

The dangers of charisma: A question of responsibility and autonomy

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Current goings-on in the political world give pause for thought. What impact do we have on others? Electoral campaigns, speeches and events tend to revolve around people with a certain charisma. But what image are they putting across and, above all, what is the **intention** behind their words and gestures: to influence or to manipulate?

My definition of leadership is as follows:

"The capacity to create momentum, to mobilize people towards a common objective, an attractive vision, via a stimulating, creative and inspiring framework."

I also say that that leadership is legitimate **power** (authority).

In a later article I shall be saying more about power/authority and legitimacy. In a nutshell, power is not negative in and of itself; only what I do with it (how I use it) can be negative. On the other hand, legitimacy is conferred by others, by my employees, by those who follow me.

This implies a heavy responsibility. I am striving for a certain vision (in my case, to help create a better world through leaders who are responsible and aware of their impact, i.e. leaders who create as little collateral damage as possible).

This being the case, it is clear that I **influence**, that I stimulate people, that with my enthusiasm and personality I generate momentum and get people involved. The inspiration I impart to them is a source of energy.

A leader is only a leader if people will follow him or her. There is a video on YouTube explaining this phenomenon:

[\(First Follower, Leadership lessons from dancing guy\)](#)

All of this implies a considerable **responsibility** on my part. What are the effects of the momentum I generate? Is my intention positive, ethically correct?

The line that must never be crossed is expressed in the word "**autonomy**". If I have a charismatic personality, I may influence people, but I must never manipulate them. The people I am speaking to, who follow me, must always be able to decide for themselves, i.e. they must have the autonomy to say "yes" or "no". Their actions are most likely influenced by my example, my convictions, by what I do. But this must never detract from their autonomy. Herein lies the ethical dimension of charisma. We bear a heavy burden of responsibility. We have no right to play on the emotions, fears and weaknesses of others.

Before judging others, I must look at myself in the mirror.

"Positive" or "healthy" charisma will be attentive to the needs of others and will contribute to a positive cause. So, if you have a charismatic personality, or wish to develop one, you must always consider the ethical dimension, your intentions, the momentum you are seeking to generate (in pursuit of what vision?) and be careful never to manipulate. **Influence, yes; manipulate, no!**

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