The Public Speaker’s Guide to Success in Every Situation

LISA B. MARSHALL
Advance Praise for *Smart Talk*

“This is no ordinary book—it’s the Swiss Army knife of communication—a set of tools to build strong relationships and avoid communication breakdowns. *Smart Talk* is fun to read, based on sound theory, and includes inspirational examples. Carry out the suggested chapter challenges and you’ll soon solve communication problems at work and in your private life."

—Mary M. Mitchell, etiquette expert, syndicated columnist, and author of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Modern Manners*

“Lisa is a dynamic and engaging public speaker, and this book shows you how to be an amazing communicator as well. No business person or educator should be without *Smart Talk*. Deep and wide, yet beautifully simple, it’s a fantastic read. Should be required reading for every graduating student.”

—Garr Reynolds, author of *Presentation Zen* and *The Naked Presenter*

“Lisa Marshall’s book gives you a tool kit to get results. One of the most painful things I’ve witnessed is watching people who want to introduce themselves but are held back by their own doubts, by their own perceived lack of personality or anything interesting to say. This is the book I’d like to glue on a stick and hit them over the head with.”

—Christopher S. Penn, digital marketing executive, bestselling author, and actual ninja

“A smart resource for real-life scenarios, *Smart Talk* teaches you easy ways to have confidence and conviction behind your words.”

—Tracy Davidson, anchor/consumer watch reporter NBC10 News Philadelphia
The Myth of Charisma

Whether you call it charm or charisma, the person who possesses this quality is powerful. They have a knack for making their conversation partner feel like the most important person in the room. Most people think of charisma and charm as intangible qualities, irreducible character traits, an “X-factor” that only a select few are born with.

However, that’s a myth!

Research suggests that charisma is a set of behaviors, or internal characteristics, that can be developed. Even the shyest
people can transform themselves into charismatic charmers. And that's great news, because that means it's inside all of us, and we can all learn to unlock our charismatic potential. We all can be the person everyone else is attracted to, is charmed by, and enjoys conversing with. It means that being charismatic and likable is, in fact, a choice.

**Warning:** Being charming and charismatic doesn’t mean sucking up, being extroverted, bubbly, or witty.

According to Olivia Fox Cabane, author of *The Charisma Myth*, having charisma means demonstrating presence, warmth, and power all the same time. For me, it means showing genuine care for others, while at the same time exuding authentic authority.

**Increase Positive Moments**

But before we talk about how you can develop these skills, allow me a small, but important, digression about the importance of positive moments. Dr. Daniel Kahneman, one of the world’s most influential psychologists specializing in how our experiences affect our abilities and perceptions, suggests that we experience approximately 20,000 moments each day and the quality of our day is determined by how our brains recognize and interpret these moments. He describes three general classifications of moments that our brains track: positive, negative, and neutral. Kahneman says our mood is defined by the ratio of positive to negative experiences over the course of a day.

**Quick Quiz:** Do you think you experience more positive moments than negative moments? What do you think your personal average positive to negative ratio is? How about your work environment? What is the ratio there?
Researchers have spent a lot of time exploring how the ratio of positive to negative experiences affects both our work and personal lives. Remember, in chapter 6 on delivering feedback, I mentioned how the magic ratio of 5:1 was used to predict marital success.

In the workplace, psychologist Marcial Losada showed that you need at least a positivity/negativity ratio of approximately 3:1 and maximum of 11:1 for teams to flourish. That means you should aim for at least three (and a maximum of eleven) positive interactions for every one negative interaction. In this “Losada Zone” teams report that time flies by, creativity thrives, and productivity increases dramatically. Below that ratio teams become incapable of working together effectively. In fact, Losada reported that in one organization the initial ratio was raised from 1.5:1 to 3.5:1 and the productivity increased by 40 percent.

Psychologist Sidney Jourard found that a staggering 85 percent of a person’s happiness in life comes not from possessions, accomplishments, or achievements, but from positive interactions with other people.

Here’s another important point: people are attracted to positive people. So in order to attract others to us we need to be positive and genuinely happy ourselves. The good news is that according to psychologists, happiness is also a choice. Interestingly, research also suggests that happiness comes down to having meaningful connections (sound familiar?). In fact, according to actionforhappiness.org, “the main external factor affecting a person’s happiness is the quality of their relationships, at home, at work, and in the community.”

When taken together, all this data suggests major implications for how we can improve the quality of our lives and how we might go about unleashing our inner charm. The key is to leave people feeling good about their encounters with you. It’s about creating positive moments for others (which in turn creates positive moments for yourself).
Quick Quiz: What have you done or said to others today? In what ways do you think you could improve the positive to negative ratio of those around you?

The next step is to make sure you’re on the winning side of someone’s positive-to-negative ratio. Here are some ways to positively influence people’s perceptions of you and increase your likability and charm so you can maximize the positive moments in your life.

Be Yourself

One of my favorite quotes from Oscar Wilde is, “Be yourself; everyone else is taken.” In order to unleash our inner charm, we need to first accept ourselves as we are. There’s no need to wish you were someone else, or to try to be like somebody else. This is important not only for yourself, but also for others around you. No one else will be comfortable with you until you can first be comfortable with yourself.

Of course, this is much easier said than done. We sometimes find ourselves constrained by our environment. We feel as though we can’t be ourselves. “What if others don’t like me? What if they think I’m [insert your own fear here]? What if they find out that I’m not who they think I am?” However unleashing your inner charm requires you to take the risk, speak from your heart, and radiate who you really are. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wisely said, “Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you.”

One way to help you understand and become more comfortable in who you are is to ask three people you know through work, three in your personal life, and three in your family what they view as your unique talent. You might consider using the classic tool used by cognitive psychologists called the Johari Window as a springboard for this exercise (you can find an online version at kevan.org/johari).
Choose people who know you well and are trustworthy. Your answers may be surprising and can help you to discover or reinforce your own unique voice.

Respect Others

You then can use this self-confidence to accept others for who they are. You probably don’t want anyone changing you; so don’t try to change anyone else.

Genuinely respecting yourself and others is the foundation of charm and charisma.

No doubt, you’ve heard of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” When it comes to charm, though, remember that it’s all about the other person. The truth of the matter is that people and organizations act within their own self-interests. Because of this, you should instead remember to practice the Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.” In short, treat other people the way they want to be treated.

Each and every one of us has the power to change another person’s entire day, simply with one single word or sentence. Think about all of those times when you may have been having a rough day until someone showed you an act of kindness or said something really nice and insightful. It probably made you feel a lot better, if only because you knew that someone cared.

Likewise, I’ll bet there’s been an instance or two when someone was extremely rude or angry with you, for apparently no reason. Even if that person wasn’t particularly important to you, you probably stewed about it for hours—all because of a few silly words. Make sure people know you care about how they feel and treat them the way they want to be treated.

Finally, the deepest form of respect is empathy. It could be as simple as hearing someone sigh and you respond by saying, “Sounds like you’re having a tough day. Anything I can do to help?” or trying to resolve a conflict when a boss says to an employee, “I
respect how you’re feeling overwhelmed. Let’s try to work it out.” By expressing empathy to others, they feel like they are being heard.

There’s a lot that people don’t get to talk about during their day because of time and work constraints. When you give someone the space to be heard—unconditionally—you increase your likability and charm.

**Warning:** It’s also important to set limits. It’s one thing to be empathetic, but it’s another to be dumped on. If someone is simply in “poor me” complaining mode, it’s reasonable to limit your interactions. Here’s a good way to transition out of the whine: “I know you’re stressed out. Why don’t you take a break and we’ll talk when you are ready to discuss possible solutions.”

**Follow Thumper’s Rule and the Magic Ratio**

“If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothing at all” is a phrase I’m sure you’ve heard before and is from Disney’s classic movie *Bambi*. This advice may sound basic and obvious, however, I see this rule violated on a daily basis. The fact is no one likes to hear someone put another person down. Just like positivity is attractive, negativity is repulsive. Although you would think I wouldn’t need to include this in the book, a good rule of thumb is; think twice before expressing negativity. Ask yourself, “What are the consequences of not expressing this?”

Especially in our professional lives there are times when we need to voice dissension or disagreement. It’s important, though, to do our best to keep it as positive and constructive as possible. Keep in mind Gottman’s Magic Ratio (chapter 6) and aim for five positive comments to every one negative comment. To be perceived as a positive person, pay attention to what people are doing right rather than what’s going wrong.
Recognize Strengths

Charismatic leaders show respect by valuing the strengths of the people around them. I sincerely believe that each of us have our own unique value which we bring to our relationships and interactions. For example, when I hear an intern at lisabmarshall.com say “Oh, I’m just an intern . . .” I make it a point to explain, “Yes, you are an intern, but good interns bring tremendous value to an organization. Interns bring enthusiasm, energy, and fresh eyes. That is difficult, if not impossible, to replicate.”

Everyone has strengths. Charismatic leaders consistently recognize and express the strengths of others.

Forgive me for sounding naive, but I also believe that each of us, when in the moment, try to do the best we can. What I mean is that I don’t think that most people consciously choose to do wrong. So when I feel wronged or offended, I try very hard to remind myself that I may not know everything that’s going on in the other person’s life.

Maybe the mom who never volunteers at school is dealing with a sick parent and simply doesn’t have the energy to give anymore. Maybe the guy in your office who comes in late, always looks tired, and is sometimes irritable, is suffering from Lupus. Maybe the kid in school who appears aloof lost a parent. I bring up these specific examples because they really were people in my life about whom I had initial misconceptions. I didn’t know the root of their outward behavior until I dug deeper which allowed me to connect with them.

Express Appreciation and Gratitude

One way to recognize and highlight strengths is to give others sincere compliments. As Abraham Lincoln said, “Everybody likes a compliment.” Let them know what you specifically appreciate in them. Birthdays and holidays are always a good time to explicitly express your gratitude. Take the time to handwriting a heartfelt
note that includes small details. At work, reward employees with kind words when they land an important client or complete a huge project. Again, the key is to highlight specific behaviors that you’ve noticed that you really do value. Everyone enjoys hearing a sincere compliment.

Most people particularly enjoy unexpected compliments or surprise gifts. It’s not that they don’t appreciate compliments at other times; it just means more when a compliment comes naturally and for no particular reason it will be appreciated more.

For example, if someone says, “This has been such a tough week! My coworker was being a bully and I finally just lost it and told her off! I apologized later, but I still feel terrible.” You can help take the edge off their negative feeling by saying something like “Coworkers can be challenging sometimes, but good for you for standing up for yourself. And it’s really great that you apologized later. That person is lucky to have a coworker like you!”

Quick Quiz: Has anyone ever told you that they appreciate the job you do, for no reason other than just to let you know? How did you feel? Did it make you feel as though they sincerely valued you and your contributions?

Express Sincere Flattery

Have you ever heard “Flattery will get you everywhere”? Or maybe you’ve heard in the opposite form, “Flattery will get you nowhere”? Interestingly, both are true!

It turns out that it’s difficult to separate ingratiating compliments from truly kind, flattering compliments. It’s human nature to believe them both. According to Robert Cialdini\textsuperscript{11}, expert on influence and persuasion “praise is the only information that is just as successful when it’s false as when it’s true . . . We like people who give us phony compliments just as much as people who give us genuine compliments and we believe them equally.” Put simply: flattery works.
In fact, a 2010 research study identified seven effective techniques of subtle flattery that helped executives win board seats. Here is what the authors suggest based on their study:

- Frame flattery as advice: “How were you able to close the deal so successfully?”
- Argue first, then agree: “At first, I didn’t see your point, but now I understand. You’ve convinced me.”
- Compliment the manager to friends in his or her network: “I’m learning so much from Roger. He is one of the best managers I’ve ever worked for.”
- Frame flattery as likely to make the manager uncomfortable: “I don’t want to embarrass you, but your speech was outstanding. For me it was extremely powerful and inspirational.”
- Agree with the manager’s values: “I feel the same way. I also believe in XYZ and I agree that we should go forward with the project.”
- Agree with manager’s opinion after learning it from a third party: “Roger told me what you said at that meeting and I couldn’t agree more!”
- Mention common affiliation before flattery: “I watched the national convention last night. What did you think of . . . ?”

In the book, *Power: Why Some People Have It—And Others Don’t*, author Jeffrey Pfeffer says:

Most people underestimate the effectiveness of flattery and therefore underutilize it . . . There is simply no question that the desire to believe that flattery is at once sincere and accurate will, in most instances, leave us susceptible to being flattered and, as a consequence, under the influence of the flatterer. So, don’t underestimate—or underutilize—the strategy of flattery.

However, keep in mind genuine flattery (otherwise known as praise) is better. Why?
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