *A Tale of two Cities*, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." When viewing the social landscape of contemporary society, this statement rings true. The opportunities afforded to Americans and people throughout the world pale in comparison to the opportunities presented a century ago. Citizens are able to determine their lot in life no matter where and what conditions they are born. The idea that one has to be born into wealth has gone by way of the horse and buggy. The opportunities for individuals to carve out a niche for themselves are endless. This is the best of times! However, although opportunities are endless, humanity has paved a new road of incivility and primitive behavior. It appears that more opportunities have brought about a greater degree of barbarism. With the most advanced minds and technology, humans have lost the fundamental quality of being civilized, compassionate and empathetic. No longer is it stylish to be chivalrous when it comes to catering to a lady's honor--at least not for the youth. Those "old fashion" ways of doing things have been replaced with physical and psychological abuse of women. It's accepted to "let it all hang out" without compunction. Anyone daring to dispute this status quo does so at their own peril.

So where did the days of sophistication go? Why has social grace and charm diminished at a time when the world is experiencing technological breakthroughs at warp speed? Once more, what will society do to maintain civilization as we know it? These issues are not the rants of a pessimist who shouts, "the sky is falling" merely because rain clouds exist. On the contrary, it is a plea to saving civilization that has gone too far and must correct itself or fall back into "The Dark Ages."

Civility in this case is not merely a nice thing to do, it becomes the saving grace of a way of life rapidly evaporating. Until a campaign is lodged to restore proper social etiquette coupled with effective communication, the idea of charisma will be as extinct as the Do-Do bird. Can charisma be learned? Many pundits believe that it cannot--either you have it or you don't. Conversely, charisma can be learned as well as taught. It is a skill cultivated and honed like any other skill. Those who consciously hone and polish it are deemed more charismatic. Charisma is defined by the Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus as "the ability to inspire devotion and enthusiasm within followers." Although we feel the aura of a charismatic person, we still have challenges putting our finger on such an intangible trait. It is one of those "high intangibles" that exist only in the context of human interaction. Without its social dynamics, it doesn't really exist. It's tantamount to the riddle, "If a tree falls in the forest and no one heard it, did it make a sound?" The answer is "who cares!" At that point the issue is moot. The same applies to charisma. It has no basis if it existed without people. Suffice to say that because we are social beings among other beings, charisma is everything!

Whether the lack of sophistication we see in individuals today is a culmination of a

facade being stripped away or the decline of civilization, we can agree that it breeds a sense of fear and discomfort. As human beings, we are motivated by our emotions. We make decisions based on emotion and justify our actions through reason. As such, the charismatic person makes us feel good about him/her as well as ourselves. With tact and diplomacy, she is able to convey a point that helps us rise above mediocrity as a telling point of our shortcomings. A person will rise from his doldrums if inspired by an individual who brings and shares understanding. She does not have to be correct in your eyes, but her opinion must be respected in the enthusiastic and profound way in which it is presented. The art of charisma must be rekindled if society is to develop to a higher level. Yes, charisma is an "art." It must be carefully nurtured and pruned so as to reflect its best features. It is not some contrived behavior that is inauthentic. It is true to form of what the individual has identified as his own uniqueness. This intangible ingredient separates you from the six billion other inhabitants on earth who share the same physical makeup. The process of cultivating charisma starts with a three-step process. This process entails:

1. Determining what role you will play on the stage of life. Shakespeare said it best when he said, "All the world's a stage and we are mere players...." In short, we are all playing a role on the stage of life--some by choice others by chance. Whether an employee, employer, mother, father, teacher, etc. we occupy some position with certain nuances and affectations that are unique and identifiable to that role. Those who seek to increase their personal charisma should be more conscious of the role they are playing. If you opt to be a banker, what type kind of banker are you? How do you feel and look? How do others respond? Individuals who want to be effective in their chosen role or occupation desire to insure that this happens through a carefully planned and strategic effort. It is ineffective to play it by ear without some semblance of the outcome you wish to achieve. Identify role models who exemplify what your personal charisma looks like and borrow some of those attributes from the way they dress to the style they use to engage people.

2. Expanding your worldview. The best choices in life are made when logic and emotions are aligned. Unfortunately, while humans are designed to be multifaceted, we often choose to be one-dimensional. This choice is usually out of convenience, because it is more challenging to expand one's level of awareness than to remain in our comfort zone. We love our comfort zone and will protect it at all cost, because it is all we know and all we want to know. Conversely, information expands our worldview to accept change more readily without the pains of involuntary growth. When we are steeped in knowledge, we are better able to connect with a greater number of people throughout the world. We do not suffer from "xenophobia" or the fear of foreigners, because no one is foreign to us. This expanded awareness increases our charisma, because we are at ease with humanity and respond in kind.

3. Creating mutually beneficial relationships. In the end, your success will be determined by how effective you were at building coalitions of people who contributed positively to the world. People management is an ongoing skill that needs constant cultivation. The ability to tap into the motivation as well as agendas of individuals will position you to get what you want by understanding what drives the other person. As human beings, we are not as complex as we would imagine if we know the background, pains and desires of those we interact with. We all need something and those who can

identify and satisfy those needs will add value to that person, thus connecting and ultimately influencing a positive outcome. At the core level, we should strive to give value as we receive value from others. Unfortunately, many people believe that it is divine to struggle and sacrifice for people when no such obligation is necessary or logical. Relationships that hurt, personally and professionally, stagnate growth and human potential and should be avoided at all cost.

These are the best and worst of times! The extent that we have more or less of the other will be determined by the choices we make in fashioning the world that reflects our desires. If the world is truly a reflection of who we are, what image do we see of ourselves? Those who connect, captivate and communicate their ideas on the world stage through the power of charisma will inherit the earth. In the end, we are the sum total of all of our choices.

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