

The 5-Finger Model of Charismatic Leadership®

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Popular Charisma Training usually focusses on one single component of Charisma: charismatic communication. Appearance and Public Speaking are the main topics of attention. While communication is an essential part of charisma, it still misses the point.

Almost 100 years of charisma research show that charisma is a conglomerate of inner attitude and outer behavior. In training, we are therefore faced with the task of mapping the complexity of charisma and, at the same time, breaking it down into concrete, trainable instructions for behavior - in *small pieces of change* that can be exercised daily.

The 5-finger model of charismatic leadership does just that: on the one hand it is simple, concise and coherent, and on the other hand it takes the complexity of the “conglomerate” charisma into account.

The scientific basis

The concept of charismatic leadership is not new but has established itself as a branch of transformational leadership in the 1990s already. In contrast to Bernard M. Bass's transformational approach, special attention is paid to the personality of the leader. It is not just about *how* the manager behaves with regards to his/her employees, but how s/he acts as a person and how high his/her sensitivity to the environment and other people is. Based on their studies, Jay A. Conger and Rabindra N. Kanungo developed the so-called Conger Kanungo scale, which consists of five factors:

1. Strategic vision and articulation
2. Sensitivity to the environment
3. Sensitivity to member needs
4. Personal risk
5. Unconventional behavior

For the assessment of these five factors, Conger and Kanungo developed a questionnaire and thus a valid analysis tool for charismatic leadership. What was missing so far was a training guide for these factors. (The validity of the Conger Kanungo scale and the assessment was also proven by recent studies. Most recently in 2007 by Jens Rowold and Martin Kersting at the universities of Münster and Aachen.)

The 5-Finger Model at a Glance

"Making the elements of charismatic leadership trainable" - that was the task. It was clear that it had to be a model that would start at both the inner attitude level and the outer behavior level. The goal was nothing less than to enable an inner AND corresponding outer development.

There is a simple reason why it has become a “5-finger model”: The aim was to create a tool that is always “at hand” for the simple reason that charisma development means constant training of new

and the replacement of old, no longer helpful patterns of thought and action. The result of such a development is *being* charismatic instead of *seeming* charismatic.

Building on the framework of the Conger-Kanungo scale, the five fingers represent the following elements of charismatic leadership and development measures:

The Index Finger = Developing Your Own Vision

The index finger starts. It stands for the development of your own vision, by also taking into account what is *in the air*.

Developing your own vision that goes beyond SMART corporate goals is the be-all and end-all of charismatic leadership. On the one hand, even though goals can be missed the vision remains valid. On the other hand, goals, in their realistic way, are far too weak to mobilize energy that also makes the seemingly impossible possible. And to make the seemingly impossible become possible is exactly what we want here. Real transformation always needs something completely new.

To illustrate it with an example: You can set the goal of converting your vehicle fleet to e-mobility by a certain date and you can miss this goal for many reasons: because it is too expensive, has too little range, because e-mobility turns out to be even more environmentally harmful than mobility with traditional fuels, etc. But even though missing the goal, your vision of becoming a pioneer in modern corporate mobility and thus setting new standards (with all the corporate branding effects that result from that), would not be missed. It could be that this vision incites the development of a completely new work concept that fundamentally reduces the need for employee mobility. There are countless ways to make this vision become a reality and only BECAUSE it is not concrete and measurable as a goal, it is the engine for creativity and motivation.

So, the vision is what charisma is based on. In the seminar, this point is therefore given particular attention. The participants will develop their own vision, avoiding the trap of being satisfied with an idea of vision that is either only a goal, albeit an ambitious one, or with a vision that is one but not their own. Vision-building is not only for top executives. Personal visions can be developed at every hierarchy level.

The Middle Finger in Connection With the Index Finger = Successful Communication

The second finger is the middle finger and is not used alone but is added to the index finger. This connection creates something that everyone, really everyone - worldwide - recognizes: the victory sign. Both stand for "successful communication" in this formation. A vision is only as good as others can see in it something worth striving for, something promising.

The communication I mean here must be successful in two ways: successful because it communicates the message effectively. Successful, too, because the message itself must point to mutual success in the future.

Success communication defined in this way has four main characteristics: it is simple, concrete, personal and positive. Training is about understanding these four characteristics, casting their mechanisms into behaviors and practicing their effective use.

The Ring Finger = Generate Exceptional Commitment

The third finger is the ring finger, also called "loyalty finger", and stands for the ability of charismatic leaders to generate exceptional commitment in others. We are only committed to people who do not run off during the first crisis or put their heads in the sand when the going gets tough. We are ready to make special commitments to people we can rely on and who walk their talk - even if this is potentially risky for them.

How people act is an expression of their values, *the consistency* of their actions an indicator of the strength of their beliefs. Standing up for their own values, regardless of the potential risk to themselves, is a striking sign of charismatic leaders. These leaders are not concerned with defending their own position and keeping their little sheep dry, but rather with being clearly recognizable for what they think is necessary and important. The training is therefore first about defining specific behaviors as expressions of certain values, checking where those deviate from current behavior and exploring the responsible scope for new behaviors in the respective systemic context - because no manager acts on the metaphorical greenfield and the line between "behavior that is potentially risky for me personally" and "behavior that is potentially risky for the company" is often blurred.

The Little Finger = Certain Type of Expertise as a Prerequisite for Unconventional Behavior

This refers to the German saying to "have something in the little finger" which means that the respective expertise is so mature that it does not require any effort at all. Or said differently: if you can do something by using your little (=weakest) finger only, you must be exceptionally good in it.

The decisive difference between charismatic experts and "normal" experts lies in how they act *because* of their expertise: the charismatic experts become even more open and curious because they know that they will always find a way, while the others tend to stick to the path they know because it is proven.

To use an analogy: charismatic leaders are those who can put together and solve Rubik's Magic Cube again and again, regardless of the starting point. Their expertise includes a certain playful curiosity and the unshakable belief in finding a way.

The little finger would correspond to the factor "willingness to show unconventional behavior" on the Conger Kanungo scale. Any amateur can demonstrate unconventional behavior, but the expertise differentiates the beginners' score from that of the mature executive.

At this point in the training, it is about a factual assessment of the participants' own expertise as well as practicing their ability to rethink the old paths they are treading and to reawaken their creativity.

The Thumb = Empowerment

The fifth finger stands for empowerment. It corresponds to the factor "sensitivity to member needs" in the Conger Kanungo scale.

The "Thumbs up!" is a clear message of reinforcement. To develop charismatic power, it is not enough to keep your thumbs up and give people general praise. It's about looking beneath the surface and recognizing the potential that is still slumbering in a human being. The one that he or she can contribute to optimally support the path towards a common vision.

In the seminar, on the one hand the ability to “see” someone is practiced and deepened, on the other hand the skill to give feedback is trained so that the person receiving feedback feels encouraged and empowered. In addition, empowerment sometimes also requires a fundamental change in communication structures and work processes so that employees receive exactly the information and tools they need to put their strengths to good use. To tackle that part of empowerment, the seminar will provide space and time for reflection and discussion.

With the fifth finger the concept becomes full circle by connecting the fifth to the first: the vision is nurtured only if the leaders not only empower their employees but repeatedly empower themselves.

Sandy Pentland, researcher at the MIT and known for his studies on charismatic communication, defined the person of the "charismatic connector" roughly as follows: *"The charismatic connector leads people to try what they have not tried before and thus makes possible what has been impossible so far."*

And to my understanding, that is enough reason for investing into the development of the charismatic leadership ability.

®The 5-Finger Model of Charismatic Leadership is a registered concept by Martina Gleissenebner-Teskey.

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