

## Charm School

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In today's tough job market, a qualified candidate could find that charisma, always an important attribute, may help them win that sought after job.

Layoffs have created a market with more job seekers than positions. Now employers need something to differentiate one candidate from the next, said Frankie R. Francese, a partner with Fortis Consulting Group in Tinton Falls.

"What it will come down to is personality," he said. "You have to show them not only can I do the job, but I can get people to work with me."

Historically, charisma has most often been associated with careers in politics, the military or entertainment, which require playing to large audiences. But charisma is important in business as well.

For instance, an executive with charisma can get other departments to help collect financial information needed to make sure balance sheets are completed on time, Francese said. It's also something that may help explain financial results to investors, he said.

Charisma is purely emotional. The word's Greek root means "divine favor," which demonstrates how this mysterious magnetism has always been seen as a bit superhuman.

"Neither money nor the media can confer charisma," writes psychologist James Hillman in "Kinds of Power: A Guide to its Intelligent Uses."

"This kind of power is a mystery that does not belong to human persons but enhances them with an otherworldly charm that is best expressed by the term 'star.' "

At the top levels of a company, charisma is more than the ability to win friends and influence people, though it certainly includes those powers. It is one form of persuasive acumen among many, well suited to certain situations and not at all to others.

Jay Conger, a London Business School professor and University of Southern California researcher, gives a concise breakdown of the traits that combine to create charisma. The list does not contain anything about physical appearance, likability, education or social background.

Instead it's:

- A restless compulsion to challenge the status quo. The charismatic leader is most at home, and most effective, in chaos.
- A clear vision of which uncharted territory to explore.
- An ability to articulate that vision compellingly to any audience and to imbue it with a sense of great importance.
- An ability to create a sense that no other person could -- or would -- take the same tactic.
- An ability to inspire and permit those around him or her to do extraordinary things.

An additional aspect of charisma is emotional intensity. When a charismatic leader is in charge, the emotional stakes are always high. For better or worse, he or she creates an environment in which people care with extraordinary depth about their work.

People in business are looking for employees with charisma and vision, said Barbara Davis, owner of Barbara Davis Employment Services, which has offices in Red Bank and Freehold.

"We have a whole new economy out there so we need more creative ideas with more vision," Davis said.

But sometimes a job applicant with a good dose of charisma may not be what a company requires. An applicant should look at the needs of the company, said Christine Nichlos, owner of Options Employment Resources, an employment agency in Tinton Falls.

Companies are team-oriented. "What kind of leader do they need?" she asked. "If you have a CEO with a lot of charisma and a CFO with a lot of charisma, you don't need a COO with a lot of charisma."

Or the company may need another type of person: a cost-cutter. "Maybe they don't need anyone who is liked right now. Maybe they need someone who is the hatchet man," Nichlos said.

There can be a flip side to the energy, drive and large-scale change charismatic leaders

bring. Their tendency to fight routine -- crucial in their creation of business methods -- works at odds with those new methods establishing themselves for the long term.

Raising a sick company to health takes one set of skills, while keeping a healthy one fit requires another. It is the truly rare charismatic leader who has both.

"Charisma doesn't handle labor negotiations, restructuring for a turnaround or petty struggles with a querulous board," Hillman says.

And too much charisma can be a problem as well, said Fortis' Francese. For example, two employees might fight it out for a little bit of the spotlight, he said.

"It is a great balancing act," he said. "Each time I hire somebody, I have to make sure that their personality, their charisma, will not conflict with someone I have in place."

Also he said, have too much charisma and "you might come across as someone that has a fake personality or is hiding something."

*Gannett News Service contributed to this story.*

