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The Charisma Code

**Seven Ways to Increase
Your Personal Appeal**

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**Karismakoden Sju vägar till ökad personlig utstrålning
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Introduction

What is charisma?

Charisma is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “the capacity to inspire devotion or enthusiasm”. This phenomenon exists above all in the eye of the beholder, but anyone can bring out the charisma that lies within themselves and increase their personal appeal. There are several ways to do this.

Creating an impression of trustworthiness

Ethos is a rhetorical term and means character / role, the part of ourselves we always show. The Greek philosopher Aristotle maintained that a speaker’s *ethos* was one of the most powerful tools in convincing others. According to him, intellect, virtue and kindness created an air of trust and reliability. There are many ways to strengthen your *ethos*, but with a few ill chosen words or unconscious body language you can also weaken it considerably.

What is your unspoken message?

Are you aware of what the way you move, your posture and your gestures are saying? What comes out of your mouth can be the direct opposite of your body language and behaviour. We rely far more on what we see and hear than on the actual content of what is said. Open your eyes to the body’s coded language – your own and that of others!

What does your facial expression say?

A considerable amount of information can be read from a person’s facial expressions, both conscious and unconscious. New research in the field of communications indicates that we have a genetic, inherited ability to register and absorb expressions signalling anger. A detail such as the position of the eyebrows can affect how others regard us.

Use your voice!

A voice can contain so much. Joy, excitement, expectation or fear are reflected in our tone of voice. For example, the way you say hello to your family when you get home from work sets the tone for the rest of the evening.

Being more aware of how you use your voice is something everyone can learn in order to improve your communication skills. In public situations, a relaxed tone of

voice and the courage to pause is one of the signals conveying a sense of security and high status.

Find your passion

Energy is infectious. It's easier for a person who has strong convictions and has powerful feelings about something to acquire appeal and charisma. When a power is realised, we can talk about *shen*, the Chinese word for vitality and life-force. A person who has landed in the right place feels good physically, mentally and spiritually. What makes you enthusiastic, powerful and motivated?

Presence – the first step towards charisma

It's possible to train yourself in the ability to have presence. One way is to sharpen your senses and concentration through mental training, such as tai chi, yoga, chi gong, meditation and similar activities. In our rational times, the importance of intellect and reason are over-emphasised. Because of this, many people lose touch with their bodies, their intuition and their emotions.

With physical awareness, the right and left sides of the brain are integrated and our ability to have presence increases.

How do you encode your language?

Words are not innocent; the words we choose to use send out signals in different ways. Charismatic personalities weight their messages with many strong associations, often positive. Language influences the way we think and different groups develop their own ways of communicating. It's easy to take your own way of speaking for granted, and to assume it's the norm for everyone. Adapt your message to suit your audience.

Speak in pictures!

Why are similes and stories so effective? Well, it's because they speak directly to our subconscious, and therefore go straight to their goal. Every individual can interpret them in his own way, based on his own personal experience of life. Metaphors are verbal weapons that can be used to denigrate or flatter. [...] Using imagery builds bridges, reaching the listener so that he remembers what we say.

The way you think has a role to play

Your body is the “transcript” of your mental program. Sportsmen use mental training to improve their results, and a speaker can make use of the same method. Set goals and challenge yourself. By stepping outside our own comfort zone, we reach new heights.

Become successful in your social life – maximise your adaptability

Life is about relationships. At home with the family, at work, among friends, in shops, while travelling – we're in contact with other people everywhere. Are you paying attention to your opposite number when you communicate? If not – switch your focus and become a winner.

Become successful in your social life, part two

This is how to get other people to appreciate you: mirror their body language, learn the art of listening etc.

Humour helps you connect

Laughter is one way to get your listeners in a receptive state of mind. With the help of humour, it's easier to get past other people's natural defences. Laughter works like a kind of spiritual purification, making an audience more open to taking in information and different messages. How can you develop the way you use humour?

Practice, training, practice, training ...

Speaking well gives power and increased personal appeal. The art of thorough preparation is something we have lost. Whatever touches you, touches other people. Start collecting the best things you hear, see and read: good quotations, wise words, amusing expressions, stories and anecdotes. Imitation is the mother of all learning. The prominent antiquarian figure Quintilianus emphasised the importance of studying skilful role models. Find your own source of inspiration.

Summary

Charisma, rhetoric and ethics. Strong personal appeal gives power, and this power can of course be abused. Use your knowledge and skills wisely.

Thanks!

Concluding notes

Introduction

When my mother suffered a stroke several years ago, she lost her ability to speak. She was also paralysed down one side of her body. This meant that both she and her family had to learn to communicate in a different way. I discovered what an amazing amount we can say to each other without using words! If I ring Mum and tell her what's been happening, she "answers" with sounds such as "mmm", "aaah", "ooh", "ohohoh", "hm" and so on, and we can talk to each other. If we don't understand, we can always laugh together.

This is one reason why communication and body language fascinate me. The movements of the body, different facial expressions and the tone of a voice sometimes contain more information than the spoken word. Everything we communicate without being aware of it, the body's silent message, is the basis of what creates a person's appeal.

It was with considerable trepidation that I began writing a book about charisma. "What if people think I'm exaggerating – reading so much into body language?!!" And all those expectations: "She must have tremendous charisma herself, writing a book like that." An enormous challenge for an A-grade neurotic.

But – this book is exactly what I would have loved to get my hands on when I first became interested in the phenomenon of charisma some years ago. Through my book I want to place the mysterious nature of personal appeal in the spotlight. The fruits of a considerable amount of research are gathered here, taken from very different disciplines: psychology, sociology, pedagogy, rhetoric, linguistics and medicine, among others. I hope that in the future there will be more cross-disciplinary studies, so that differing fields can enrich each other.

It can appear overwhelming and stressful when so much information relating to charismatic behaviour is piled up together in this way. It makes it difficult to follow every piece of advice in the book all the time, but that isn't my aim. We are only human, incomplete and far from perfect.

We can, however, influence the way others see us. A person can change the way he presents himself, and the first step is to become aware of our own non-verbal communication.

Besides offering training in the art of speaking in public, the book describes seven ways to increase your personal appeal:

1. THE BODY'S SILENT MESSAGE
2. TRUSTWORTHINESS
3. PASSION AND INVOLVEMENT
4. PRESENCE
5. SPEAKING IN PICTURES
6. INNER FOCUS
7. SOCIAL SKILLS

For athletes or practitioners of other sports, there is nothing unusual about practising certain movements and physical behaviour in order to win medals. The successful athletics trainer Yannick Tregaro, who coached Christian Olsson (among others) in the run-up to his Olympic gold medal in the triple jump, calls himself a choreographer as much as a trainer. He has learned the vital significance of the smallest details, such as the angle of a jumper's arm, or the extent to which the toes are pointing upwards at take-off. A person who wants to strengthen their appeal can practise their posture and facial expression in a corresponding way, in order to communicate exactly what he or she wants.

The way in which we behave and act towards one another plays a significant role in our sense of wellbeing. But we are often unaware of the extent to which the body's message influences us, both consciously and unconsciously.

Putting into practice the knowledge provided in this book leads to new opportunities. When we become conscious of the signals we are sending out to those around us, we have a choice. Do we want to continue relating to others in this particular way, demonstrating one form of behaviour, one attitude, or do we want to change?

Everybody has the desire somewhere inside them to be seen and acknowledged, to be able to enchant and delight others. Developing charismatic behaviour isn't some kind of ego trip, it's a way of releasing your hidden resources. These skills will be useful everywhere – at home with the family, at work, at school, on a course, in meetings, at parties and so on. Hopefully we will also become more tolerant and broad-minded as we learn to look behind the unconscious expressions of other people. Perhaps we might even discover that someone who looks aggressive or bad-tempered isn't like that at all.

Used in this way, charisma becomes a “language” for respectful communication and good relationships. We can use this knowledge to become a better communicator in every context. In order to create more rewarding contacts. And to lift others so that we can all shine and glow more.

What is charisma?

“Intrinsic charisma is a birthright.”

Doe Lang, author

Most of us talk to more people in a week than our forefathers did in a lifetime. We learn to handle computers and an enormous deluge of information, but we are seldom given training in how to communicate well. How we relate to others plays a significant role in determining the appeal we have in their eyes. Words have their meaning, of course. But the *way* in which we say things and everything else we communicate with our body also has a considerable influence on how we are perceived by those around us. A whole raft of signals forms the total impression.

No-one can be an exact copy of another person. But we can all make the best of ourselves, thus increasing our personal appeal.

So, what do we really mean by charisma? It's not so easy to reach an exact definition of the word. The phenomenon exists primarily in the eye of the beholder, and we all have our own interpretation. Nor is it necessarily seen as exclusively positive. Individuals as diverse as Princess Diana, Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Hitler and mass murderer Charles Manson have been described as charismatic.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as follows: "A gift or power of leadership or authority; aura. Hence, the capacity to inspire devotion or enthusiasm".

The word *charisma* itself was invented in Greece more than two thousand years ago. It means *gift of grace* or *favour*, and comes from *cha'ris* = pleasure, grace, kindness and *chari'zomai* = to do someone a favour, to humour someone. After the birth of Jesus, the church took up the word. Charismatic movements within the church see charisma as a gift of grace from God. It is granted to all those who give themselves to the "baptism of the Holy Spirit". This means that one can speak in tongues, heal the sick or speak prophetically (make predictions).

However, if we interpret the word according to the definition given in the Oxford English Dictionary, it seems odd to hear someone describe himself as charismatic. It is the observer who decides whether or not someone has strong personal appeal in his or her eyes.

In the 20th century the German sociologist Max Weber turned his attention to the field of charisma and leadership. He used the term to describe how exceptional leaders have changed the face of politics through their personal power. He regarded charisma as a gift which distinguished an individual from other people. Since then, a considerable amount of research has been undertaken into charismatic leadership. On the other hand, there is very little documented work on developing one's charisma in everyday life.

Nobody can develop strong appeal without being in contact with other people. Charisma builds on relationships. What happens in encounters between people means that certain inspiring characters, with their outward behaviour and their inner passion, create special bonds, both mental and emotional.

In our own lives we have presumably all come across unforgettable people who have made a deep impression on us. It might be a teacher, a boss, a work colleague or someone else among our acquaintances. They have something extra, something special, and we are touched by their appeal.

One thing charismatic people often have in common is a strong belief in something, and they are very skilful communicators. They speak to us in an attractive way both verbally and non-verbally, thus capturing our attention.

Some speak of magnetism, some of an aura, a luminosity, or a natural authority when they are touched by someone. Charisma can also be described as the ability to influence others in a positive way by establishing contact with them on all levels – physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. When a person communicates in this way, something happens in the atmosphere. It's as if there's magic in the air. The public and the artist can experience that at special moments when everything is in perfect harmony between the stage and the auditorium. This feeling, this total contact, can be so powerful that some become dependent on the kicks they get from being the centre of attention.

Human attraction works in many ways, and we all vary in how receptive we are. Basic attraction comprises beauty along with both sensual and sexual appeal. But attraction does not depend solely on how a person looks. It's also about how a person uses their body, voice and face.

Exceptional talent attracts our admiration. Another key word when it comes to charisma is energy. Passion, conviction and driving force are the fast track to increased personal appeal. Intense individuals with enthusiasm and passion can often have a powerful influence on the world around them.

Courageous individuals are another group who attract admiration. Some people are impressed by brash, feisty appeal. Others react more positively to low-key, modest charisma.

Charisma can be developed through practice

Many people regard charisma as something mystical, something a person is born with, a quality you therefore have or don't have. But scientists who have studied charismatic personalities in order to discover the gift of carrying people along with you have not found any specific character trait or any particular talent. Instead the researchers are concentrating on finding and developing charismatic behaviour. It is possible to learn to act in a way that will lead to stronger personal appeal.

In order to investigate the difference between various ways of communicating, the researchers in one experiment divided 48 individuals into three groups. Sixteen received training in charismatic behaviour, focusing on what they were communicating through attitudes, behaviour and body language. A third were taught traditional performance techniques, while the rest received no training at all, but formed the control group. In order to measure the effects, all the participants had to produce and deliver a talk that was filmed on video.

The group who had training in charismatic behaviour learned to:

- use body language to a much greater extent, and to use all the nuances of their voice.
- deliver their message with the help of anecdotes, similes and metaphors.
- address the emotions, and have a visionary image.

The group trained in charismatic behaviour were clearly the best received by the audience. They were also the most effective from the point of view of instruction. Measuring retention showed that the listeners recalled most of what this group had said.

In order to strengthen your charisma, you need to be aware of your own body language, of what non-verbal codes you are sending out where and when, and how this happens. Then you can shape your image as you wish.

The presidential couple John F and Jacqueline, "Jackie" Kennedy were regarded almost as royalty by the American people. This is one explanation for the couple's luminous appeal: both were constantly incredibly conscious of their image. In public they dressed and acted in a way that meant they were perceived as royal. Their posture was upright and proud, communicating an image of dignity and high self-esteem. They charmed the people they met by their open attitude, and by joking, smiling and laughing. In public John F Kennedy's body language indicated power and

energy through convincing gestures, among other things. His voice was rich and decisive, never hesitant, and his tone was often upbeat. Under the spotlight Jackie Kennedy always acted like a queen. For example, when she waved to the crowds she did so with calm, controlled movements, almost languidly. This gave her an aura of refinement and nobility.

The atmosphere we create around us is built up through a combination of words, behaviour, and physical expression. How we move, carry ourselves, walk and stand is called *actio* in rhetoric. The voice, which is often an underrated tool in the art of influencing others, is called *pronuntatio*.

It's more difficult to be perceived as charismatic with smaller ways of expressing ourselves. Characters such as the freedom campaigner Martin Luther King, South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela, the actress Marilyn Monroe, the artiste Elvis Presley and others with a great capacity to touch others are unusually clear in their body language. If one studies their voices and facial expressions in detail, one finds that they communicate a considerable number of emotions. In this way they form a vibrant, attractive image of themselves.

When Elvis Presley walks on to the stage at a show in Las Vegas in 1970, the audience goes wild. Screaming fans cluster round the stage. Elvis greets them with a bow, but without losing eye contact with his audience. For a fraction of a second he looks almost scared as he gazes out over the cheering crowd. Then he takes a deep breath, and shapes his mouth into an audible exhalation, communicating the message "wow ...". He shakes his head slightly as if he were thinking "they're crazy". But he does it with good humour, his love for the audience shining through. He smiles with his eyes and with his mouth, the smile growing ever broader until finally his dimples appear.

Another central component in people with strong appeal is that they communicate vitality and energy. We are drawn to people who live life intensely. Elvis' physical moves on the stage were a part of his magic. His body, tall and well built, was constantly moving in time to the music. Hips, legs, feet, upper body and arms – everything swayed and shook, nothing was still. At the beginning of his career his body language was regarded as so daring and shocking that American television would show him only from the waist up.

John F Kennedy spent a large part of his childhood and youth confined to bed with a mysterious illness the doctors couldn't put a name to. Despite his poor physical condition, he shone academically. Gradually, with the help of a determined exercise programme, he managed to gain a place on a tough military training course. During the Second World War he served with the Pacific fleet, always ensuring that he was in the forefront of any action, which gained him a medal for bravery in conflict. A back injury that had got worse forced him to use crutches from time to time. An operation might cure it, but there was just a 50 per cent chance of survival. This was Kennedy's comment on those odds: "I'd rather die than hop around on these things."

John F Kennedy has been criticised in retrospect for being too ready to take risks as President. He was a fighter who wanted to reach his goal at any price, and he sought out danger and excitement to the extent that world peace was put at risk. The 1952 Cuba crisis, when strained relations between the USA and the Soviet Union threatened to unleash a major war, reminds us of this. But he was also much admired for his resolution and fearlessness. Even his extra-marital escapades don't seem to have had a negative influence on his appeal to any great extent. People in general seemed to forgive the charming President his affairs. The situation appears to be the same for Kennedy's successor, Bill Clinton.

Selflessness gives the ability to shine

The fact that certain individuals are perceived as charismatic is to a certain extent linked to the times in which they live. Nothing is more powerful than a message or an idea which is exactly apposite to its time. Today, Hitler cuts a ridiculous figure in old documentary footage. Despite this, in his day he had the ability to dazzle and seduce the masses. There are plenty of other leaders with questionable motives who have succeeded in winning the trust of their listeners. But the lasting good impressions have been made by people such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa. Their selfless desire to contribute to the welfare of mankind creates a unique trust and a shining goodness.

Communicating the fact that you wish others well is one way to increase your personal appeal, according to research from an American university. Teachers who demonstrated great concern and consideration for their students were perceived as charismatic. According to the results, these academics were also regarded by their pupils as enthusiastic and full of energy.

In uncertain times the need for powerful, visionary leaders is at its height. Charismatic prominent figures know how to paint an appealing picture of change, and how to convince others that something can be different and better. This type of leader often functions best during the build-up period and during times of change. For an organisation entering a calmer, more administrative phase, a more conventional leader is often more suitable.

Positive expectations increase appeal

If another person believes we can do something, we tend to live up to their expectations. A distinguishing feature of charismatic bosses is that they have high expectations of what their colleagues can achieve. The leader who makes those around him blossom and grow is usually very highly thought of by his colleagues.

Another key to powerful personal appeal is the ability to have presence and to become completely absorbed in what you are doing, to "become one" with the task in hand. When a great musician is in a state of deep concentration with his instrument, he completely forgets himself. The music takes on a life of its own. A situation where everything is just right, where we are completely taken up with what we are doing, is an appealing situation that affects our powers of attraction. We have presumably all experienced this at times when life has been uncertain. When we hit a winning streak we become strong, invincible and attractive.

The ability to be able to speak well is essential for charismatic individuals. When you are able to use words skilfully, other people take your message on board more readily. Many people think you're either born with this talent, or you're not. But good speakers are rarely practised rhetoricians right from the outset.

The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill became a legend for his oratory. Thanks to a wealth of perfectly chosen words, he succeeded in leading the British people to victory in the Second World War. But Churchill was most definitely not a born orator. He stammered and lisped and was so nervous that the first time he was due to speak in a large political meeting, he fainted with the stress of it all. With diligent practice he gradually became one of the 20th century's most quoted speakers.

It is reasonable to assume that a person who is nervous about speaking in public has every chance of being a good communicator once he has overcome his fear. Fear is one side of the coin, creativity and inventiveness the other. And in order to be a good speaker, you need imagination and the ability to access a whole range of emotions. Someone who merely churns out facts and forgets the language of emotion, *patos*, is boring to listen to.

People who are perceived as charismatic have often cultivated the ability to speak in a natural way, although they may be tense during an appearance. They have done this through training and a great deal of practice. Daring to be personal, to reveal parts of your inner self, touches people.

"I'm a pathetic person really, because I never think I'm good enough." This is what the Swedish television journalist and author Alexandra Pascalido once said, in front of a large audience. It's easy to feel sympathetic towards someone who expresses something many of us recognise. But this presupposes that the speaker radiates self-assurance in both their body and their voice. Otherwise confidences of this kind can be uncomfortable for the listeners to share.

The public likes people who are just themselves. Artists are often even more loved when they dare to reveal their faults and flaws.

There's a story about Evert Taube, a Swedish national poet; it's said he even pretended to be forgetful in order to enhance his performance on stage. He used to ask his wife for advice: "Astri, will it work if I go wrong just here ..."

Being spontaneous is something we learn NOT to do as we grow up and are formed as individuals. It takes training and courage to alter this pattern.

Charismatic personalities are to be found in the most diverse fields. Successful entrepreneurs, inventors and major company directors fall into this category, as do many sportsmen and women. The list of legendary sports personalities is a long one, and we all have our own personal favourites. Other categories include political and spiritual leaders, campaigners for freedom, and media stars.

By being the first woman, and a black woman at that, to hold the post of America's Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice has assured her place in history. Being unusual in a number of ways helps the individual to end up in the spotlight. The enormous influence of the media means that people who get a lot of exposure on television, on the radio, on the internet and in the press acquire a kind of lustre. Whether the world's most powerful woman (according to the business journal *Forbes* 2005) will be regarded as charismatic in the long term, only the future can tell.

Time and distance are in fact two further components that tend to create charisma. Many become super-charismatic figures only after their death. One of Martin Luther

King's close colleagues relates in a programme reflecting on King's life that he never saw any trace of charisma when the two of them were working side by side on a daily basis. He simply saw his friend and colleague, a man with faults and good points.

A myth has a life of its own

A kind of mythology can easily grow up around famous people, contributing to their lustre. These myths often become self-perpetuating. The former ANC leader and President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, is linked to the following quotation, both in Sweden and abroad:

“Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate, but that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. /.../ And, as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

These words crop up all over the place, and everyone thinks they come from Mandela's inaugural speech as President, but they don't. The quotation is from *A return to love* by the American writer Marianne Williamson. Nelson Mandela never used these words, either in his first inaugural speech in Cape Town on May 9th 1994, or in his second in Pretoria on May 10th. But we are happy to attribute these lines to him, because they fit in so well with the image we have of him. Marianne Williamson has commented on the misquotation on her homepage:

Several years ago this text from my book A return to love began to crop up everywhere, and was said to have come from Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech as President. However flattered I might be to have the President quote my words, I must point out that he never said them. I have no idea how the rumour got started, but I'm grateful that my words have come to mean so much to so many.

The way in which we see ourselves, the self-image we convey, plays a significant role in how we are perceived by others. A genuinely sound sense of self-esteem (and not just confidence in one's appearance) contributes to charisma.

When the American film actress Katherine Hepburn made her way to Hollywood in the 1940s to see if she could make it in films, she arrived with an extremely positive self-image in her luggage. She says that she thought of herself as a basket of beautiful flowers that she wanted to hand over to film makers, to the town, and to the public.

Lasting charisma is not based on power

Strong personal appeal isn't automatically created by having power and status. Anyone who bases his brilliance on position, appearance, money or a professional title will notice that it disappears as these external attributes fall away. Being admired is not the same as being loved and liked. On the other hand authenticity, what you really are as a person, is a value that lasts. Genuine charisma comes from inside.

People who show sympathy, consideration and love, both towards themselves and towards others, have a tremendous appeal. It's about developing your ability to inspire trust. Your ability to see, acknowledge and lift others, and to be able to enthuse them. To communicate energy, hope and joy.

The Norwegian-born actress Liv Ullman once said: "We all have the same deep thoughts and feelings. Opening up to them builds bridges to other people."

So why is personal appeal so important? It is of course a resource when it comes to job interviews, in the work place, within different organisations, at parties and in any other social context. We much prefer to lend an ear to a person with appeal than to a more mediocre individual. Being a good communicator is the key to success in life, both on a personal and a professional level. Our service-based society means that we are dealing less with things and more with people than ever before. The way we act and behave in our interpersonal contacts determines the way in which our relationships and our lives will be shaped.

It is the totality, the interplay between words and body language, that determines how others perceive us. Thoughts, attitudes and emotions pour out of us like radio waves, and in the best case scenario can make us into a "living magnet". We all have the chance to develop the charismatic within us! An exciting journey awaits anyone who begins to research and try out new ways to communicate through their body, new ways of thinking, new ways of behaving.

What is your unspoken message?

Sometimes the amount we communicate without even knowing it is almost magical. The brain has the ability to process an enormous amount of information at lightning speed without our even being aware of it, and we simultaneously give out and receive a tremendous number of non-verbal signals in our dealings with each other. Small, minor details that our subconscious picks up can determine how we interpret a person.

The body's unspoken messages can be used to create a positive contact. On the stage expressions need to be exaggerated and made more obvious. For example, this is what Mark Levengood did when presenting the show to find the Swedish entry for the Eurovision Song Contest on Swedish television in 2003:

Mark makes his entrance with an upright posture, walking towards the front of the stage with long, powerful strides, his arms swinging. The way he walks radiates energy, which is attractive. He smiles with his mouth open, raises his eyebrows so that his eyes open wide, an expression which is inviting and seeks contact. (More on the significance of facial expressions in the next chapter.) When he reaches the front of the stage, he stops and greets the audience by bowing his head. When they applaud, his foot scrapes along the floor in some embarrassment, conveying a becoming modesty. He smiles, tilting his head to one side at the same time as he welcomes the audience. His head moves from side to side, still slightly inclined, conveying a non-threatening position. He bites his lip, a gesture that indicates shyness.

Both conscious and unconscious physical messages affect our position in different contexts. These "status transactions" occur between people all the time, catching the subconscious unawares; teacher and theatrical expert Keith Johnstone describes their significance very well in his book *Impro*. People are constantly arranging themselves in rank order through a series of verbal and non-verbal signals. For example, behaviour such as moving rapidly and jerkily indicates a lower rank / status position in the hierarchy. Other low status markers are fiddling with the hair, putting the hands up to the face while speaking, nervously glancing around, or avoiding eye contact. The situation and context are of course determining factors, but high status is mostly conveyed by a powerful posture, speaking in an authoritative tone, and a resolute expression.

An individual who wants to improve their appeal would do well to be aware of possible low status indicators and work to get rid of those which are inappropriate. Sometimes, however, they do have a role to play – a person who is voluntarily submissive does not constitute a threat.

In the example above, Mark Levensgood uses a whole range of physical signals to emphasise that the person standing in front of the audience is nice, and not at all dangerous. In this way he communicates with the subconscious, genetically inherent ability of those watching to perceive external danger rapidly. None of these signals can be interpreted as frightening – quite the reverse. Mark Levensgood's image is conciliatory and co-operative. With the help of the body, the message "I wish you well" is conveyed and underlined, thus increasing his chances of creating a good relationship with the audience.

The significance of small nuances

Today, many of those who seek to improve their appeal and attraction have understood the importance of physical exercise, taking care of their outward appearance, and perhaps using mental training to guide their inner self. But not many polish and hone their body language or their habitual behaviour (*actio*). We really ought to do this – the body is an undervalued tool in the field of good communication. Our everyday lives can in fact be compared to a kind of theatrical arena, where we unconsciously read each other – facial expressions, tone of voice and other aspects of body language – without even thinking about what we're doing.

Because we have learned to act and react quickly in our social lives, many of our behaviour patterns have become automatic. Anyone who begins to work on changing their unspoken message will notice that little details can have an enormous, revolutionising effect.

A woman in her fifties was unable to understand why shop assistants and others in the service industry were always so unfriendly towards her. She was unaware that her frown and pinched mouth, along with her tense posture and the way she walked, made her appear critical and displeased. In the end the woman was expecting negative reactions, which did nothing to make the signals from her facial expression, posture or tone of voice any more pleasant. She was amazed at how much more receptive people were once she had learned to change small details, such as raising her eyebrows and making her mouth look less determined when speaking to someone. This change in behaviour started a positive chain reaction. When the woman was treated differently, her body language became less tense and her image became softer and more open. Her relationships with others improved in every area of her life.

Anyone who wants to improve their communication skills would do well to be aware of and work on the body's unspoken messages. There are researchers in cognition who maintain that the brain's visual system is so incredibly sophisticated that it can process ten million units of information per second!

A dizzying thought, particularly if you compare this with the fact that a person reading silently to themselves processes 45 units per second. And in order to multiply two numbers, only twelve units per second are required.

The majority of what we see, hear and otherwise perceive is sorted, filtered and stored in the systems within our subconscious. We “think” without thinking, according to these researchers.

This can explain why we sometimes feel sympathy or antipathy towards another person, despite the fact that we don’t really know why. We talk about personal chemistry; it may be that we have unconsciously noticed a fleeting but revealing facial expression, that a person’s gestures or physical posture don’t match what is being said, or that the tone of voice sounds false, despite friendly words.

This would mean that the body’s expressions and our behaviour – both intentional and unintentional – are of vital importance in how others perceive us. If a person’s non-verbal messages express dislike, and we perceive that it is directed at us, then what comes out of his or her mouth won’t make the slightest difference. We follow the body’s unspoken messages.

Opening one’s eyes to the body language of others makes it easier to read what is happening beneath the surface. A skilful leadership consultant is often called in when difficulties have arisen in the workplace. She describes her strategy as follows:

“When I make my introductory visit to a group, I ask all the participants to give me their view of the problem. But I don’t listen to what anyone actually says; instead I devote the first half hour to studying tone of voice, facial expressions, posture and other physical expressions. Through all the signals people give off, both consciously and unconsciously, I get a good idea of what’s really going on within the group. After that I usually turn to the youngest and most ambitious person in the room and ask him or her to summarise what’s been said so far.”

The body lies at the heart of human communication. Sometimes it can even speak about things we aren’t even aware of ourselves.

The psychiatrist Sigmund Freud once mentioned a woman who spoke lyrically about her happy marriage, while at the same time she was unconsciously taking off her wedding ring and putting it back on again. It didn’t surprise him when the woman gradually started bringing up her marital problems.

Reading physical details is also something experienced doctors, nurses and other care workers are good at. They have trained their eye to spot when something is wrong even if the answers to questions are perfect and all the instruments are showing green. There’s nothing mystical about it; they have simply developed the ability to perceive and interpret the body’s subtle messages through long experience.

A confident posture creates trust

One of the quickest ways to have a positive influence on your appeal is to develop a posture and a way of moving which convey energy and confidence. Status, authority and the degree of confidence are directly influenced by posture. A slumped body with

sloping shoulders signals exhaustion and low self-esteem, while people who move with vigour and elasticity convey confidence and power, increasing their magnetism.

When we meet another person, a quick glimpse is enough to take in a whole range of details. We are, according to several studies, surprisingly accurate in such observations of others. Since visual and auditory impressions go deeper than language, the body's unconscious expressions – a grimace, a violent gesture or a sigh in the wrong place – have a considerable influence on our appeal.

Most of us have no idea how we are actually perceived by those around us. In an investigation into how people went about getting others to like them, three quarters were completely unaware of how they themselves were behaving.

It isn't unusual for women to make themselves smaller when they come into contact with men. We are seldom aware that small adjustments to the body's unspoken message can provoke quite different reactions:

A woman often felt insecure when she was with her male colleagues. Without being aware of it, she was adopting a submissive position in relation to them. Her back slumped, her voice became hesitant, her facial expression was supplicating and unsure and she avoided looking them in the eye. But once the woman had learned the importance of communicating in a new way, the men's attitudes changed and she was treated with greater respect.

She changed her body language by:

- adopting an erect and powerful posture.
- lowering her voice to give it a deeper tone, and at the same time speaking more loudly.
- maintaining eye contact with the person she was speaking to.
- making her mouth look more determined by keeping her lips firmly together.

During the course of our lives certain patterns form and become fixed. Irrespective of how we are feeling inside, our posture, gait or facial expression can make us seem angry, in a bad mood, supercilious, bored or afraid. *Body hexis* is a concept within sociological research and it means "body habit". This means that what we think we are communicating is not always the message we are conveying.

When our way of expressing ourselves becomes nothing more than routine it's easy for us to be read wrongly. In order to appreciate the difference between what we say with our lips and what we express with our body, we need an honest response from outside observers. Other ways are to look at yourself on a video recording or to examine your body language in a mirror.

A person who is happy in their own body has a different kind of appeal from someone who is uncomfortable with their body. If we want to have magnetic appeal then we need to send out positive signals through what we do and what we say. We all tend to interpret negative emotions as if they were directed at someone personally. A person who is shy, tired or hesitant can easily be perceived as bad-tempered, nonchalant or aloof, although they may not be like that at all.

Use the body's signals consciously

It's possible to train your body language to signal power and confidence in order to be perceived as more charismatic. Actors can shine to order. For them, the body –

posture, gait, facial expressions and so on – is the main tool they work with. In a theatrical context, body language is known as the sub-text or hidden message.

It is with this knowledge of the sub-text, how to use the voice, face, gestures, posture and gait that actors convince their audience. They practise their body language constantly, and have techniques and tricks to make them credible as the character they happen to be portraying. We can all use some of these approaches.

During intense, highly charged moments in our lives we are all charismatic. When we are so strongly motivated that almost nothing can stop us. When we are deeply in love, or when we feel righteous anger at some injustice. When we have won a much longed-for victory, become a parent for the first time, lost someone we hold dear, and in similar situations of emotional turmoil.

By using these strong emotional memories, by going back and reliving a situation, our frame of mind is brought to life, and the consequence is physical expressiveness. Depending on how great our ability to enter into the situation is, our gaze becomes steadier, our eyes begin to shine, our posture, gestures and voice come alive. Even physiological changes which are not normal governed by willpower can be brought about by vivid visualisation. These reflex responses include, for example, more rapid breathing, enlarged pupils, blushing or going pale.

We see more than we think

The art of being able to read and interpret a person's physical expressions is a source of a great deal of valuable information. People are constantly reading each other, and when we judge someone we "scan" them at lightning speed, searching first of all for signs that show us the person is true and genuine. Does what he or she is saying really come from inside, based on his or her own personality, or is it just "the matter in hand" that is being conveyed? Is it the whole person who is speaking, or merely the intellect? When someone is authentic and genuine in their voice, facial expressions and body language, that's when we are most convinced by them.

In order to increase your appeal, you often need to express yourself more consciously with the help of your body. Not to become someone else, but simply to convey more of yourself. Perhaps this is best explained by the orator Cicero, when he says: "Let your appearance be coloured by the emotions of the soul with the help of a rich body language".

Oprah Winfrey worked as an actress before she began to present her own show on television. As a trained actress, she knows how to behave in order to be convincing on stage. However, in her shows she doesn't use her knowledge to portray someone else, but to convey as much of herself to her audience as possible. She allows strong emotions to shine through in her voice and facial expressions, conveys an open and at the same time understanding and empathetic attitude, uses spontaneous, exaggerated gestures, and laughs and jokes frequently. In this way she creates a warm, attractive persona in public.

The body is the link between our outer and inner self. In larger public contexts it is particularly important to underline a message with body, voice and face if it is to reach its goal. Small gestures won't do. Big movements from the shoulder can feel strange for someone who is used to talking in a context where a movement of the wrist or elbow is sufficient, but what feels unnatural and exaggerated to the speaker is not perceived as such from the auditorium.

Re-conquer your body language

The ability to perceive the body's subtle details is developed within all of us to a greater or lesser extent. Sensitive individuals with a high level of perception often have more access to messages which are absorbed subconsciously. In general, women are said to be better at picking up and interpreting the body's signals.

But we can all improve our ability to read non-verbal messages. We learned all this when we were little. Tone of voice, facial expression, contact through several different physical expressions – this is how parents and children communicate before the child begins to verbalise. However, many lose this knowledge as they grow up. Re-awakening the meaning of body language will help us to communicate more effectively. Children and young people who have not yet learned to hide their spontaneous expressions make good subjects for study.

The more we open our eyes, ears and other channels to the body's subtle expressions, the more conscious we become of the smallest component parts in all communication. For example, a person's posture and the way they walk mirrors their attitudes and the way they relate to others. Our body is the "transcript" of our mental programs, and small nuances can reveal a great deal.

By observing body language with fresh eyes, we can become conscious of things we sometimes already "know", without understanding why. A person's behaviour can tell you how they think of themselves or others. Is the handshake firm or uncertain? Do the eyes convey warmth or coldness, a desire for contact or the wish to remain at a distance? Does the timbre of the voice convey power or uncertainty, happiness or unhappiness? (More on the significance of the voice in the chapter *Use your voice more.*)

After a presentation or a lecture, it is rarely the words that people remember best. What remains most vividly in the memory is the picture of themselves the speaker conveyed through patterns of movement, facial expressions and tone of voice.

We communicate ourselves with everything we say and do. Clothes, jewellery, bags, mobile phones and other accessories indicating prestige, status and our position in society also have a role to play in our unspoken message. Everything sends out signals. Clothes can describe a person as insignificant or as strong and interesting.

During the run up to South Africa's first free democratic elections, the ANC leader Nelson Mandela was very conscious of the significance of clothes. He would often change several times a day: a suit for a working breakfast, a casual open-necked shirt at an election meeting in a small town, a woollen sweater when visiting old folk at home. The incumbent Prime Minister de Klerk wore the same blazer all the time. As President, Nelson Mandela created a style of dress that was all his own. Yusuf Surtee,

his friend and adviser on style, has this to say: “Before his time in prison President Mandela always wore a suit. But after a visit to Indonesia he began wearing a shirt. We asked why, and he replied: ‘I want to identify myself with the majority in South Africa, and they don’t wear a suit’.”

Mandela brought several shirts from Indonesia and had several more made for him to his own design – longer than a normal shirt, and with slits at the sides. Even when having dinner with the Queen in England, where everyone was wearing a smoking jacket or dinner suit, Mandela wore one of his own personally designed shirts.

Jayne Fincher is a photographer who followed Britain’s popular “Lady Di” for many years. She explains that before a trip abroad the princess liked to come up with some item of clothing which would constitute a mark of respect to the country she was visiting:

When Diana went to Japan, she wore a dress inspired by the Japanese flag. It had glowing red spheres set against a white background, the same colour and shape as the country’s flag, which is white with a red circle. The Japanese were naturally thrilled. When she went to France, she dressed from top to toe in Chanel – “Maybe then nobody will notice I don’t speak a word of French,” as she said. As expected the French were so flattered that nobody even mentioned her inadequate knowledge of the language.

For a speaker, overhead transparencies or computerised visuals such as Powerpoint can be a useful support. But the visual aid that beats all the rest when it comes to giving a successful talk is our own body. Churchill would never have won the war if he’d flipped on an overhead with “blood, sweat and tears”.

Klas Hallberg is a professional lecturer who sometimes makes use of information conveyed unconsciously. When he stands on the stage, gestures or facial expressions can sometimes contradict the words. For example, he might emphasise the word “begin”, and at the same time raise his hands in a gesture that indicates “stop”. Or he might use the words “deadly boring” (about his college studies) while at the same time his eyes and mouth look particularly happy, and his arms are raised in a victorious gesture. Contrast is a classic way of increasing attention within rhetoric.

Work on your unspoken messages

People with an appeal that touches others often have an expressive, direct and immediate body language. They allow their inner self to become outwardly visible through a whole range of physical signals – often positive – which we perceive both consciously and subconsciously.

In order to increase our personal appeal with the help of the body's unspoken messages, we need to work on several levels:

- *Number one is to become conscious of everything the body conveys without our knowing it. Change what needs to be changed in order to elicit the desired response. Ask people you trust how they interpret your body's signals. Use video to see how you move.*
- *Number two is to train our expressiveness so that we communicate ourselves in an attractive, appealing and convincing way. We simply need to act more powerfully and dare to push the boundaries with our voice, body and face.*
- *Number three is to be aware of and increase our skill in reading other people's physical codes. If we develop the art of reading our surroundings, we increase our skill in saying the right thing at the right time – timing or kairos, as it's known in rhetoric.*

Subconscious messages in advertising

It isn't only in our everyday dealings with other people that we can be exposed to subconscious messages. These also occur within advertising. When television viewers in the USA switched on their sets during the presidential election campaign of 2000, they saw an advertising film where the Republicans were showing a picture of their opponent, Al Gore. Why on earth should President Bush and his campaign generals want to use expensive advertising time to show the Democratic candidate? Well, at the same time as Al Gore was appearing on the screen, the Democratic party were

referred to as “bureaucrats”. But that wasn’t all. At lightning speed, so quickly that the audience couldn’t consciously pick it up, the last four letters flashed across the television screen. And so, for a fraction of a second, the word RATS appeared on the screen in capital letters, at the same time as the picture of Al Gore was being shown.

Showing hidden messages in this way is known within scientific research as subliminal perception or influence. The technique was held up to a certain degree of ridicule in 1957. At that time the researcher James Vicary maintained that sales increased when the audience was exposed to subliminal messages at a cinema in New Jersey. “Eat popcorn” and “Drink Cola” were the messages, but Vicary was later forced to retract his claims, since there were no actual research results.

However, modern studies show that subliminal influence is a reality, not a myth. Researchers in several countries have been able to show that messages subconsciously absorbed by individuals in experiments have still shaped their behaviour. In an American study, the test group was subconsciously exposed to two different messages. For a few hundredths of a second, one group saw a picture with the word “honesty”, the others the word “evil”. Afterwards the participants were asked to judge the dubious activities of an individual. Those who had subconsciously registered the word “honesty” perceived these activities as comparatively honest, while the group exposed to the word “evil” perceived them as dishonest.

Japanese researchers have obtained similar results. Test groups subconsciously exposed to value-weighted words, for example “hostility”, reacted more negatively to an unknown individual’s behaviour in comparison to those who had not received such a message. In the USA, the advertisers behind the RATS-message were taken to court. However, the court decided that the film would have no effect on the results of the election. The Bush administration decided to withdraw the film in any case, but by then it had already been shown more than 4,400 times in different media.

To summarise:

Send charismatic signals with your unspoken message:

- *Let your posture and the way you walk convey strength, decisiveness and confidence. (Tips on posture – see the chapter Practice, training, practice, training)*
- *Let your body language signal strong, positive emotions. Show your appreciation with the help of the body's unspoken message. Don't be afraid of touch, for example a pat on the shoulder, a hug or a handshake.*
- *Be observant about the way you move – do you allow yourself to occupy the space, do you make your way to the centre of the room?*
- *Ask yourself whether what you're wearing strengthens or weakens your image. Work on new ways of dressing and check whether the response from those around you changes.*
- *Everything communicates. Is what you eat, what you do and your general lifestyle a help or a hindrance on the road to creating a stronger personal appeal?*
- *As a speaker – train yourself to be more expressive with your body so that you and your message can reach others. How do people react when you meet them sitting down, with your arms folded? Do you notice any difference if you stand up, with your arms held loosely at your sides?*