

# CAREERS & RECRUITMENT

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Deiric McCann: 'Make a positive difference in the way people feel or in how well they do, and they will find you charismatic'

Good leadership can play a big part in keeping employees engaged in a tough business climate, writes Deiric McCann

**T**he world of business has seen some tough times over the last few years and we have all struggled to come up with a magic formula for success. There is just one formula for achievement in modern business: get your people on board and invested in your success and the success of your organisation. All other things being equal, success in business comes down to people.

Charisma for its own sake is good for little more than your ego, but put it to work in service of your business and its impact can be enormous. Focused properly, leadership charisma fosters an environment where every one of your employees has a positive and energetic attitude, is emotionally and intellectually committed to your vision and is inspired to contribute his or her very best.

If your employees are totally dedicated to the business, if they buy into the organisation's vision – and are prepared to do all they can to ensure this vision comes to pass – your business is more likely to be successful.

This is why the concept of 'employee engagement' has garnered so much attention in recent years. The Conference Board defines employee engagement as a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.

Leadership charisma and employee engagement are inextricably linked. The Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study surveyed nearly 90,000 employees in 18 countries.

"The companies with high

employee engagement had a 19 per cent increase in operating income and 28 per cent growth in earnings per share," it said. "Conversely, companies with low levels of engagement saw operating income drop more than 32 per cent and earnings per share decline 11 per cent."

## Engaging employees

Gallup Management Journal's Employee Engagement Index reported that, in the US, 17 per cent of employees were 'positively disengaged' and 54 per cent were not engaged. Disappointingly, it found that just 29 per cent were engaged.

It estimated that the cost of disengaged employees was between \$250 billion and \$350 billion per annum. The impact is equally high everywhere else in the world.

What is clear is that organisations with high levels of employee engagement are dramatically more successful than those with low employee engagement (not to mention actual disengagement). This success is evident where it counts most – on the bottom line.

Employee engagement is essential for success in modern business: it is all about people. One of the questions at the forefront of every results-oriented business leader's mind must therefore be: how do I develop higher levels of engagement in my people?

There are many means to measure environments in which employees are engaged and almost as many programmes for developing such an environment. Most are aimed at making direct changes in employees' environ-

ment and their work conditions. This is all valuable, but it ignores an important piece of this complex puzzle. What's frequently forgotten is the prime mover in creating the right environment for engagement: the leader.

Fortune magazine's '100 Best Companies to Work For' study revealed that an engaging workplace is driven by three inter-connected relationships:

- the relationship between employees and management
- the relationship between employees and their jobs/company
- the relationship between employees and other employees.

Let's look at these first two points. What is often overlooked is that employee engagement – and all the positive business benefits it brings with it – is largely driven by those we put in charge – the managers and leaders at all levels in our organisations.

Anyone who supervises or leads people has an enormous impact on engagement, for better or worse. From the first two points in the Fortune quotation, it is clear that at least two-thirds of the responsibility for an engaging environment falls to the leader. The influence of the leader can be critical in the third point.

This is the often-forgotten reality of employee engagement. If the leader is not creating an engaging environment, then, no matter what else you do, your people will not be engaged.

## Business results

Focusing on becoming a more charismatic leader is a clear way to obtaining superior results from people. Jo Hennessy, director of research at the Rofley Park Institute, put it like this: "Charismatic leaders can gather people behind them. They're inspiring and strong and, if they're able to engage staff, the results will follow."

The reason that most people confer magical status on charisma is that they mistakenly think of it as an attribute that an individual possesses; nothing could be further from the truth.

Charisma is not an attribute, but a perception one person has of another whose personality he or she finds appealing. No one can be charismatic on his or her own. It takes two people – one to observe what he or she describes as charisma and another to behave in a manner that the observer perceives as being charismatic.

Charisma is simply the combination of the impact of a wide variety of behaviours that people observe practised, consciously or unconsciously, by those they term charismatic. Ask ten people to explain why they find someone charismatic and you'll probably get ten different answers. Some will talk about the

person's ability to speak in an inspiring manner. Others will describe his or her genuine friendliness. Still more will talk about the interest he or she shows in other people's well-being. They are all right – charisma is whatever others observe it to be.

Charisma is a term applied to us when someone likes the combination of how we behave, the actions we take, the face we present to the world, the words we use, our body language and myriad other things.

## Being charismatic

All of these contribute to a greater or lesser degree to our perceived charisma. So charisma is not a particular quality that a person either possesses or does not possess; and it is based on behaviours, so it is definitely not something that is innate.

When you think of charisma in this manner, it becomes clear why some people are perceived as charismatic in one setting, but not another.

Someone who has developed superior oratory, presentation and performance skills may come across as a charismatic speaker when addressing a group of hundreds of people, but be singularly uncharismatic immediately afterwards when talking one-to-one with members of the audience.

This is down to a lack of one-to-one social and communication skills. Similarly, someone may be charismatic for one group of people who find his or her behaviour appealing and not at all charismatic to a group of people who do not.

Everything we do contributes to – or detracts from – our charisma. Those who are charismatic simply display more of the behaviour that triggers the 'charismatic response' in others.

Some people do this quite effortlessly – there is something in their genes or in their upbringing that makes this the most natural thing in the world; the rest of us must learn it. And learn it we can.

The good news is that because charisma is based on behaviour, it can be cultivated. Anyone can decide to become charismatic and, simply by assimilating the behaviours that will be charismatic by his or her target audience, that person can raise perceived charisma in pretty much any situation.

This is especially good news for business leaders for whom charisma is an indispensable element of success. If you want to, you can become a genuinely charismatic leader.

Looking at things from the perspective of those perceiving charisma is very enlightening and doing so provided us with two principles: WIIFM? and the Charismatic Equation. Both could be extremely

useful in helping you to determine whether any planned action or behaviour would have any charismatic impact upon those who work for you.

## What's in it for me?

WIIFM? or What's in it for me? is not as cynical as it might sound. When you strip away all the niceties and all the layers of proper behaviour that de-

fines the way we act and interact with others, self-interest tends to inform most of what we do. It's that simple. That's why the WIIFM acronym is one of the most recognisable in the lexicon of every English-speaking business. Before doing anything asked of them, even the most altruistic people (at least unconsciously) ask: what's in it for me?

If the answer is nothing, they generally do not do what is asked unless they are coerced into it. Those who are charis-

matic are always appealing in some real way to the wants and needs of those upon whom they have a charismatic impact. They always answer the WIIFM question.

The Charismatic Equation describes how charismatic people meet a fundamental and universal human need in those they interact with – the need to feel positive about oneself and one's situation.

This equation states that the extent to which you are perceived as being charismatic is

directly proportional to the extent to which people either feel or fare better after each interaction with you.

Make a positive difference in the way people feel or in how well they do and they will find you charismatic.

Business author Deiric McCann has written several books, including *Leadership Charisma* (Liffey Press, €24.95), available in bookshops and online at [www.theliffeypress.com](http://www.theliffeypress.com)



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## What is charisma?

Arthur C Clarke famously said: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." It is a classic human tendency to describe anything we do not fully understand in magical or mystical terms. The ancient Greeks observed that some people, generally their leaders, had what they perceived to be a mysterious quality that enthralled others and made them want to follow them.

Because they did not understand what this quality was and couldn't quite pin it down, they decided that it must be a magical or God-given gift.

They even created a special word for this mysterious attribute: 'kharisma', a divinely

conferred gift or power ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)).

This ancient Greek word has found its way, largely unchanged, into many modern languages.

In all of these languages, you will find definitions of charisma similar to that used by the Greeks several thousand years ago.

If you look at some of the other dictionary definitions of charisma, however, it becomes obvious that there is more than a passing connection between charisma and employee engagement. Look at the definitions of employee engagement and charisma below.

What is abundantly clear is the direct connection between a leader's charisma and business results.

Employee engagement drives business results; charismatic leaders bring people on board, driving employee engagement.