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CUES

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The Signals That Are Secretly Shaping You

Have you ever shared a great idea only to find that others didn't get it? You're not alone.

This was exactly what happened to mogul and entrepreneur Jamie Siminoff, the founder of Ring. His video doorbell company made headlines when it was acquired by Amazon in 2018 for over \$1 billion. But before Ring was installed on millions of front doors around the world, it was almost derailed by a single bad pitch on *Shark Tank*, a TV show where entrepreneurs talk up their company to a panel of investors.

In fact, when Jamie went on the show in 2013 to pitch his company (then called Doorbot), *every single Shark passed on the opportunity to invest*—despite strong early sales and traction.

What happened?

The answer lies not in the information Siminoff presented but in *how* he presented it. Virtually every tiny signal, or *cue*, Siminoff shared—through his body language, vocal modulation, and pitch—undermined his credibility. He all but told the Sharks to stay away.

Siminoff had a great idea with huge potential, but with the wrong cues, it crashed and burned. Those *cues* spoke even louder than his billion-dollar idea.

Let's go through Siminoff's pitch step by step so you can see exactly where his cues went wrong.

Siminoff began his pitch with a knock on the door to the Shark Tank. "Who's there?" tech investor and Shark Mark Cuban asked. Siminoff replied from behind the closed door: "It's Jamie?"

This was Siminoff's first cue, or miscue. Instead of *stating* his name, he *asked* it. This is an example of a **question inflection**, also known as uptalk. Research has found that when the question inflection is accidentally used in a statement, it signals low confidence and insecurity. When the question inflection is used with a statement, it causes the listener's brain to question the speaker's credibility. The brain says, "If you aren't confident in what you just said, why should I be?"

Making things worse, Siminoff used the question inflection a second time: "Here to pitch?" Repeating this cue reinforced his lack of confidence—and he hadn't even started the pitch yet! Not a great first impression.

When the door finally opened, Canadian entrepreneur Robert Herjavec gave Siminoff a cue of his own: a fake smile. A genuine smile reaches all the way to the upper cheeks, activating the crow's-feet on the sides of your eyes. A fake smile appears only on the bottom half of the face. Herjavec's fake smile should have signaled Siminoff to change tack. If he'd caught it, he could have worked to build rapport with Herjavec. He didn't, and Herjavec passed on the idea.

When Siminoff finally began his official pitch, things seemingly moved back in his favor. He fielded questions from the Sharks on everything from market size to pricing. Mark Cuban even gave him a "Good for you!" when Siminoff shared that he'd had over a million dollars in sales. Throughout, however, the cues passing back and forth told a very different story about Siminoff's chances.

Three minutes in, Cuban pulled the corners of his mouth down into what looks like a frown but is actually a **mouth shrug**. This cue signals disbelief or doubt. It's a sign that someone feels disconnected or indifferent.

Researchers believe this is because the position of the mouth makes it impossible to speak. It's a nonverbal way of indicating a lack of interest



Shark Tank

in responding and therefore a bid to terminate the exchange of information. Cuban was telling Siminoff, “I’m done here.”

Instead of seizing that moment to address Cuban’s disbelief, Siminoff barreled along obliviously. If he’d registered Cuban’s cue, he could have addressed his doubt with a simple acknowledgment: “Mark, I see that you’re skeptical. Let me share some data with you.” But Siminoff could only hear the words—“Good for you!”—and missed the underlying nonverbal message. A few minutes later, Cuban pulled out of the deal.

Of course, Siminoff wasn’t just blind to the Sharks’ negative cues during his pitch. He was also sending dozens of his own. For example, when he mentioned the price of his product, he showed a **one-sided shoulder shrug**, yet another low-confidence signal. Five minutes in, challenged on a crucial point about the future of smart devices, Siminoff gulped a **deep swallow**, a cue conveying nervousness. While all of this is completely understandable—who wouldn’t be anxious defending years of work in front of skeptical billionaires on a TV show—these cues completely undermined the clear and confident words he actually spoke. **A strong idea cannot stand alone. It needs to be accompanied by strong cues.**

Siminoff slipped yet again when he tried to convince the Sharks he didn’t face any serious competition in the space. His answer started strong, but then he leaked a **halt cue**: “We do not have any direct com-

petitors. When I say direct [pause], we're [pause] the first video doorbell built for the smartphone." As you can see, a halt cue is when someone adds an out-of-place pause in the middle of a sentence. Liars halt. So do the very nervous. Since our brains can't tell the difference, we protectively and instinctively worry that someone is being dishonest. Halting can also occur when someone switches from a spontaneous answer to a rehearsed one. This is probably what happened to Siminoff. Having realized mid-sentence that he'd prepped for this question, he switched over to his script. Even though the substance of what he was saying was faultless, the choppy delivery undermined his credibility yet again.

Siminoff made the classic mistake many smart people make: **He focused too much on the *content* and not enough on the *cues*.** Cues could have supported his message, but instead they undermined it. In the end, it was Siminoff's failure as a communicator, not as an entrepreneur, that scuttled his pitch and sent him home empty-handed.

What Good Is a Brilliant Idea If No One Listens?

Every day I meet brilliant, creative, strategic thinkers held back, unwittingly, by their cues. Aspiring leaders, ambitious professionals, and entrepreneurs like Siminoff are not sending the right signals and are missing the signals being sent to them.

They have ideas but don't know how to share them persuasively. They are underpaid and don't know how to prove their worth to a boss or client. They leave a meeting feeling as if it went badly, but they aren't sure why . . . or worse, they finish an interaction thinking it went well only to be blindsided by negative feedback later.

Hundreds of subtle signals are being sent to you every day. Humans are social animals. We evolved to get along in groups, so we're constantly telegraphing information—about our social status, our potential as mates, and our intentions. Similarly, we're constantly alert to social information others are sending to us.

When you uncover the cues being *sent to you*, everything becomes clearer. You won't miss hidden emotions. You know who and what information to trust. You can communicate authentically and assertively.

When you learn to *send* the right cues to others, people start listening to you, find you engaging, and are more interested in what you have to say. You'll also feel more confident going into your interactions.

The right cues can take a lackluster conversation, meeting, or interaction and make it memorable. Send the wrong cues and potential opportunities are missed, doubted, and overlooked.

Researchers have long known about the power of cues, and most people have some inkling that body language is important. But what most people *don't* know is how well cues predict behavior, personality, and achievement with surprising accuracy. For instance:

- We can predict a leader's charisma based solely on five seconds of exposure.
- Want to know who will get divorced? One single cue can predict with 93 percent accuracy which couples will split—sometimes years ahead of time.
- We can predict which doctors will get sued more often by listening for specific cues hidden in their voice tone.
- When jurors exhibit this one nonverbal cue, it can completely change a criminal's fate.
- Researchers observing speed daters can predict who will trade numbers at the end of the night simply by observing their silent nonverbal cues.
- Want to know who will win an election before it happens? Researchers found that voters decide who is more dominant in just one minute of political exchange, and that predicts their vote.

If cues can be used to predict the outcomes of critical events like elections, marriages, and malpractice lawsuits, imagine what mastering them can do for you in your day-to-day life. My goal with this book is to make these normally invisible signals visible, whether it's in person, on phone calls, in video calls, and even on email and chat. Armed with the knowledge of how cues work, you will be able to amplify your message and increase your impact. And you'll never be underestimated, overlooked, or misunderstood again.

Why Cues?

Twelve years ago, I made a discovery that profoundly changed the way I communicate. I discovered that there was an invisible language being spoken all around me. It explained why people so often dismissed my ideas. Why I had a hard time building relationships—both professional and social. It's why I felt so uncomfortable, bored, and awkward in so many interactions.

I was sending the wrong cues . . . and missing the ones being sent to me. Learning to decode and *control* my cues changed my life and my career. Now I would like to share that knowledge with you.

I've had the privilege to lead hundreds of corporate workshops, at companies like Amazon, Microsoft, PepsiCo, Intel, and Google, to name just a few. I've been fortunate enough to help millions of students level up their people skills in my courses, and 36 million more have watched my YouTube tutorials on communication. And now I'm very, *very* excited to bring that knowledge directly to you in this book.

My secret sauce is to combine the latest research (including original research my team conducted at Science of People), real-life case studies of success, and fascinating examples of notable figures, including Lance Armstrong, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Nixon, and Britney Spears, with practical strategies you **can** start using immediately.

I have grouped cues into four different channels: **Nonverbal**, **Vocal**, **Verbal**, and **Imagery**. And this is how the book is organized.

First, we will learn about nonverbal cues. Researchers find that nonverbal signals account for 65 to 90 percent of our total communication, yet most of us have no idea how to use our body language to communicate effectively. This is the largest section in the book because it constitutes the biggest channel in our communication. You'll learn to project confidence without having to say a word (which also helps you *feel* more confident too), to quickly build trust, and to have a powerful presence in any setting. I'll show you which hand gestures make you look smart and how to spot hidden emotions.

Next, in the Vocal Cues section, you'll learn how to sound powerful. Believe it or not, leaders actually use vocal cues to influence others. We'll

also dig into why our brains associate vocal charisma with leadership, and how you can build trust on phone calls, on video calls, and in person.

In the Verbal Cues section, I'll show you how to make your emails, chats, and profiles more impactful. Ever wonder why certain people respond slowly to your emails? We'll dive into how to be more verbally engaging and how to communicate with charisma both online and offline.

In the final section, you will learn how Imagery Cues matter more than you think. I'll show you what your clothes, your desk, and the colors you wear say about you . . . whether you want them to or not.

Let's dive in!

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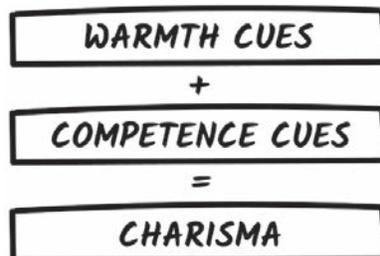
Cue for Charisma

Who is the most charismatic person you know?
This is one of my favorite questions to ask audiences. People immediately shout out their answers. “My dad!” or “My teacher!” or “My best friend!”

The next question is where things get more interesting. I ask, “What *makes* someone charismatic?”

Typically, I hear crickets. People rack their brains to come up with the answer. They venture, “Well, it’s, you know, that feeling?” **Why is it that we struggle to define charisma, even though we immediately recognize it in others?**

In a groundbreaking study from Princeton University, researchers found that highly charismatic, likable, compelling people demonstrate a special blend of two specific traits: warmth and competence. It’s a simple equation:



This formula is a powerful blueprint for every interaction. And it can completely change the way you communicate if you know how to use it.

According to the research, warmth and competence cues account for 82 percent of our impressions of others.

First, we quickly assess someone's warmth, answering the question:

Can I trust you?

Then we look for competence, answering the question: **Can I rely on you?**

And this formula isn't just at play when making a first impression. Any time people interact with you, they continuously scan for cues to gauge your warmth and competence. And you do the same to others. Whether you are in a business meeting, on a date, with your boss, or with new friends, managing these two traits is essential for your effectiveness.

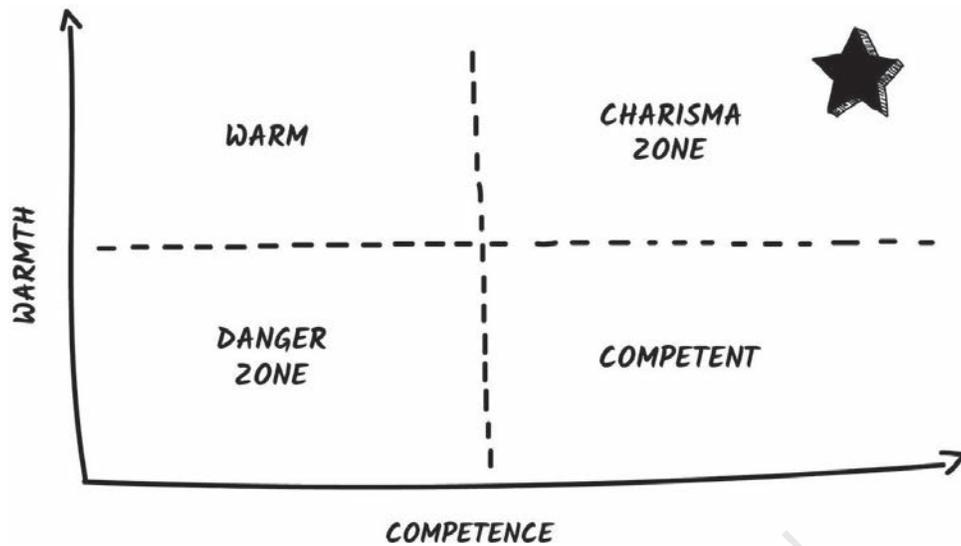
Highly charismatic people exhibit the perfect blend of warmth and competence. They immediately signal trust and credibility. We see them as friendly and smart, impressive and collaborative. They earn both our respect and admiration.

Here's the problem: **Most of us have an imbalance between these two traits.** It's often the hidden cause of our social difficulties, missed potential, and miscommunications.

We need this balance to succeed. Highly charismatic people use both warmth and competence cues to communicate successfully. We love being around people who make us feel like we are in both safe *and* capable hands. We like our leaders to be both highly effective and very approachable. We look for partners we can trust with our deepest secrets and call in an emergency. We want to work with people who are both friendly and productive.

We're always on the lookout for people who hit the sweet spot of both warmth and competence—the quadrant that has the star on the Charisma Scale on the following page. This Charisma Scale helps us map our communication.

Where do you think you fall on the scale? Are you more warm (upper left quadrant) or more competent (lower right quadrant), or do you strike a perfect balance and land in the Charisma Zone? Not sure? You might not show enough cues at all, putting you in the Danger Zone.



Consider where *others* might *place you* on the scale. Do a quick test below by choosing which column sounds more like you:

COMPETENT	WARM
Impressive	Trustworthy
Powerful	Collaborative
Smart	Kind
Capable	Compassionate
An Expert	A Team Player
Effective	Open

Be sure to take your official Charisma Diagnostic in your digital bonuses at scienceofpeople.com/bonus.

Higher in Warmth

If you are highly warm, you have a strong desire to be liked. This can be good—you strive to be friendly and personable—but it can also be challenging. Highly warm folks are often people pleasers and struggle to say

no and set boundaries. **Your desire to be liked can get in the way of your need to be respected.**

You might be seen as:

- Trustworthy but not always powerful
- Compassionate but not always competent
- Friendly but not always impressive

If this is you, you likely have good relationships with your colleagues but you find it hard to pitch yourself or your ideas. You might even get interrupted in meetings or feel underappreciated for all the hard work you do. In social or casual settings, people enjoy talking to you but might not ask for your business card.

You're likely higher in warmth if people tell you things like:

- I always feel so comfortable around you!
- You're such a sweetheart.
- I feel like I have known you forever.
- You have a trustworthy face.

Steve Wozniak is a good example of a business leader who is known for being jovial and kind but doesn't get as much credit for his accomplishments as his former partner, Steve Jobs, who was known for high competence.

Higher in Competence

If you are highly competent, you have a strong desire to be seen as capable and impressive. People take you and your ideas seriously, but you might have a harder time building rapport. You could be seen as:

- Smart but not always approachable
- Dependable but not always collaborative
- Important but not always kind

People might even be intimidated by you. They may tell you that you're hard to talk to or come across as cold. In business settings, this can be a double-edged sword. You're taken seriously as a leader, but you may have a harder time working with teams.

Clients, customers, or colleagues may find you credible but might not feel comfortable telling you all their needs. Researcher Susan Fiske found that **“competence without warmth is likely to leave us feeling suspicious.”** In social settings, this means you're often perceived as important, but it takes you longer to build deeper connections and make friends.

You're likely higher in competence if people tell you things like:

- I never know what you're thinking.
- You can be a little intimidating!
- You're hard to read.
- You must be the one in charge here.

Business leaders like Mark Zuckerberg, Anna Wintour, and Elon Musk are examples of people who have had success with high competence but have been criticized for being harsh, hard to read, and unemotional.

You might notice that highly competent people will often partner with highly warm folks to balance them out. Many famous duos include a highly warm character and a highly competent character. This is a good way to think about how these traits play off each other.

- Captain Kirk (warm) and Spock (competent)
- Warren Buffett (competent) and Charlie Munger (warm)
- Ernie (warm) and Bert (competent)
- Sherlock Holmes (competent) and Dr. Watson (warm)

Put together, these duos often hit the sweet spot.

The Danger Zone

The last part of the quadrant is the one you need to work hard to avoid: the Danger Zone.

Researchers have found that if you rank low in both warmth and competence, you are more likely to be overlooked, dismissed, pitied, and undervalued.

The Danger Zone is also where I would have placed Jamie Siminoff during his *Shark Tank* pitch. His idea wasn't bad, he simply didn't send enough warmth and competence cues. As a result, the Sharks didn't believe him.

You can have the best *content* in the world, but if it's not shared with the right charisma *cues*, it doesn't land.

Siminoff's low competence and low warmth cues undermined his message. He addressed every single one of the Sharks' verbal questions with logical answers but missed critical nonverbal feedback cues from them. He prepared his numbers and created a helpful demo, but his Danger Zone cues sabotaged his credibility every step of the way.

Here's the key: You might be the most competent, warmest person in the world, but if you don't show it, people won't believe you.

The good news is that even if you fall into the Danger Zone, you don't have to stay there. Siminoff's idea was so successful that he was invited to come back to *Shark Tank* five years later *as a Shark!* When he walked into the tank as an investor, it was like seeing a different person. His cues transformed him. He strode into the room, made broad gestures, smiled, and shook hands with each of the Sharks. He even sounded different.

Sure, Siminoff had one bad pitch, but he bounced back. Everyone can improve their cues.

Why Charisma Matters

Golden Globe-winning actress Goldie Hawn is known for her beauty, her humor, and her talent in front of the camera. But in 2003 she decided to set her sights on a very different goal—creating a mindfulness program in schools. She decided to call the program MindUp and set

out to create a mental fitness program for children that could be used in classrooms. But she had a problem. She worried that people wouldn't take her and the program seriously.

Hawn was keenly aware that she is known for her warmth but not necessarily for her competence. In her own words, "It's hard enough being me, being Goldie, who has been known for all these decades as being funny and sometimes bubble headed," said Hawn.

To help give her idea credibility, she brought in neuroscientists and psychologists and launched a massive study to validate the program. Hawn intuitively knew that she had to balance out her warmth with competence to get people to *trust* and *rely* on the program. And it worked!

Hawn and her team have grown the program to help over seven million students in fourteen countries and trained over 175,000 teachers. Eighty-six percent of the children who go through the MindUp program report being able to boost their well-being, and 83 percent show improvements in positive social behaviors.

Hawn isn't the only one embodying the balance of warmth and competence. If you visit the MindUp website, you will see it has a powerful blend of warmth cues—smiling kids, a laughing Goldie, and great stories—right alongside competence cues like statistics, social proof, and data. Brands, websites, social profiles, and companies also need to hit the sweet spot of warmth and competence.

No matter who you are or what you've achieved, balancing warmth and competence is key to your success. A famous study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* looked at how patients rated doctors on their warmth and competence. Researchers wondered, do *both* of these perceptions really matter? Isn't competence more important for doctors? Shouldn't years in school be enough?

Nope.

The researchers found that doctors who were rated poorly for warmth, rather than for their actual medical mistakes, were more likely to be sued for malpractice. Doctors who don't use enough warmth cues are unable to get across their competence and are sued more often.

If you can't showcase your warmth, people won't believe in your competence.

Too often I see people stuck in one part of the scale. I run into brilliant engineers who focus so much on technical skills that they are disliked and avoided in the office. They can't get buy-in on their innovative ideas, feel disconnected from the team, and wonder why they're always doing all the heavy lifting on projects.

Or I meet generous office managers who worry so much about being liked that they can't speak up in a meeting or get the respect they deserve. They wish for more social assertiveness so they can feel empowered to say no to toxic people and stand up for themselves.

Often it seems the kinder someone is, the less they are appreciated and respected. On the other hand, the more skilled someone is, the more they might struggle with their colleagues and teams.

Whether you're starting a new project, pitching ideas to a team, or trying to reset your reputation at work, we need *both* likability and respect. The right charisma cues can help.

PRINCIPLE

Balance warmth and competence cues to be charismatic.

Flavors of Charisma

When I ask audiences to name the most charismatic people they know, two names frequently come up: queen of talk Oprah Winfrey and the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher.

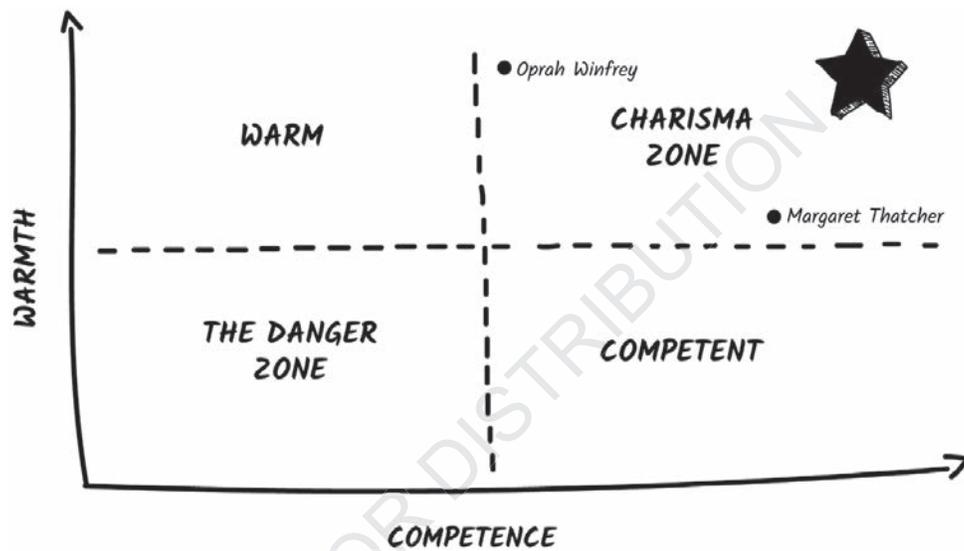
Both of these women are considered successful, well respected, and charismatic. Yet their charisma feels completely different. How can this be?

One study examined Winfrey's and Thatcher's communication styles and found they use very different cues.

Thatcher was known for her control. She "stood leaning against the parliamentary podium, elbow out as if she owned it. Her head tilted upward. Her voice strong, loud, and with controlled pauses . . . Her body and face still," explained the researchers.

Winfrey is known for her expressiveness. She “moves with gusto—her arms are long and she gestures broadly. Her facial expressions carry every feeling—she cries, and laughs. . . . She sits and stands and moves all around,” explained the researchers.

Winfrey and Thatcher both fall into the Charisma Zone, but they have different leanings. And that’s good! We don’t want everyone to look the same or mimic cues like robots.



Winfrey leans toward warmth but grounds her warmth with enough competence cues to be taken seriously. This is clear in every episode of her show. She cries with people, touches their arms, but also listens intently and asks challenging questions. She laughs freely and pairs heartfelt stories with hard-hitting perspective.

Thatcher leans toward competence but shows enough warmth cues to be seen as trustworthy. In her speeches, Thatcher spoke with clarity and precision, rarely using flowery language, but she imbued her words with passion. She used fewer gestures but would frequently tilt her head toward the sky in a nonverbal gesture of warmth and optimism. Does it surprise you that the “Iron Lady” showed warmth cues? You can demon-

strate warmth and still be seen as serious. In fact, you need both elements to communicate effectively.

Yes, there is one formula to charisma—warmth cues plus competence cues. **But each of us has our own special balance.** As long as you're in the Charisma Zone, you're showcasing enough warmth and competence to be perceived as credible and trustworthy.

Compare TV hosts and chefs Jamie Oliver (higher in warmth) with Gordon Ramsay (higher in competence). Both are considered very charismatic but have different flavors.

My goal is to give you the full menu of cues. Then you can *choose* how much of each ingredient you need to hit your unique charisma sweet spot. This is how we communicate authentically inside the Charisma Zone. You can add cues as you need them.

And the best part? **The most charismatic people move *flexibly* within the Charisma Zone.** Need a little more warmth in a situation? Use more warmth cues. Need to inject competence into an interaction? Add competence cues. You can use the Charisma Scale like a dial.

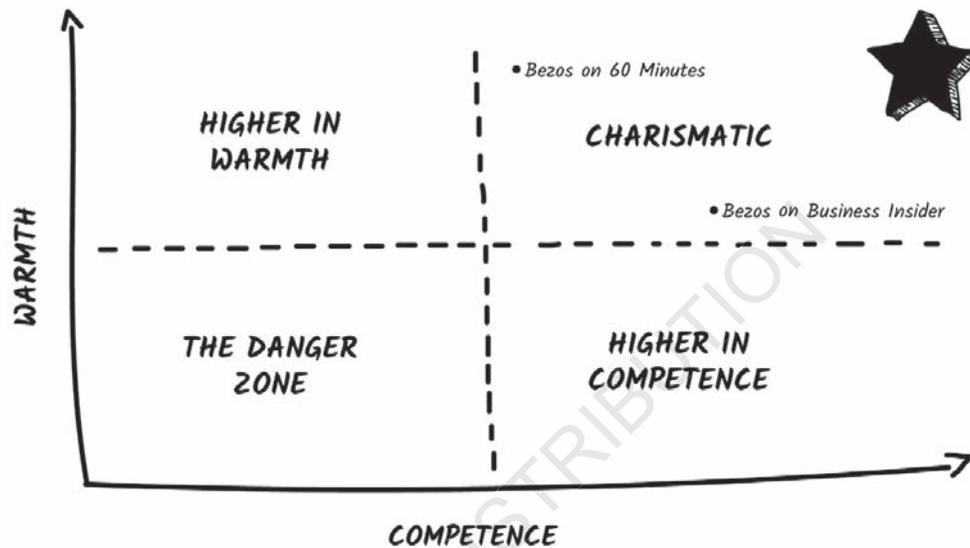
Your Charisma Dial

You are most charismatic when you adjust your warmth and competence based on the situation and person you're with—while still staying in the Charisma Zone. Take, for example, billionaire founder of Amazon Jeff Bezos. In one early interview with *60 Minutes Australia*, Bezos uses warmth cues as he casually takes a reporter around the office—he smiles, laughs, and gestures freely. The reporter even says, “The thing that strikes you first and most profoundly about Jeff Bezos is his laugh.” He was incredibly likable in the interview because he leaned into warmth but still balanced his communication with competence cues—speaking with credibility about his company's growth, sharing impressive statistics and goals in between laughs.

In a later interview with *Business Insider*, Bezos got asked more serious questions about his legacy as a leader.* In response, Bezos dialed up

* Watch both interviews in your digital bonuses.

his competence cues. He sits expansively and makes purposeful eye contact with the interviewer, and if you listen carefully, you will hear that Bezos even uses a lower tone of voice than in the earlier interview. But Bezos still uses enough warmth cues to stay in the Charisma Zone (his famous chuckle kept the audience laughing with him).



The number one way to improve your interactions is to send clear cues based on your goals.

When you need more credibility or to be taken seriously, as in negotiations, pitches, and important interviews, dial up competence. Additionally, if you're with someone who appreciates highly intelligent, capable, efficient people, use more competence cues.

If you want to build more collaboration and trust, dial up warmth. If you're with someone who values connection, rapport, and empathy, you should generate warm cues.

PRINCIPLE

The most charismatic people move flexibly within the Charisma Zone.

How to Solve Your People Problems

Every day we interact with people who fall into different zones of the Charisma Scale. This can create all kinds of disconnects and miscommunications. Let's say, for example, that you're a little higher in warmth. But your client or customer (or boss or colleague) is a little higher in competence. This can cause a connection problem.

You, as a highly warm person, love rapport. When you start a meeting, you feel that chitchat is essential for a successful interaction. When you present an idea, you value great stories, case studies, and examples. When you make decisions, you often go with your gut. You place a lot of confidence in recommendations by referrals.

Your client, as a highly competent person, loves information. When they start a meeting, they want to get right to business. They don't want to waste time with unproductive catch-ups. They prefer presentations with lots of data, research, and facts. If they doubt what you're saying, they *will* fact-check you on Google. They don't really care about social proof (it's only one person's opinion!) and they prefer hard numbers. Oh, and nothing drives them crazier than going off agenda on an unrelated tangent. They say things like "I need to do my own due diligence."

So what happens? You try to bond, while they try to be productive. You try to build trust, while they try to get informed. You feel your presentation is inspiring and they find it disorganized. You give them testimonials to close the sale, but they want more proof and data. You try to cultivate warmth and they try to harvest competence.

Neither of these approaches or preferences is right or wrong; they are just *different*. Remember, people have their own unique flavors of charisma, and that's good. Warm and competent folks have different talents, and we need *both* on a team. I will teach you how to spot these differences and even make them work for you.

Mismatches in charisma explain so many problems you might face:

- Why you just can't click with your boss.
- Why your presentations or ideas sometimes don't land.

- Why you've been passed over for a promotion or dismissed by a potential friend.
- Why you sometimes feel awkward or disliked.

Know you need more trust, collaboration, and openness with someone? Dial up your warmth cues.

Know you're interacting with someone who is higher in competence? Dial up your competence cues as a sign of respect.

We can use these cues to be more successful in every area of our life—face-to-face chats, social media profiles, voicemails, slide decks, presentations, and even in our offices. I'll teach you cues for each area of the Charisma Scale so you can use them purposefully, in the right situations, with the right people.

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

To help you get the most out of this book, we have created an official **Charisma Diagnostic**. This will help you identify exactly where you are on the scale. Take the official quiz and get your results at:

scienceofpeople.com/bonus

This is also where you'll find all the digital goodies, videos, and extras in this book.
