

Charisma in Leadership

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CHARISMA DEFINITIONS, *as a noun*:

1. *Theology . a divinely conferred gift or power.*
2. *a spiritual power or personal quality that gives an individual influence or authority over large numbers of people.*
3. *the special virtue of an office, function, position, etc., that confers or is thought to confer on the person holding it an unusual ability for leadership, worthiness of veneration, or the like.*

As you walk into the bookstore, and wander down the business text aisles, please note the number of texts on leadership and management. This is proof-positive that there is no one set answer for the best outcomes. The first text I published, *Building The Successful Veterinary Practice: Leadership Tools* (Volume 1) Blackwell/Wiley Publishing, was caused by my consulting team taking me to task because the first book I drafted, *Building The Successful Veterinary Practice: Programs & Procedures* (which became Volume 2) referred to leadership and teams, but did not give the basics. Volume 1 has 14 leadership skills which can be taught, but the assimilation into daily life is much more difficult than just reading the text.

Most students of team-building have long acknowledged that many aspects of leadership remain a mystery. I believe that both TRUST and RESPECT are critical organizational behavior elements of leadership, and another such attribute is the concept of “charisma.” Charisma has been described as a quality that enables leaders to influence others, to attract followers, and achieve remarkable outcomes beyond that of any individual.

According to the late Peter Drucker, leadership was all about delivering results. While the nature of these results may vary from one organization to the next, all organizations exist to bring about some form of desired result. As a leader, you have been charged with the challenge of delivering those results that truly matter within your organization, whether it be a veterinary practice, a family, or a volunteer organization. And be certain of this, it is not just any result, but something that others consider extraordinary — something that pushes and passes the boundaries of normality. Drucker’s incisive insight into the nature of leadership was quite empowering to American leadership for many decades. As a leader, you have many demands on your time. If you are clear about the results you want to achieve, you can focus your efforts and limited time on those activities that contribute the most to delivering results. Yet, while Drucker’s view provided a focus, it failed to differentiate between a star individual and a great leader. To be effective at work, both *staff* and their *leaders* need to be focused on achieving the best results that they can. The best player on a team does not always make the best captain or coach. Why?

Because leaders are concerned with delivering results through the IMPACT they have on the attitudes and actions of others. Any success as a “leader” is all about the impact made on those that have been led. Understanding that leadership is all about the impact you have on others is central to enhancing your own leadership effectiveness. The central question becomes, “How can I have more of an impact on others?”

There was an interesting book published in 2009, *Unlocking the Mystery of Inspiring Leadership*, by Zenger, Folkman, and Edinger, that started as follows:

Mysteries Block Progress

About five percent of the population will develop a stomach ulcer at some time in their life. For many years, it was assumed that the cause of stomach ulcers was excess acid in the stomach that came from stress, diet and general lifestyle. The wall of the stomach became inflamed and sometimes this was so severe that the stomach would be perforated, in which case it often became a bleeding ulcer. Physicians recommended that patients eat bland diets and avoid stress because excessive stress and the production of stomach acid were known to go together. Some foods were thought to either be more acidic or to cause the stomach to produce more stomach acid.

Then in 1982 two Australian scientists discovered that the bacterium “*Helicobacter pylori*” was the cause of more than 90% of stomach ulcers. Discovering that the basic cause of ulcers was something totally different than had been assumed led, of course, to radically different treatment. Without that discovery we can only assume that physicians would still be prescribing bland diets and stress avoidance for ulcer patients

A Leadership Mystery

Let us now switch to a totally different arena, the study of leadership. Despite all the research that has taken place about the nature of leadership, practitioners and scholars have long acknowledged that many aspects of leadership remain a mystery. What’s more, we have described these mysteries in terms that readily concede that it they are something that we simply do not understand. We would like to address one such mystery.

Often, leaders have been identified as possessing some remarkable quality that sets them apart from others. This quality enables them to have a powerful influence on others. It causes people to be attracted to them. It enables them to achieve remarkable outcomes. We have labeled this quality “charisma,” coming from the Greek word meaning “gift.” It was thought that this quality was a gift that was bestowed upon some and not others. No one knew where it came from. Unlike other leadership skills such as giving compelling oral presentations or delegating, no one attempted to teach charisma.

But having given this quality a label allowed observers to say things like, “Well, the reason she has been so effective in her role is that she’s charismatic.” Others hearing this would nod their agreement and concur. Everyone pretended that they understood what was meant. In truth, no one had the faintest idea what “charisma” was, other than that there was a special quality this person possessed.

For those involved in leadership development the questions were even more profound. Not only is there a question of understanding it and being able to define it; but more importantly, can it be learned or acquired? Can it be measured? What kind of impact does it really have? Is there one way that charismatic or inspiring leaders behave or does charisma have several “flavors?” What the authors discovered after assessing 14,500 leaders confirmed, “expertise, inspiration, and motivation” were the key factors from followers for defining leadership competency. Inversely, when assessing leadership competency, followers (managers, peers, and those who report to them) poor leaders got the lowest scores in these same areas.

Like most researchers, these three authors loved to make lists of the feedback they received, and defined three major areas which set inspiring and charismatic leaders apart:

AREA ONE – ATTRIBUTES (broad and general qualities)

1. Role Model – excellent examples of WHAT they want others to do
2. Change Champion – constantly challenging the organization to change
3. Initiative – a driving force to make things happen for the better (status quo goals were considered NOT INSPIRING).

AREA TWO – BEHAVIORS (six discrete, actionable behaviors used by inspiring leaders)

- Stretch Goals
- Clear Vision and Direction
- Effective Communication
- Developing People
- Teamwork
- Innovation

AREA THREE - EMOTION (the contagious nature of the positive mental attitude)

- Evoking a similar and positive emotional response in others
- Leaders position acts as an accelerant to any emotional contagion that occurs, altering the organizational behavior into an energy flow (inversely, negative emotions of any type shut down the organizational culture’s energy flow).

BACK TO THE VET TRENCH

The data from multiple authors indicates that inspiring leaders utilize a variety of ways to connect with those about them (Hershey & Blanchard called it Situational Leadership, which I thought was a great term, so included it in my 14 leadership skills). The good leaders don’t do just one thing. Indeed, it is the combination of several approaches that lifts people to a higher level: Great leaders use five or more, and usually vary the approach with the people involved, project goals, and organizational culture level (for more information, see the VCI Signature Series monograph, *Human Resources & Organizational Behavior*, available from the VIN Bookstore, www.vin.com)

In the 500 page (18 appendices), March 2008, VIN Press text, *The Practice Success Prescription: Team-based Veterinary Healthcare Delivery*, which is now available for FREE DOWNLOAD from the VIN Library (www.vin.com), I shared both a SYNERGY MODEL, and LEADERSHIP PRACTICE IMPACT MODEL . . . Training To Trust is the first step in the SYNERGY MODEL, and Building Mutual Respect is the second step. As far as the perception of clients – *they really don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!* The other favorite quote I use on consults is paraphrased from Lord Baden Powell:

What you do speaks so loudly, they can't hear what you have said.

Every veterinarian must learn to be an effective leader, especially when pursuing client-centered patient advocacy in well care. Every specialist must learn to be an effective leader, especially when developing satisfied referring veterinarians as well as satisfied clients. Every practice owner must learn to be an effective leader, especially when pursuing the team-based healthcare delivery model, and when leveraging a veterinarian's time is important. In fact, every member of a practice healthcare team must learn to be an effective leader, for the sake of peers and clients, as well as the promotion of health for our patients.

Becoming an inspiring leader is not limited to one set of core values or leadership action-based taskings. Rather, inspiring leaders draw on a number of attributes and behaviors, all powered by their preferred emotional method. The choice is NOT whether you want to be an inspiring leader or not; it is a function of perceptions of the practice team and clients. My suggestion is that the 14 leadership skills I have published in many venues be combined with one of the behaviors or attributes listed above and infuse it into daily behavior with positive emotion toward the practice team and clients. Experience shows definitively that by doing so, a practice owner or manager will become perceived as a more inspirational leader and, in turn, have a more productive and profitable practice.