

# What Makes People Instantly Magnetic?

Six proven practices that will empower you while also making you easier to like.

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Mar 22, 2025



Notice the softness in the eyes, and the sincerity in the smile...

Walk into any room, and you'll spot them immediately—those magnetic individuals who effortlessly draw others into their orbit. They exude an irresistible blend of warmth and confidence, and it left me wondering: What's their secret? Is charisma truly an innate gift, or can it be cultivated?

The self-help industry certainly wants us to believe the latter. Countless gurus promise to unlock our "inner charisma" through pricey seminars and dubious quick fixes. But beyond the hype and hollow promises, what does science actually tell us about the nature of charisma?

To separate fact from fiction, I dove into the research on highly charismatic individuals. I wanted to know, are there genuine, scientifically-backed patterns that make certain people exceptionally likable and persuasive? Can these behaviors be learned and implemented by anyone? And perhaps most intriguingly, can small, intentional adjustments to one's communication style truly make a significant difference in how one is perceived?

The answers, it turns out, are more nuanced—and potentially more empowering—than any seminar sales pitch could possibly convey. On the surface, it resembles common sense. But if you dig a bit, what the evidence reveals about instant likability and the subtle art of charisma is encouraging, empowering, and often quite surprising.

Here are six practices, scientifically shown to make people more likeable and charismatic. I have presented them in order of difficulty to master, from easiest to most challenging, so you can get the absolute most out of them.

## Start with Balance

Demonstrating both credibility and emotional intelligence in conversations enhances social appeal. Take [Dr. Miranda Bailey](#) from the TV show "Grey's Anatomy", for example. Her character expertly blends stern competence with moments of genuine warmth and empathy, earning her the nickname "The Nazi" for her strict demeanor while simultaneously being one of the most beloved and respected characters on the show. Her ability to demonstrate both credibility in her medical expertise and emotional intelligence in her interactions with patients and colleagues exemplifies the powerful combination of warmth and competence that defines true charisma.

Charismatic individuals tend to exhibit a balance between warmth and competence. People who are too warm without competence risk appearing incompetent, while those who are highly competent but lack warmth may come across as unapproachable. Striking the right balance is key to instant likability ([Cuddy, Kohut, & Neffinger, 2013](#)).

Keep in mind that those who lean too heavily on warmth without demonstrating competence risk being seen as incompetent, while those who demonstrate high competence but lack warmth may come across as unapproachable. It's the balance that matters. Both warmth and cool are needed to create a magnetic presence that attracts people and fosters trust.

### Practice #1: Prime Your Power, Anchor Your Empathy

**Prime Your Power:** Before entering a social interaction, recall a moment when you felt confident, capable, or in control. This could be a professional achievement, a time you successfully led a group, or a moment when others relied on your expertise. This primes your brain to project confidence and competence.

**Anchor Your Empathy:** Next, to balance confidence with warmth, mentally shift focus to the person you're engaging with. Ask yourself: *What might this person be feeling right now? How can I make them feel comfortable?* This practice keeps you aware of their emotional state, ensuring your confidence doesn't overshadow approachability.

**Why It Works:**

Power priming enhances self-assurance, while empathic perspective-taking increases emotional intelligence ([Galinsky et al., 2006](#)). Together, these techniques create a presence that is both commanding and engaging—making you naturally more charismatic.

## Be Empowered by Imperfection

During the 85th Academy Awards in 2013, Jennifer Lawrence, who won Best Actress for her role in "Silver Linings Playbook," tripped on the stairs as she was walking up to accept her Oscar. Instead of hiding her embarrassment, she laughed it off and charmed everyone with her [self-deprecating humor](#).

Perfection doesn't make people likable. Rather, imperfections give them authenticity. Renowned British psychologist, magician, and author, Richard Wiseman, famously conducted an experiment in which two women were selling blenders. One woman looked immaculate, did every step in the demonstration perfectly, and closed with a tried, tested, and true technique. The other woman made minor mistakes while demonstrating it, and let a bit of her embarrassment show. The one who made mistakes was perceived as more trustworthy and likable by customers. She also sold more blenders.

Owning quirks can turn potential awkward moments into endearing ones. The "Pratfall Effect," is where showing vulnerability makes people more relatable ([Wiseman, 2009](#)). Instead of striving for perfection, embracing small flaws can make interactions feel more authentic.

When people learn to challenge unrealistic self-expectations and extend the same kindness to themselves that they would to a friend, they naturally become more approachable and relatable. Authenticity rooted in self-acceptance strengthens relationships, making people more likable and socially at ease.

Why? Because authentic people have imperfections that make them more relatable. There are plenty of studies that confirm that embracing imperfections increases relatability and fosters deeper connections ([Bruck et al., 2018](#)).

Leaders and public speakers who admit to small mistakes while maintaining confidence are often seen as more approachable and inspiring. Brené Brown, a researcher on vulnerability, emphasizes that people connect more deeply with those who are honest about their struggles rather than those who present a flawless image. Embracing imperfection isn't just a social advantage; it's a powerful leadership tool.

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### Practice #2: Self-Compassion and Evidence Bonking

**Self-Compassion Journaling:** Each day, write down one perceived flaw, mistake, or awkward moment you experienced. Instead of criticizing yourself, re-frame it with

self-compassion. Ask yourself: *Would I judge a friend this harshly for the same mistake? How can I view this moment as a sign of growth rather than failure?*

**Evidence Bonking:** When you catch yourself fearing judgment over an imperfection, challenge your thoughts with evidence. Ask yourself: *Is this imperfection really making me less likable, or does it make me more relatable? Have I ever found someone else's vulnerability endearing rather than off-putting? How did people actually respond versus how I assumed they would?*

### Why It Works:

By integrating self-compassion exercises with cognitive restructuring techniques, individuals can embrace their imperfections rather than seeing them as barriers to connection. Writing about personal struggles with self-kindness rather than harsh self-criticism significantly improved emotional resilience and social ease ([Urken and LeCroy, 2021](#)). Self-compassion training leads to better overall psychological well-being and more positive interpersonal interactions ([Ferrari et al., 2019](#)).

This approach fosters deeper connections by reducing self-consciousness and increasing empathy. Cognitive restructuring enhances self-perception and reduces anxiety about social interactions, making individuals more comfortable expressing their authentic selves ([Webb, DeRubeis, and Barber, 2023](#)). Plus, practicing perspective-taking—deliberately considering how others perceive a situation—helps individuals shift focus away from self-judgment and toward mutual understanding ([Kanter et al., 2023](#)).

## Ask Engaging Questions

James Lipton, the host of *Inside the Actors Studio*, was a master of this technique. His deep, thoughtful questions made guests feel valued and appreciated. Once, movie director Stephen Spielberg thanked Lipton [live on-air](#) for articulating something about Spielberg's own parents that he himself had never realized!

Great conversations build strong connections, and asking thoughtful questions is one of the most effective ways to make people like you. People who ask more questions—especially follow-up questions—are perceived as more likable and intelligent ([Huang et al., 2017](#)).

Genuine curiosity also fosters stronger social bonds and makes interactions more meaningful. Shifting the focus to others and avoiding conversational narcissism can transform interactions into engaging discussions ([Harvard Business Review, 2018](#)).

Conversations that focus on the other person create stronger and more positive connections. Active listening and follow-up questions make people feel heard. Neuroscience research suggests that when people talk about themselves, their brains release dopamine, the same chemical linked to pleasure and reward. Giving someone the opportunity to share their thoughts

and feelings not only makes them like you more but also makes the conversation more enjoyable for them ([Tamir & Mitchell, 2012](#)).

### **Practice #3: Practice Active Listening**

**Be Attentive, Paraphrase, and Follow Up:** Active listening is a structured cognitive-behavioral practice that helps individuals shift their focus to others and avoid conversational narcissism. This technique involves fully concentrating on the speaker, paraphrasing their words to confirm understanding, asking thoughtful follow-up questions, and using affirming nonverbal cues such as nodding and maintaining eye contact. By deliberately engaging in these behaviors, individuals break the habit of redirecting conversations back to themselves and instead foster a dynamic where the other person feels genuinely heard and valued.

#### **Why It Works:**

Training in active listening significantly improves social interactions. For example, people who practice paraphrasing and follow-up questioning during interviews are perceived as more attentive and likable ([Weger et al., 2014](#)). Similarly, active listening helps people reduce self-focused communication and increase their ability to form deeper social connections ([Honeycutt et al., 2021](#)).

The effectiveness of active listening is rooted in psychological and neurological mechanisms that govern human connection. When people feel genuinely heard, their brain releases oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and trust (Zak, 2012). This neurochemical response makes interactions feel more rewarding, reinforcing a positive feedback loop that encourages further engagement. Focusing on the other person rather than oneself fosters a sense of validation and importance, which strengthens social bonds and increases overall likability ([Honeycutt et al., 2021](#)).

Moreover, active listening not only enhances the speaker's perception of the listener but also increases the listener's own social satisfaction ([Weger et al., 2014](#)). By reducing self-centered conversational habits and embracing curiosity about others, individuals naturally cultivate deeper, more meaningful interactions that leave a lasting positive impression.

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### **Don't Gossip. Gush with Dignity.**

Mike Rowe, known for hosting "Dirty Jobs" and advocating for skilled trades, consistently praises the work ethic, skills, and [positive attributes](#) of blue-collar workers. He highlights the dignity of work and the admirable qualities of those in essential, often overlooked jobs. Through

his platform, Rowe highlights the positive qualities of hardworking individuals, emphasizing their expertise, dedication, and societal importance.

Your words about others shape how people see you. One study by Skowronski et al. found that when you speak positively about others, those traits are subconsciously attributed to you through a process called spontaneous trait transference ([Skowronski et al., 1998](#)). Other researchers have found that speaking positively about others can enhance your reputation with people you've never even met ([Cruz et al., 2021](#)).

Complimenting and uplifting people not only makes them feel good but also boosts your social appeal. Expressing kindness and generosity toward others reflects positively on you... **But beware!** The opposite is also true. Saying something negative sticks to you too.

Workplace environments benefit from this principle as well. Employees who speak highly of their colleagues and publicly recognize their contributions tend to be perceived as strong team players. Studies in organizational psychology have found that positive reinforcement and praise in the workplace create a more cooperative and engaging culture, reinforcing social bonds and boosting collective productivity ([Grant & Gino, 2010](#)).

## **Practice #4: Make a Habit of Appreciating People**

**Maintain Empathy:** When you feel the urge to criticize or gossip, take a moment to assess your thoughts. Instead of focusing on faults, find a neutral or positive aspect of the person or situation. For example, if a coworker makes a mistake, acknowledge their effort rather than their failure.

**Listen to [Thumper's Dad](#):** Commit to only speaking about others in a way you'd be comfortable if they were present. If you make a habit of recognizing and appreciating the good in others, your mindset will naturally shift toward positive speech.

### **Why It Works:**

Shifting focus to positive aspects strengthens neural pathways for constructive thinking (Beck, 2011). This practice trains your brain to default to positivity, reducing negative biases and impulsive criticism. By focusing on constructive viewpoints, you strengthen emotional intelligence, enhance relationships, and build a reputation as a supportive and trustworthy person.

Moreover, reframing negative thoughts often reduces personal stress in addition to improving relationships (Beck, 2011). The evidence shows that this practice gets easier over time. You'll find it gets easier and easier to avoid gossip and foster a more uplifting social environment the more you do it.

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# Gesticulate to Communicate

Steve Jobs was known for his expressive [hand gestures](#) during Apple product presentations. He understood that keeping his hands visible while speaking enhanced his credibility. However, he did not just gesticulate for the sake of visibility. He used his gestures to show when the messages he wanted to convey were coming, concluding, pausing, and even transforming. As a result, audiences were inclined to accept his ideas, even when he was under attack.

Body language influences how trustworthy you appear. Studies show that people who use open hand gestures are perceived as more honest and persuasive ([Maricchiolo et al., 2009](#)). Simply by being aware of how your hands are positioned, you can take steps to significantly improve the effectiveness of your message.

Politicians, public speakers, and salespeople use strategic hand movements to reinforce their message and create stronger connections with their audiences. But have you ever noticed when their gestures feel a little bit... off? It makes them seem disingenuous.

Subtle nonverbal cues can either invite trust or create barriers. Researchers have found that hiding your hands creates suspicion, while keeping them visible increases engagement and trust ([Talamas et al., 2016](#)). Being mindful of your physical presentation can significantly impact how others perceive you.

Open body language encourages reciprocity. When one person exhibits open gestures, the listener is more likely to respond with similar openness, fostering a sense of ease and mutual trust. Mirroring behaviors enhance social connection by engaging neural pathways associated with empathy and understanding (Iacoboni, 2008).

## Practice #5: Be Observant, Open, and Mentally Present

**Harmonize:** Observe and subtly reflect people's postures, gestures, and facial expressions without exaggeration. Maintain open body language by keeping your shoulders relaxed, arms uncrossed, and leaning slightly forward to show engagement. Synchronize your tone and pace with theirs to create harmony. Stay mindful and present, adjusting your mirroring based on their comfort and cues to ensure a natural interaction.

### Why It Works:

Mirroring the movements of others enhances social connection by engaging neural pathways associated with empathy and understanding (Iacoboni, 2008). When you use open, welcoming gestures, others are more likely to mirror them, fostering trust and cooperation. Subtle imitation creates a subconscious bond, making interactions smoother and more positive - especially when combined with matching tones of voice and rhythms of speech. Replicated research shows that mirroring increases feelings of social affiliation and likability (Iacoboni, 2008).

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## Use the Windows of the Soul

In May of 2024, Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman [interviewed each other](#) for People Magazine. The camera angles used in the video make it easy to observe how they both expertly use their eyes to communicate. They both maintain direct but relaxed eye contact, which makes their interactions feel genuine and charismatic. If you watch closely, you'll also see them subtly shifting their gaze to create a flow in both their humor and storytelling. As a result, they both come across as confident and approachable.

Strong eye contact creates instant connection. Prolonged eye contact triggers the release of oxytocin, often called the "bonding hormone," fostering trust and intimacy ([Eckstein et al., 2019](#)). Locking eyes for just a few extra seconds can enhance social rapport.

Maintaining eye contact is helpful, but don't overdo it! Small changes in gaze behavior can make interactions even more engaging and personal. Variations in eye contact increase social bonding and attraction ([Jarick & Bencic, 2019](#)).

The power of eye contact extends beyond personal relationships into professional success. For example, steady eye contact is crucial in persuasion. People who make direct eye contact during negotiations or presentations are perceived as more competent and confident ([Chen, Minson, & Schöne, 2013](#)).

### Practice #6: Develop Magnetic Eye Contact

**Focus but Don't Stare:** Maintain eye contact for about 50% of the time while speaking and 70% while listening to balance engagement and comfort. The rest of the time, shift your gaze between the other person's eyes and mouth to create natural variation without staring.

**Soften and Use Pauses:** Keep your gaze relaxed rather than intense to appear approachable and confident. Break eye contact briefly when gathering thoughts or transitioning points to make interactions feel dynamic. This is especially important if the person is highly emotional. If they are insulting or bullying, increase the duration of the pause and then ask how what *they* just said makes *them* feel. Don't ask for empathy. Don't tell them how you feel. It's all about them.

### Why It Works

Consistent eye contact increases perceptions of competence and authority. Adjusting your gaze creates a sense of engagement and attentiveness, making conversations feel more personal. Practicing structured eye contact techniques makes interactions feel more natural over time. The research couldn't be clearer: Appropriate eye contact improves persuasion and social bonding (Kleinke, 1986).



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# The Capstone: Confident Authenticity

Charisma isn't a mystical trait reserved for celebrities or natural-born leaders—it's a skill forged through deliberate habits. The science is clear: Likability stems from authenticity, not perfection.

By embracing quirks and vulnerabilities, as Jennifer Lawrence did after her Oscar stumble, we become relatable. Richard Wiseman's blender experiment and Brené Brown's work on vulnerability both reinforce that flaws, when owned confidently, transform into connection points. This shift—from polished performance to genuine presence—creates the magnetism otherwise known as innate charm.

Charisma isn't just about how you present yourself; it's about how you make others feel. Asking thoughtful questions, like James Lipton's signature style on *Inside the Actors Studio*, signals curiosity and care. Neuroscience reveals that letting others share their stories activates dopamine, making conversations rewarding for both parties.

Similarly, speaking positively about colleagues or friends, as Mike Rowe models, doesn't just uplift them—it subconsciously ties those admirable traits to you. These behaviors, paired with nonverbal cues like Steve Jobs' iconic open gestures or Ryan Reynolds' and Hugh Jackman's skilled use of eye contact create feedback loops that build trust and engagement.

Ultimately, charisma is a set of small but effective habits that you can learn and apply. Whether through eye contact that sparks oxytocin release or visible hands that signal honesty, little adjustments to your communication habits tend to compound into profound social impacts over time.

The most memorable people aren't those who flawlessly perform—they're the ones who lean into their humanity, spark joy in others, and turn everyday interactions into opportunities for connection. Master these six practices, and you'll find that "star quality" isn't in the spotlight—it's in the subtle art of making others feel seen, felt, and understood.

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