

The Charismatic Leader Model

Description

Call this the “Pied Piper” model. The only thing that matters is the one, charismatic leader. As long as that one person is present, everything seems to go great. That individual has a way of seizing the moment, and can do so just about anytime and every time. People follow.

Charisma operates beyond the analytical. You can’t create a specific plan with all of the right components, like an equation, and expect it to work. But having a charismatic leader does work. This special person usually has multiple talents, such as music or other artistic elements, intelligence, a sixth sense for individual and group dynamics, sports skill and interest, a commitment to God, good looks, and often something unique or quirky. Organizational skills, adhering to protocol, and follow through rarely enter the charismatic leader’s orientation. This type of leader most likely is slightly older than the target group and certainly younger than the parents of that group. But the greatest asset of the charismatic leader is enthusiasm. Often this takes things over the top and it provides youth and young adults with a leader they willingly follow.

Living out one’s own reality and relationship with God places the charismatic leader in his own world, which is just a step

ahead of the youth or young adults, and yet behind the rest of the adults. Parents find themselves torn between joy because their children are following a spiritually inclined leader, yet frustrated that this leader does things “by the seat of the pants” and often fails to utilize a network of other willing assistant leaders. The charismatic leader identifies with the young people more than the adults, which adds to the attraction for the young people and the exasperation of the adults.

Critique

Just as the charismatic leader makes everything happen by being present, whenever that leader is absent, everything either falls apart or pales in comparison. For example, if the charismatic leader takes a group on a weekend retreat, that retreat will go great for everyone present, but those who attend any youth or young adult event back at the church will find it to be a dud—lifeless. Within time, nobody will show up to anything

unless the charismatic leader is present, or they will quickly leave when they discover the “Pied Piper” won’t be there.

Others rarely are empowered to lead because they just don’t have what it takes. Young people who mimic the leader might be given small, visible opportunities. Those who would lead differently aren’t seen as a threat, but somewhat clueless and even a nuisance. These probably are the ones who desire a clearly stated plan, which won’t likely happen since it stifles the spirit and forces the leader to be accountable.

Potential dangers can develop with romantic crushes, especially when the charismatic leader is just slightly older than the youth or young adults. Because of the position of the leader, a youth or young adult has nothing to lose by developing romantic interests and feelings with the leader, but the leader has nothing to win and everything to lose if that isn’t kept in check.

As unlikely as it seems to many, there will be some in the youth or young adult group who, for whatever reason, don’t march to the charismatic leader’s beat. Such a person won’t fit in and won’t be given any credibility and probably won’t stick around the group for very long, because “everyone loves the leader” except for this eccentric outcast. Maybe a person like that will get a chance when the charismatic leader leaves, but just about everyone else will leave then, too, and “nobody will be able to do it the way the last leader did!”

Possibilities

The greatest strength of a charismatic leader is that people follow and it rarely matters what else happens. In a sense, the leader plays the role of God—able to handle every situation and capable of making the most of it. A charismatic leader can jolt a group to life. Participants seem more willing

to give God a try and engage in whatever is happening. The non-conformist approach appears to be more spiritual because it deals more with a feeling than a controlling or rigid plan.

Perhaps the greatest need for the charismatic leader is to join forces with others to make a team. This includes adults who will not only make up for the leader’s deficiencies (organizing, planning, etc.), but also pass along some of the skills to make the leader more than charismatic. It includes young people who aren’t just like the leader, and maybe don’t even want to be like the leader, but still need to be actively involved in the group.

A youth or young adult group with a charismatic leader has the opportunity of impacting the rest of the congregation and community by moving outside the comfort zone of “only the groupies.” This might result in lack of acceptance or not as loyal a following compared to the tightly knit group around the leader. But it will grow the leader, the group, and foster a dependence on God instead of merely on the charismatic leader.