

Red, White and True Blue Body Language

What Distinguishes Charismatic from Credible Presidential Candidates?

By: Patti Wood MA, CSP

Barak Obama has laser-focus eye contact; Mitt Romney is tall and attractive; Giuliani smiles, gestures and laughs before he speaks. These presidential candidates have Charisma, with a capital "C." Their body language gives off that seemingly secret magic. Simply put: Body language helps candidates win elections and corporate leaders win investors and the public's loyalty. Charisma intoxicates and persuades us.

But as a body language expert, I must see beyond pure charisma. Consequently, I search for the truth in each person's communications. Let me explain: At its simplest, charisma is based on power attractiveness and likeability. The "can't tell a lie" red, white and blue *credible* leader may have those charismatic qualities. But he or she must also have integrity. Recognizing the difference between smoke and mirrors (charisma) and true credibility can be difficult.

That said, charisma without credibility can be extremely powerful. Researchers at the Institute for Social Research studied the effects of charisma on politics. In the study, Harvard undergraduates who were shown ten-second silent video clips of unfamiliar candidates from 58 past gubernatorial elections consistently chose the candidate who won. They didn't hear a word the candidates said, but they almost without exception picked the winner. Their choices were made purely on the basis of body language. In fact, when they could hear what the candidates said, the students were no better than chance at predicting who had won.

The researchers found that they had to use silent clips to measure charisma because, as one said, "Knowing about candidate policy positions disrupts people's ability to judge the non-verbal cues that really matter." I have been writing and speaking on nonverbal communication for over 26 years and that last statement scares me, because it's the timing of the nonverbal communication with words that reveals honesty.

For example: Start watching Rudy Giuliani and you'll notice that his gestures often come before his words. He gestures emphatically, and then he makes an emphatic statement. That shows his statement is credible. The reason: Sincere feeling comes first. Those feelings motivate our body language and nuances of our voices in what's called paralanguage. From there, we switch from our primitive brain to our cognitive brain and say the words that we want the world to hear. The words should match up with body and voice. The order of the sequence is described as "feel-show-say." I have watched over 40 hours of video of all the current presidential candidates—and you rarely see credible "feel-show-say" nonverbal cues." Hillary Clinton is one of the worst offenders and seems to have this odd pause after she speaks where she tries to figure out the emotion her words should show before she shows it.

Another indication of credibility is having the nonverbal cues you give match your words. For example, you smile, raise your open-palmed hand high and say enthusiastically, "I love the spirit of the American people." Watch almost any tape of Romney on YouTube and you'll see how often he makes definitive

positive statements with his words and then shakes his head "no." That's a clear indication that his subconscious does not agree with his cognitive thought. In other words, he is lying. Hillary Clinton does this occasionally—but Romney does it habitually.

In addition to the above, credible speakers also exhibit facial symmetry between upper and lower faces when speaking. Gary Condit's famous Connie Chung interview illustrates this: His forehead didn't move. It didn't really matter to the audience whether this lack of expressive symmetry was caused by plastic surgery, Botox or outright lying. All that mattered was that he looked like a liar. As I observed over fifteen other distinct deception cues in that interview, I would say he had no credibility. Looking at the current presidential field, we again see a lack of credible symmetry. Specifically, McCain's forehead doesn't sync with his words. Yet Giuliani again has this credibility cue: His forehead always moves in sync with his words. When you're telling the truth, your entire body is aligned with your words.

Now that we've analyzed how some of the current presidential candidates rate in terms of credibility in their communications—let's look at how they stack up in terms of sheer charisma, by deconstructing the three critical components of charisma:

- **Power:** Ronald Reagan and Martin Luther King are premiere examples of "power" in communications. For starters, height communicates power. Looking at the current presidential field, Romney was the tallest candidate in the Republican debates, giving him nonverbal power over the others. Interestingly, the taller of the final two candidates in presidential races typically wins. Other power body language cues involve gestures, which can be coached. Bill Clinton and Colin Powell, for example, punctuate nearly every sentence they utter in public with hand gestures. Candidates Giuliani, Clinton and Edwards use aggressive and powerful chopping motions as they speak. Sam Brownback uses expansive outward gestures. Romney's hands more often stay cupped and then sweep out, which makes him appear less definitive on issues. He even does this in a video of his speech on a topic he feels strongly about: Islamic Jihad. John McCain's nonverbal cues are different from the other candidates in that he exhibits an interesting lack of full body movement—lack of gestures, lack of vocal variation and overall lack of energy. Looking at these and other nonverbal cues communicating power in the presidential race thus far, Republican candidates have looked tired rather than powerful—particularly in the debates.
- **Likeability:** Smiling is one of the strongest determinants of likeability. Romney, Edwards and Giuliani smile more than other candidates, but only Giuliani consistently gives "feel-show-say" full face smiles. Matching and mirroring other people's body language is another factor contributing to likeability. It's also a common practice among charismatic leaders. While many candidates (like Hillary Clinton, in particular) slow their speech slightly to charm their Southern audiences and conversely increase their rate of speaking for New York news shows, Obama eerily transforms himself to completely match and mirror them. If you had never heard him speak before and watched him give his Selma, Alabama speech, you would have noted his voice becoming extremely slow and taking on the relaxed consonants and cadences of Alabama speech patterns.
- **Attractiveness:** Romney is definitely a hottie, as is Obama. And Edwards is a powerful, animated and enthusiastic candidate. This, combined with his attractiveness, gives him the big three in charisma (for many Americans). However, Edwards' credibility is affected by what certified

speaking professionals dub a "Pinocchio nose growing" lying cue: He quite literally talks out of the side of his mouth at times. Similarly, he smiles and expresses more on the right side of his mouth. This side of the face is controlled by the more logical and rational left hemisphere of the brain. This pulled up right side of the face is more permanent in Edwards than in Obama. Kerry exhibited the same trait during his run. Though everyone exhibits these side-face differences to some extent, Kerry's entire left emotional side looked melted compared to the right, showing years of hard lies.

Charisma comes from the Greek word "charis," which means grace. Research shows that people with charisma are able to gracefully persuade us to buy from them, vote for them and (as charismatic leaders like Kennedy and Clinton have shown) mate with them. But, as stressed above, there is more to leadership than charisma.

So look for more than power, attractiveness and likeability in this election season's roster of presidential candidates. Seek instead credibility—and watch for the red, white and true credibility cues outlined here, particularly during this Fourth of July week.

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