

The Charismatic Radiologist

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Charisma is a sparkle in people that money can't buy. It's an invisible energy with visible effects.

—Marianne Williamson

The ACR's Imaging 3.0™ campaign strives to increase radiology's visibility and leadership in health care. The underlying framework necessary to achieve these goals is improving our communications skills with our referring physicians and patients. This need was recently highlighted in a study whose authors concluded that referring physicians overwhelmingly request greater interaction with radiologists and that limited time to discuss imaging results with radiologists is a hindrance to patient care [1]. With the advent of PACS, there are fewer reasons for clinicians to visit the reading room. Therefore, when the opportunity to interact with our referring physicians arises, we must go beyond simply being available. We must learn to communicate with influence, and this is where understanding charisma helps.

Charisma, the ability to engage and inspire trust in others, is not necessarily innate. Rather, it is a set of behaviors that can be learned and perfected. Olivia Fox Cabane [2] provided the basic blueprint for learning charisma in her critically acclaimed book *The Charisma Myth*. Radiologists can adopt many of her strategies without altering our personality or detracting from our work lists. Subspecialty-trained radiologists with highly technical skills may be considered experts in their field, but

the extent to which their recommendations are implemented and their opinions sought after depends on their influence and charisma. Following is a list of behaviors displayed by highly charismatic people, largely adapted from Cabane [2], which radiologists can use in their increasingly multifaceted world, whether directly in patient care, interacting in the reading room, consulting on tumor boards, presenting at national meetings, or leading their groups as presidents or chairs.

TEN SIMPLE STRATEGIES FOR BECOMING CHARISMATIC

1. Be Present

When referring clinicians visit the reading room, focus on how to best meet their needs. When they are speaking, pay complete attention. Do not let the mind wander. Many people believe they are good at “fake listening,” but the human mind is exceptional at picking up on the smallest delays in reaction, even transient facial expressions lasting a few milliseconds [2,3]. A lack of presence causes referring clinicians to feel ignored, unwanted, and even annoyed. Increase the value radiologists bring to patient care by creating a bond with referring clinicians, and demonstrate that you value their input and respect their time. If your mind begins to wander, whether due to boredom or impatience, try focusing on breathing slowly or the physical sensations in your fingers and toes, which breaks the cycle of distraction and allows the return of complete attention.

2. Be Powerful

When consulting on a tumor board or speaking in front of a group, demonstrate the power of radiology by projecting confidence through body language and a well-suited appearance. Regardless of one's experience, others will tend to accept what we project. An inexperienced practitioner may garner more respect through the cultivation of presence than more experienced professionals who lack basic communication skills. Confident body language is a combination of having poise and a relaxed disposition. Reduce excessive movement, whether that is frequent nodding, fidgeting, scrolling or tapping, or using verbal fillers. Speak slowly, pause frequently, and modulate voice intonation. As radiologists, we are physicians and should present ourselves accordingly. In daily practice, make a mental note of the range of clothing styles in the workplace and align yourself with the upper end of formality.

3. Be Warm

Warmth is a feature that radiates from within, and one must nurture positivity and graciousness throughout the workday. This can be challenging given the endless interruptions to our workflow from referring physicians and technicians alike. However, charismatic radiologists have the ability to maintain focus on other people rather than on themselves. It is natural, and understandable, to let irritation slip into interactions that distract from our work and interrupt our flow. However,

try to view these interactions for what they are fundamentally: one person asking another for help. It is not easy, especially as a professional, to humble oneself and approach a colleague for assistance. We should understand this and respond warmly and patiently. If we maintain a gracious countenance during these interactions despite the interruption they represent, we can foster a reputation as a valued, accessible colleague and therefore an essential part of the clinical team. Our hard-won expertise then carries more weight, and patient care benefits. We also benefit because there will be times, inevitably, that our assessments will be incorrect, and we will be looking for the same graciousness we have afforded our colleagues in the past.

4. Be Authentic

Radiologists are constantly met with challenges to their expertise. Given the inherent uncertainty we confront in the practice of radiology, we must overcome self-doubt and maintain the ability to provide value in the face of nondiagnostic studies or even misdiagnoses. We also need to realize that negative emotions such as self-criticism are natural and normal. Rid yourself of the stigma of these emotions through the realization that even one's most admired colleagues and mentors have endured similar situations. The field of radiology and its radiologists are not perfect. Every study carries with it a significant degree of uncertainty. Our assessments will occasionally reflect the ambiguous nature of the field. Accepting these imperfections as natural and inevitable allows us to maintain self-confidence and to continue to provide value during challenging situations.

5. Listen With Charisma

All too often when referring clinicians come to the reading room, we turn

our backs to them while they are speaking, scroll through the study, and then ask them to repeat themselves. In interactions such as these, one must be an attentive listener to have communication presence. The mentality of "letting people talk until it's my turn" shows in facial expressions. Never interrupt others, regardless of how relevant or well-meaning the interjection. To seem more purposeful, include a deliberate 2-second pause before answering questions. Cabane [2] recommended the following sequence for any conversation: (1) the speaker finishes a sentence, (2) the listener's face absorbs, (3) the listener's face reacts, and (4) then, and only then, the answer is given. When interacting with referring clinicians, take 10 seconds to maintain eye contact and intently listen to their concerns and questions. This will strengthen the clinician-radiologist relationship by allowing them to feel respected and discovering that they have a partner who is also invested in their goal of patient care.

6. Speak With Charisma

Communicating with referring clinicians in the reading room or during conferences is about an exchange of ideas that strengthen patient care, not about impressing others with technical jargon and inconsequential radiology-specific diagnoses. Speak with a vocabulary that is understood by everyone in the room. Radiologists who understand how to put referring clinicians at ease will make them feel welcome in the often intimidating world of the radiology reading room. When lecturing to residents or at national meetings, speak with impact by lowering the voice, using frequent pauses, modulating volume, and keeping a slow and steady pace. Whenever possible, increase the richness of your speech by recounting

entertaining stories and using dynamic metaphors. Studies have shown that audiences are more strongly influenced by delivery style than by content [2,4]. Well-liked educators also have better chances of being promoted and obtaining leadership positions.

7. Lecture With Charisma

When lecturing to residents, break the tradition of standing motionless and presenting hundreds of slides of conditions one should know, by focusing on only a few points and teaching them well. Studies have shown that audiences remember only 20% to 40% of any lecture, with much lower rates of recollection 1 week later [5]. Increase the concentration of the lecture by clearly stating the main points and using 3 to 5 subpoints per topic. Reduce the amount of text on each slide to contain as few words as possible, or no words at all. Attention spans typically wane every 10 to 15 min, so create openings at these intervals to ask the audience questions and facilitate discussions [6]. Lecture with enthusiasm and dynamism; move across the stage and down the aisles. Let the audience know ahead of time that there will not be a question-and-answer session at the end. It is known that an audience more reliably remembers the beginning and end of any lecture, so improve your effectiveness by forgoing a question-and-answer session at the end. Instead, focus on ending on a high note and simultaneously engage the audience by only allowing questions to be asked throughout the presentation.

8. Make a Good First Impression

When meeting with the chair or working with a new team, a good first impression is everything. It starts with a good handshake. Make

sure to give plenty of eye contact and smile warmly but briefly. Make palm-to-palm contact, squeeze firmly, and shake from the elbow. There's nothing worse than a dead fish or knuckle cruncher. As always, make sure to project presence, warmth, and powerful body language. Keep the focus of the conversation on the other person. As the conversation ends, a good exit strategy is to acknowledge the other individual's assessment, answer any questions, and provide a recommendation if needed.

9. Keep Your Cool in Difficult Situations

Every radiologist, whether an academic department chair or a radiologist in private practice, will eventually be called upon to guide a difficult situation to a satisfying conclusion. Times like these are critical to refocus the attention on each party so they feel accepted and understood. Studies demonstrate that parties sitting across from each other during conflicts are likely to engage in a higher amount of arguing [2,7]. Instead, subtle tricks to defuse tension can be used. Move next to your colleague and adopt a more congenial stance. Mimic body language to affect a feeling of solidarity. If delivering criticism, the beginning and end of the conversation must be positive. After letting your colleague know how much he or she is appreciated, specifically address the behavior that needs improvement, rather than the person as a whole. For example, instead

of "Why are you too lazy to proofread your reports?" state, "I get concerned about errors in our reports because they can have clinical implications." Reiterate once again how much your colleague is valued within the workplace and demonstrate enthusiasm for future projects together.

10. Have Netiquette

Speaking on the phone with referring clinicians in the middle of a busy workday is fraught with distraction, from the never-ending work list to the other phone ringing off the hook. Listening skills and paying attention in this situation are essential, as one cannot compensate with good eye contact or confident body language. Avoid typing, eating, and drinking, as the other person can hear these sounds. The other person can easily notice the slightest delays in your responses from any chart surfing or e-mail checking. Answer the phone in a neutral manner, and after the caller identifies himself or herself, let your voice express warmth and enthusiasm to ensure that the other person feels appreciated.

E-mails should be as short as possible, with the main point listed at the very beginning or end. Subject lines should be concise and specific. All e-mail attachments should have their content cut and pasted into the body of the e-mail in addition to attaching the original file. This allows the reader to quickly scan the content of the report without the inconvenience of opening the attachment, in

addition to having the original file for printing or archiving. Last, in anticipation of any lengthy or complicated discussion that is predicted to last more than 5 minutes, close the computer and pick up the phone.

CONCLUSIONS

Charisma is a skill often thought of as coming naturally to a gifted few. However, it can be developed and honed by constant practice. Taking the time to think about some subtle modifications in our behavior and interactions can transform how our peers perceive us as radiologists. Try out some of these ideas; the results may pleasantly surprise you!

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