

# 7 Secrets Of Hitler's Charisma



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If Hitler hadn't existed no fiction writer would ever have dreamt him up. He is just too implausible a figure to have become the leader of a sophisticated state at the heart of Europe in the Twentieth Century.

He was incapable of normal human friendships, filled with rage, full of prejudice and unable to sustain intellectual argument. When we see him on the old newsreels today he looks like a ranting lunatic with a bad haircut and worse mustache.

Yet this man became one of the most powerful human beings in the world, instigated the Holocaust, and altered millions of other lives -- all for the worse. How was it possible that he ever came to power and stayed in office for so long?

Well, having met hundreds of veterans from the war -- including a number of people who encountered Hitler directly -- I believe that a key to understanding Hitler's success lies in an examination of seven aspects of his 'charismatic' leadership:

## 1) CONNECTION

Charisma exists only in a connection between the individual who is perceived as charismatic and their audience. Only because, in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the First World War, Hitler was able to articulate in a dramatic way many of the fears and prejudices already felt by his audience was he able to be successful.

In the words of Hans Frank, who heard Hitler speak in a Beer Hall in 1920, 'he uttered what was in the consciousness of all those present'.



## 2) PERSONAL VISION

Charismatic leaders despise detailed policy. There is an element of personal conviction, bordering on the magical, associated with the decision making process of a person with charisma – a magic the committee room destroys. And Hitler took this idea to extremes, outlining a wild fantasy of a world based on race and hatred in which 'racially pure' Germans were a superior people – a broad-brush vision that many found inspiring.

### 3) DISTANCE

Hitler's ability to connect with a large audience of supporters, often by reinforcing and then heightening their existing beliefs, combined with his inability to interact in a normal everyday way with individuals, helped create Hitler's 'charisma' as a leader. Hitler, almost incredibly, could be both intimate with an audience and distant with an individual.



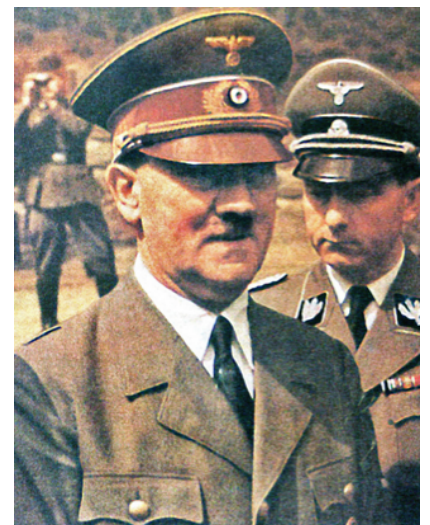
### 4) CERTAINTY

Hitler was always certain in his views – he debated with nobody. During the 1920s and early 1930s he insisted that he would be made Chancellor – even though some doubted it would ever happen. But events proved Hitler right, and after he was made Chancellor in January 1933 many people subsequently believed he was infallible in his judgment. 'The Führer is always right' almost became the motto of the whole Nazi state.

### 5) ENEMIES

It is virtually impossible to overestimate the importance of enemies to a charismatic leader. As Hitler discovered, it is much easier for charismatic leaders to define themselves by who they hate rather than by what they believe in. And Hitler was never in doubt about the single category of people he hated above all others – the Jews.

In his fantasy world the Jews were to blame for Communism, the excesses of Capitalism, liberalism, Germany's economic woes and a whole catalogue of other problems. It was all a lie, of course, but because anti-Semitic prejudice already existed, and the Jews were a small but defined group in Germany, then millions of others were content to persecute them.





## 6) HOPE

Strange as it might seem to us today, Hitler was perceived by many as an optimistic figure during the 1920s and 1930s. He promised a world where Germans – other than German Jews, of course - could recover their honour after the defeat of the First World War and in which the economy would flourish. After hearing him speak in the early 1930s, Albert Speer, for example, concluded that ‘here, it seemed to me, was hope’.

## 7) SUCCESS

Max Weber, the German social theorist who first analyzed ‘charismatic leadership’, wrote that leaders can only retain their charismatic appeal in the long term if they preside over a series of successes. And Hitler’s career is proof of Weber’s theory. Whilst belief in Hitler’s charisma grew as a result of his foreign policy successes in the 1930s, and peaked after the German defeat of France in 1940, it waned after the German loss at Stalingrad in February 1943.

At the end, the general view of Hitler was summed up by one anonymous German civilian, whose views were recorded in a Nazi intelligence report in 1944: ‘It’s always claimed that the Führer was sent to us from God. I don’t doubt it. The Führer was sent to us from God - though not in order to save Germany but to ruin it.’

