

THE CHARISMATIC CODER

The Software Developer's Guide to
Social Confidence and Emotional Freedom



Dev Career
Mastery



ZSOLT NAGY

The Charismatic Coder

The Software Developer's Guide to Social Confidence and Emotional Freedom

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1. Introduction

This book is about practical, actionable steps you can take to drastically improve your life, our financial situation, your leadership skills, and your emotional and financial freedom.

Software engineering requires discipline. You see, in order to function as a software professional, you might have learned some abstract concepts. Then you might have spent a lot of time with a computer, that did exactly what you told it to do. Even if this task was to format itself. As designing and implementing software solutions is a complex riddle, skilled developers tend to derive a lot of pleasure out of solving problems in practice. For many of us, coding is playtime.

Unfortunately, in social situations, we tend to lose our safe environment. For this reason, at some point in our lives, many of us, myself included, suffered from shyness, anxiety, emotional numbness, we felt uncomfortable in social situations, and we were afraid of initiating contact with people we perceived as higher status than us.

If you have the same struggles, I fully understand your situation. I have been there myself. More importantly, I have found a way out, so I can show you what you can do to create new life experiences.

Even though I came from a pit of self-judgement, low self-esteem, today, I am grateful for everything that happened to me. These experiences made me look for answers beyond what most people never experience in their lives.

My Story

You may already know me from my career blog, devcareermastery.com¹, from my tech blog zsoltnagy.eu², or from one of the many courses I have authored with Packt Publishing or Sitepoint. Indeed, I went through an interesting journey of improving my communication and presentation skills.

During that time, I focused on improving my leadership skills, as I started with leading just one person, and today I am leading a department of thirty people.

My salary has also skyrocketed throughout these years. Currently, I am getting multiple offers a week to my LinkedIn inbox and email addresses, and have the opportunity to work with excellent professionals.

I have participated in more than 500 tech interviews as an interviewer, and know the ins and outs of what developers do to get hired.

Based on these accomplishments, you may think, it is easy for me to write about how to be charismatic in your career. After all, I have all the reference experiences I need to feel charismatic, right? Wrong. In reality, nothing is further from the truth.

I have not always been the person I am today. In fact, I grew up as a very shy, somewhat antisocial person. My father left us when I was two. For this reason, I went to school as an insecure child, and my parasitic classmates picked up on it very well. So they bullied me on a daily basis, making my school years a horrible experience.

On top of that, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, but she refused to have it treated. Doctors claimed, they could have saved her, had she acted on time. Even though I kept telling her that she should go back to the hospital, she refused. So my unconscious

¹devcareermastery.com

²zsoltnagy.eu

mind registered, I was not man enough to save her from certain death. I thought of myself as a low status person who does not have any inner strength to accomplish anything. As a fallout of this experience, during the early years of my professional career, I was physically shaking in the presence of secure people, because I compared myself to them and concluded that I was not good enough.

I knew one thing that caused me some relief from everyday life: studying. I literally achieved my way to success. When it came to securing my skills, people wanted to team up with me. When it came to partying and fun, they chose others to mingle with. Back then my reaction was that I would build the cornerstones of an extraordinary life by devoting every energy I had to studying.

While I was building my life through getting good grades and studying, I realized people who were less skilled than me sometimes moved ahead faster. They were better risk takers, because they were not burdened by the same fears that I had. They had better social skills, as they enjoyed being around other people instead of being afraid of them. I admit, I hated their guts because of this. My rationalization was that they didn't deserve succeeding as I worked harder. Now I know that my unconscious hated the idea of success through social skills, because I didn't have these skills back then.

During my first years as a software engineer, when it was my turn to talk, I had a hesitant, high-pitched, monotonous voice, and I flooded people with facts. My monotonous voice accompanied me for a long time. I became a leader, because I was the only person in the team capable of taking responsibility. Thanks to leadership, I confronted some of my fears, and I improved in communication and assertiveness.

My insecurities still surfaced from time to time. A couple of years ago, I had to present some good news in front of more than a hundred people in my company. As we started gathering, I felt nervous. While calming myself down by feeding my body with a

big dose of sugar, the anticipation of me having to talk didn't feel that real anymore.

The marketing representatives delivered an excellent speech. But wait a minute, I am a software developer with an analytical mind. How am I supposed to entertain a wide audience? I felt a ball growing in my throat.

After each new speaker finished, I felt fear that it was going to be my turn. And indeed, there it came. I heard, "Next up is Zsolt". I moved towards the stand energetically and confidently. Unfortunately, this act didn't last long, because I managed to lose balance on the stairs. Once I regained balance, I was out of breath.

The whole message I had prepared got distorted, because I kept talking fast, and I kept grasping for air. At the same time, one of the founders in the background kept moving his hand horizontally from left to right. I thought, he is thinking, "Oh no, I can't believe how bad he is".

Eventually it turned out, the founder was dissatisfied, because my voice simply did not reach him. Given I had no idea how to do diaphragmic breathing, and I had no idea how to project my voice, he simply did not hear me. So I paused for a moment, regained my breath, and finished the presentation literally shouting a summary of what I had talked about.

The message itself was not that bad, although it was not as funny as I expected. After the presentation, I went online, and purchased a few public speaking courses to ease my guilt, because back then, I was pretty hard on myself. To this day, I have not finished watching all the content.

This was me. Now I am happy and grateful that I went through all these events. Just think about it. What would your life be like if you never had to face a challenge? You would have nothing to be proud of.

Life offers limitless opportunities. This book will show you how

to unlock these opportunities one by one. Because the process I went through can help anyone with moving towards emotional and social freedom.

First I accepted myself as I was, including my flaws and insecurities. Then through years of personal development, I slowly understood that all that happened to me was not my fault. I slowly understood that the highest intent behind my past behavior and my insecurities were to protect me. I thanked my unconscious for protecting me and enabling me to develop skills that help me earn an excellent living most likely for the rest of my life. As I let go of these insecurities, I realized that I had a hypnotic effect on people when I was just myself. My charismatic self was always shining like a sun. It was just covered by a thick layer of clouds.

I worked with small startups of size 5 to 20, a small traditional corporate business, and a 2500 people organization. I have seen consulting companies, tech companies, and software houses. As I opened up, people started showing more and more interest in me.

Fast forward to the present. I am in charge of more than thirty people, sometimes mentoring them on communication. I can cheer a lot of people up just by being myself. During networking events, I can start a conversation with anyone at any time. Oh and speeches: when I feel fear, I breathe deep, and get connected with my core. From the place of certainty, a lot of good things tend to happen.

There is nothing more satisfying than facing your fears, getting out of your comfort zone. I strongly believe that everyone needs this experience.

As I became more and more socially free, responsibility at work followed faster than I ever imagined. My team grew from three to six, then I became a lead of two teams, then I got a whole department.

I want you to experience the same transformation that made it possible for me to enjoy my life and set myself free. That's my mission.

Your Journey

My promise to you is, I will deliver everything in my power to make a positive impact on your life. The question is, will you follow the steps outlined in this book to experience breakthrough after breakthrough? Or, would you rather settle for a comfortable life and the compromises that come with it?

If you choose to go on a journey with me, congratulations! The journey will be a lot of fun. Sometimes you will experience some challenges. These are part of life. Once you start overcoming challenges, your world view will change about what's possible.

This book is all about actionable advice, because in today's world, personal development has become toxic. It is easier to market simple solutions than the truth. You see, people often pay for simple solutions to their problems, even where simple solutions do not exist. You have to take consistent and continuous action to improve your situation.

I know this is symbolic, but by the end of chapter 6, you will have earned back the price of this book with some exercises that are rewarded with money in the real world.

You will go through seven stages to build a charismatic character from the ground up as a software developer. By the end of this book, you will get everything you need to experience emotional and social freedom.

1. You will discover your values and character traits that make you a valuable and naturally charismatic person.
2. You will learn how to demonstrate your values in real life via courage, vulnerability, integrity, and having clear boundaries.
3. You will then solve the charisma-paradox by experiencing emotional states that make you effortlessly charismatic. You will be charismatic without trying.

4. Building on effortless charisma, you will start building some habits that let you experience moments in your life effortlessly that help you be charismatic in any situations. You will train your mind and body to make your naturally charismatic self better defined.
5. You will reclaim your emotional freedom by calling out and eliminating your limiting beliefs. These beliefs act like an inner critic that trick you into believing that you are not charismatic. This is your chance to let go of them.
6. With your reclaimed emotional freedom, you will go out to the real world and do some exercises that make you a better communicator both at work and outside of work. This is where you will reap immediate rewards from taking action, and you will also get a chance to earn back the price of this book.
7. Your career vision will be the culmination of this experience of building your charismatic self.

Each lesson contains some exercises that will unlock some new skills and emotional transformation for you. Together with the knowledge you gain and action you take while going through this book, you will learn how to be naturally charismatic to

- increase your influence at your job,
- gain leadership skills,
- increase your success rate at tech interviews,
- negotiate a higher salary for yourself,
- start a side-business,
- become a more rounded person in all areas of your life.

Who is this book for?

Above all, this book is for anyone who thinks that progress in our professional and personal life does not only depend on learning more facts, technologies, programming languages, or concepts.

Most of us are forced to have developed an analytical mind. As funny as it may sound, I strongly believe, the easiest way to finish a tech university is to repress your emotions. Otherwise, how could you tolerate getting to know so many abstract concepts?

These abstract concepts, computer games, lack of socialization all tax our ability to be socially free.

I hear many of my readers say, Zsolt, come on, I am an introvert, this is who I am! You know what? I am one of the biggest introverts out there. Just look at all the books and courses I have authored. Not only here, but also on PacktPub and on SitePoint. I literally regain my energy when I am alone.

There is no real difference between extroverts and introverts from the perspective of reaching social freedom. You can have the same amount of fun. Being an introvert does not cap your ability to be social.

Introverts recharge by being alone. Extroverts recharge by being surrounded with people. Once you are recharged, you have energy, and social freedom determines how much fun you can experience.

If you feel a bit anxious, a bit stressed, a bit shy around people or challenges, this book is for you.

If you feel you continuously block your emotions around people, and you have to fall back to facts instead of feelings, this book is for you.

There is only one constraint. In order to experience lasting change, you have to go out to the world and do the exercises I describe in this book. Once you gain traction, even exercises that were initially hard will become a piece of cake.

What you can expect from this book

You may ask the question what qualifies me to give you advice on improving your emotional and social freedom.

I was tempted to become a PhD, but I turned it down. I am not a psychologist, bodyworker, method acting coach, or professional therapist.

I could talk to you about my professional history in IT engineering, describing the roles I got promoted to, and describing the things I achieved in my career. Ask yourself, is this what you want to hear?

I believe, if you are reading this book, you are looking for some answers. These answers go beyond career coaching, psychotherapy, or communication coaching. Addressing your situation goes beyond citing some great quotes from excellent authors.

You can get more than ten years of advice from this book, written by someone who experienced hell on Earth on a daily basis, and more importantly, managed to find a way out.

If you went through similar life events, based on my experience, I cannot promise you that this book will be enough for you to eliminate all your insecurities without the help of qualified professionals. I also needed years of therapy. However, if you got better cards than me during your childhood, you may probably feel by now that if I made it, you can make it too. Maybe you just haven't experienced on a regular basis what your charismatic self is like.

Let the journey begin.

2. Discovering Your Charismatic Character

In every journey, the first step is to find out where we want to go.

Burning desire is the name of the game.

Have you ever seen a software developer pretending that he is working?

I can clearly recall the image of a software developer looking at some crappy legacy code of a boring system that no-one uses. This person was surrounded by others, whose vision was to extend their teenage years, without taking responsibility.

This developer was not aware of what his intellectual capacity could have been used for. More importantly, he had no idea how much this attitude cost him in his everyday life.

Your behavior at work reflects your behavior outside of work.
The quality of your life depends on your decisions you take,
and decisions you put off.

I saw this developer during the beginning of my career quite often. Especially when I looked at myself in the mirror. Because this developer was me. I was horrified at work. I had no idea what I was doing there anymore. My drive was completely lost.

How did I end up in such a situation, you may ask. The answer is, *I wanted to please other people instead of living my own dreams*. My area of competence was useless outside my job.

I still pursued a dead-end job for almost half a year, trying to make things work.

Back then I didn't realize that one day I would be dead. An average person lives around 80 years. Wasting half a year here and there may cost you a lot of amazing life experiences.

If you study human evolution, you know that we are not evolved to be happy. We are evolved to survive. Happiness and pursuing fulfillment is something new, modern life allows us to choose.

Our brain is a supercomputer, evolved and adapted to life hundreds of thousands of years ago. Back then, food was scarce.

Just imagine. One mistake in communication could get you exiled from your tribe. Exile meant an almost certain death in a hostile environment. Our brain hasn't caught up with the modern environment we live in. We still act as if we fought for survival. This is why you might have fear of public speaking, or the fear of not being good enough.

If you did something that almost cost your life, no wonder you start procrastinating and pursuing unimportant goals. Trauma protects you from making a lethal mistake in life. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, your unconscious protected you from certain death by cutting your wings and making you risk-averse.

In the old days, wasting half a year might have protected your life. Trauma allowed you to slowly get a new perspective to increase your chances of survival. In today's world, we are not fighting for survival. But we still act like it on a daily basis.

The part of you that holds you back is not bad. This part of you has his or her best intentions to protect you. Thank this part of you for doing its best to protect you. Trust it, appreciate it, then ask this part of you to retreat to the background. Because other parts of you serve you better.

Exercises

You will find some exercises at the end of each section.

Purchase a notebook to record your thoughts on this book. Writing stimulates your brain more than typing. Make use of this process. Once you get your journal, name it your personal Freedom Journal. Answer all future questions in your journal. The higher quality this journal is, the better.

Then answer the following questions:

1. Identify those parts of you that are active right now, and are sabotaging your success. You may feel anxious at times, you may feel the fear of getting fired, not getting respected, or taking things too seriously. In certain situations, we often have a hard time behaving in a way we really want to. Jot down your hurdles when a part of you is in command that does not serve you anymore.
2. Think of how these parts of you protected your survival in the past. Always assume positive intent from these parts.
3. Give thanks for these parts of you that they protected you.
4. Ask these parts to retreat and give way for others to run the show.

Defining Charisma

In order to learn how to be charismatic, we first need to know what charisma means. We will then construct our own definition that defines our expectations.

If you open some dictionaries¹, you will find many different definitions of charisma, defining its different aspects.

¹For instance, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charisma>, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/charisma>, or <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/charisma>

If you read a definition saying that charisma is something that *some people have naturally*, you have the right to debate and reject this definition. So do I. By the end of the book, you will have collected enough evidence to know that everyone is born with the ability to be charismatic. At the same time, no-one is born knowing how to be charismatic. Charisma is not a skill some people *naturally* have. It is available to everyone, and charisma can be trained.

Let's collect what it means to be charismatic: it is an ability...

- to inspire others,
- to have interesting personality traits,
- to influence others,
- to attract the attention of others,
- to be seen as a naturally attractive person,
- to be seen as a leader.

Most of these traits are seen as positive. Being a leader, being attractive and magnetic, and inspiring others are usually great traits to have.

Influencing others is a context dependent term. When we influence someone, the result can be helpful, neutral, or harmful to the individual. Influencing someone does not mean that we are manipulative. Manipulation is the act of controlling a person, often by being dishonest. Anyone can act in a manipulative way, not only charismatic people. Unfortunately, charismatic people tend to get away with manipulation more. This does not mean though that this book teaches you techniques to manipulate others. My intention is the exact opposite: to inspire you to seek for win-win situations in life, without the use of manipulation.

We can conclude that the difference between influencing and manipulation is inversion of control. It's like the difference between a library or a framework. An influencer helps his or her audience to get inspiration and take action. A manipulator pushes buttons of others to trigger calculated reactions. The former is a charismatic act, the latter is not.

The book *The Charisma Myth* by Olivia Fox Cabane places charismatic traits into three categories: presence, power, and warmth.

Believe it or not, most of this book is about a journey to discover presence. Without giving you any spoilers, let me ask you some questions. Would you like to know the operating system behind your everyday actions without worrying about them? Would you like to know where you are heading in life to stop doubting yourself if you are on the right track? Would you like to spend a lot of time engaged in the present moment, heading towards what you want, immersed so deeply that you lose track of time? Would you like to be present in social situations instead of worrying about how you are perceived? What about telling engaging stories without making an effort to impress others? If you just read the table of contents, you will know which chapters to read to answer these questions.

Obviously, this book will not tell you how to get a powerful job title, how to make a lot of money, or how to increase your competence as an expert. If you do any of these things, you will get more power, and this adds up to your charisma.

You will still improve the power aspect of charisma. In the book Emotional Intelligence 2.0, research has been presented and cited saying that your work performance positively correlates with your emotional intelligence. This book will give you a lot of tools to raise your self-awareness, eliminate your limiting beliefs, and become more emotionally intelligent and free.

The beauty of raising one's emotional intelligence is an interesting side-effect: warmth. Letting go of anxiety, worry, and self-centeredness comes with less obstacles standing in front of your naturally charismatic character. Replacing fear and worry with gratitude also helps you develop the warmth of your character. The cherry on top is the ability to tell engaging stories inspiring others.

Now that we approached charisma from different aspects, let me take the opportunity to construct my definition of charisma for the purpose of defining the message I intend to convey in this book.

Comforting magnetic presence in the face of adversity, that inspires others to take action.

My definition may be surprising to you at first glance.

The center of my definition is presence, which has an inspirational effect on others. This presence is magnetic, because it lures in the attention of other people.

The word comforting may be surprising at first. In this context, comfort is needed, because a charismatic person should be on his or her mission, while being centered and grounded. Even if everything else collapses, a charismatic person stays the stable point of reference, having the power to lead others to safety.

This power is not the power of authority, but the power of character. Think about it. In most stories, the hero often appears more charismatic before they become an authority. In the Disney story, in my opinion, Aladdin appears the most charismatic when believing that he is enough and worthy of the attention of princess Jasmine before he became a prince.

In most stories, the hero goes through trials, and these trials equip them with charisma. This is why adversity is important. The audience is captivated if they sense that a charismatic person is living on his or her edge. Once in a method acting class, my coach, [Shredy Jabarin](#)² asked me to tell a short story while fighting for balance standing on two yoga balls³. The story was recorded with my phone. We both concluded that the story was more captivating than anything that I had ever presented in front of him for a year. It is not the words that matter, but the underlying emotional state. I faced danger by falling, but I had enough experience to keep my

²[shredyjabarin.com](#)

³He was there to catch me in case I fell, so don't try this at home without experience.

balance and continuously talk. In other words, I kept my comforting magnetic presence in the face of adversity.

Does this mean that you have to take your yoga balls to your next presentation? No. Once you experience the emotional state of living on the edge, you will be able to anchor it into you and replicate it under some circumstances. Experiencing this state makes you conscious about it. Training increases your competence. Enough exposure makes this skill automatic, without consciously paying attention to it. At this stage, you don't need your yoga balls to deliver an engaging presentation. You just need to take your emotional experiences with you.

If you learn how to face adversity, you don't need adversity to display the same character traits.

In this book, you will find many challenges and exercises that your nervous system may perceive as adversity in a controlled, harmless environment. These exercises are there to make you more charismatic. We will do some more in-depth exercises and emotional work in a video course at a later stage.

Focus

The most expensive thing in your life is your attention. If you focus on passing time watching Youtube videos, your career will suffer. If you focus on coding without ever talking to anyone, your social skills will suffer.

Tech skills and soft skills have one thing in common: use them or you lose them.

We all say at times that we lack confidence in an area of our lives. Let me give you a challenge. Make just one little step every single day towards your goals. You can refine these steps later once your career vision is ready. Right now, just plan some steps in.

Of course you will face challenges along the way. You can be grateful for these challenges, because they shape your character. You will be fed up with your challenges at times. This is when the feeling of gratitude helps you the most. Just imagine. Who would you be if you never faced a challenge? Would you get a chance to enjoy your life at all?

Exercises

1. Think of three actions you have been putting off. One action should be something you can do right now. A small, simple action is enough here. Make time for the other two actions.
2. Take action right now on your first item. Record what it feels once it's done.
3. Schedule your other two actions for the next two days. If you need continuous action, make some time for it every single day.
4. Once you run out of action items, make sure you always schedule something for yourself to make yourself a better person every single day.

Now that you see that challenges are good, let's take some steps. First, you will discover your character strengths and weaknesses. Based on your character, you will be able to make better career and lifestyle choices.

The Roles We Play

Every human on the planet has potential to accomplish extraordinary things in life. Unfortunately, there is a big difference between what people will do and can do.

Ask yourself, how much time have you allocated in your life to determine your own character strengths.

I have conducted hundreds of tech interviews in my professional career, and concluded that most candidates have a hard time knowing whether they want to become a tech lead or an expert.

If you don't have plans for yourself, your destiny will be in the fate of other people.

When we are born, we are innocent and pure. Young children are not self-conscious. They do whatever they want. As we grow up, society forces us into roles. These roles require us to adapt. Our *true self* goes back to the background, and a *false adaptive self* takes control.

You may ask, what are you talking about, Zsolt? I am not playing roles!

Most of us had to play a role for our parents. We had to play a different role at school, in sports communities, during our playtime with our friends, and also at work. These roles shape our character.

My role as a child was a pleaser and an achiever. When I got a mediocre grade, my mother was very unhappy with me. So I always did my best to get the best grades from every subject. Whenever I got the second best grade, I felt anxious, worried, and I felt the world was about to end. This was my fear as an achiever and a pleaser.

We spend most of our lives playing roles. Therefore, most people hardly ever think about their own character strengths.

Exercises

1. Think of a few environments where you are forced to play a role.
2. Identify actions and behavior you are not taking or expressing because you feel you are expected to play a role.
3. Think of three ways to let go of the burden of expectations in each of your role.

The Victim Role

Originally, I wanted to discuss the victim role inside The Roles We Play section, but I find this role so important that I gave it a different section. Because your life depends on understanding that in most scenarios it is your choice whether you are a victim or not.

I get it, there are exceptions. In a war situation, or during tribal days tens of thousands of years ago, you had no choice. If you were born a lobster, you may have no choice. But as a human, you have everything you need to take yourself out from victimhood. More on lobsters later.

In my private coaching practice, a software engineer called Maurizio shared a problem with me that he felt bullied on a regular basis. Thinking back at my own situation, I concluded that it always takes two people to tango. Maurizio wanted results and not sugarcoated lies. This is good, because he was ready for a change.

I asked him what he was doing on a regular basis to attract the attention of people that bullied him. He didn't understand me first. Because he thought of himself as a victim of evil people.

Maurizio happened to follow the work of Jordan Peterson. In his book, 12 Rules for Life: an Antidote to Chaos, Jordan described how dominance hierarchies work⁴.

If you think of yourself as a winner, your body language will come across as intimidating, and your predators will look for a different prey. They may test you for a while, but eventually they give up.

If you think of yourself as a victim, a loser, you will occupy less space, your body language will communicate, I am a victim, take advantage of me! Bully me! Harrass me!

I know it is easy to consume free content of Jordan Peterson then conclude, "These evil dominance hierarchies, it's so unjust! Why

⁴If you haven't read the book 12 Rules for Life, I suggest watching this six minute long video on dominance hierarchies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xw1m87XsMgI>.

can't we just live our lives?". But let me ask you a question, is it easier to change the whole world, or is it easier to change yourself?

If you recall my story from the introduction, I was bullied at school on a regular basis. My first childhood memory of getting bullied was at kindergarten. People made fun of me, because I wanted to play with LEGO alone. At school, I was an easy victim, because I went to school with an experience that I am not worthy of the attention of my mother. School kids sized me up and unconsciously ranked me lower than themselves.

The day after my mother died, I can still recall that I sat in an English grammar class. I felt puzzled and disturbed all day, I didn't even bother retaliating to any of the attacks that day. Our head teacher was a chain smoker. Although she had never asked anyone to buy her cigarettes, she called my name during the middle of the class, gave me some money, and asked me to buy some tobacco from the store next door. Yes, back in the early 90s, this was possible. An eleven year old kid could buy cigarettes without getting asked why.

As I came back, the class was already over. I saw one of the bullies approaching me, and to my surprise, he side-hugged me and showed empathy. As I was anticipating an attack, I quickly jumped away from him. He said he would take my gym clothes down to the changing room. Still puzzled, I gave it to him.

On my way to the head teacher, I realized that she told everyone what happened. Later I found out she ordered them not to bully me with a possible threat of getting expelled from school.

As I arrived in the changing room, I didn't have enough space to change my clothes, because a guy from another class occupied more space as soon as he saw I was about to sit down there. My classmates saw this, and the same people who had bullied me on the same day, grabbed this guy, took him out, and beat him up.

This was the first time I felt some sense of status. This was weird, I never asked for any of this treatment. I didn't really like it.

A few weeks later, one of the bullies found out that I had a Super Nintendo, so he started playing with me during the weekend. We developed some commonalities and we had a lot of fun. This opened up a new experience for me.

Unfortunately, this experience didn't last long. A few months later, the novelty of me losing my mother wore off, and the same person who defended me in the gym and played computer games with me, started bullying me again.

It took me another five years of victimhood until I realized that it was my behavior that attracted this whole experience. I wonder why it took me so much time after changing schools. I was already bullied at the bootcamp, before school started.

After more than ten years of continuous bullying, one day I woke up and said to myself, I am not taking this anymore. Back then, I had no clue about dominance hierarchies or Jordan Peterson. I just knew that death was a better option for me than one more day of getting bullied.

To this day, I have no idea where my inner strength and charisma came from. But whoever wanted to make fun of me got humiliated in front of everyone. If someone attacked me verbally, I genuinely didn't care. I literally heard some funny little innocent words, and I was so good at creating a parody of these messages that everyone stopped bullying me within a week.

Not as if I saught their company, but I was accepted as a new cool kid. In my last year, the same people took good care of me when I tested my limits and got drunk at a school excursion.

Circumstances do not define you. Decisions do. Actions do.

If you were a victim for ten years, it doesn't matter. All that matters is what you're going to do in the future.

After this story, I asked Maurizio, how he could have attracted bullying.

He started opening up. One character trait of his was that he was continuously caught up in unimportant debates, where he defended his opinion religiously. I had picked up on this character trait of Maurizio before as well. In fact, I asked him to channel his energy towards creating meaningful things, not debating for no reason.

I recalled my first mentor from ten years ago. He asked me, “How would you describe unsuccessful people?”. I looked at him puzzled. Then he added: “They are always right.” They have to be right all the time, and this is why they are not open to learning new experiences. If you cannot learn, you are destined to be unsuccessful.

So there is this ego thing in Maurizio. Where may it come from? Possibly some form of narcissism.

Maurizio’s second issue was the quality of his communication. During our video calls, I picked up on him sending me mixed signals at time, and having trouble with clearly explaining what he wanted. If I didn’t always understand him, others might have had the same problem.

When I asked him why he talks in such a complicated way, he kept rejecting my simple sentences. “It is not that easy, others may perceive me as a bad person”. Bingo. Caring too much about what other people think of you. Do you remember The Roles We Play section? Same problem. Lack of self-esteem. You think your message is not important.

When we lack self-esteem, but we want to appear confident, our ego takes control, and our behavior becomes narcissistic.

As Maurizio kept worrying about how he is perceived, he created a false self that no-one wanted to interact with. So others made fun

of him and they started bullying him.

I recommended Maurizio to start catching his thoughts each time he finds himself in a useless debate, and instead of debating, his new mission will be to understand the opinion of the other side.

Clear communication was another mission that needed practice.

On top of the new actions, I recommended continuous therapy for Maurizio until he processes this issue of wanting to be right all the time.

Exercises

1. Find three areas in your life, where you have a belief that your circumstances define who you are and what you are capable of.
2. Find three past events for each area in your life that imply why your belief is false.
3. Find three actions you can start doing right now to stop being a victim.

In question 2, if you didn't find any reasons, or your reasons seem fake, chances are that your belief is actually true. For instance, your genetics may not make it possible for you to win an olympic gold medal at swimming, whatever you do. You may never grow 25cm (10 inches) in height. You can still reframe the situation and find an empowering meaning in things you can control in your life.

What Are Your Character Strengths?

If you accept that the expectations of other people is more important than your own future, no wonder that your burning desire to accomplish anything in your life vanishes. You may spend your life feeling a victim of circumstances that are beyond your control.

Our character is shaped by the roles we spend our lives in. If you are in a destructive community, your character will be shaped in the wrong direction.

When you are surrounded by a toxic peer group, your character strengths will not manifest without exceptional commitment and work.

In my first book, [The Developer's Edge](#)⁵, I dedicated a full section on unlocking your potential by building your self-esteem. Check out Section 2.2 of the free sample on Leanpub.

One sign of a low self-esteem is when you compare yourself to others. This is unhealthy, because there will always be someone who is better than you at something.

Always compare yourself to your past self. Never compare yourself to others.

Throughout the beginning of my software developer career, I worked for a self-made entrepreneur. His message initially resonated with me, because he inspired me to become an entrepreneur myself one day. He clearly valued risk taking over common sense. This lead to his downfall.

After a while, things changed. He started behaving like a jerk when we talked to him. He hacked his way to high status body language, and always wanted to exert control and dominance over others.

We, software developers tend to be intimidated by hardcore business people, especially if we are treated as lower status individuals.

⁵<https://leanpub.com/thedevelopersedge>

In that environment, software developers were “programmers paid to get things done”.

Some risk takers emerged from the pack, not because they did a good job, but because they shared or mimicked character traits of our business leader. These people could keep their jobs even though they did absolutely nothing. Some of them even got raises.

There was a developer who often worked overtime to get things done. He received the lowest salary out of the whole team.

If you want to become a better professional, you have to take some decisions.

What is your best, second best, third best, and fourth best option?

- a. See what you need to do to get ahead, get promoted and make more money, even if you have to act against your values and beliefs
- b. Stay true to your values, and continue working hard
- c. Stay true to your values, but learn how to sell your performance
- d. Resign

You will find some hints after the Exercises section. Before continuing reading, do this exercise.

To break free from the expectations of other people, you have to shift your focus.

Your character is shaped by what you focus on. Your values determine your focus. Therefore, your values shape your character.

Unfortunately, most of us pay a lot of attention on things we don't want in our lives. Think about it. In most magazines and news TV shows, there are more bad news than positive news. Even if most people hate bad news, they still spend a lot of time talking about politics, murder, violence, and things they don't want in their own lives.

When we pay attention to things, we pay the price of where our attention is. We also pay the opportunity cost of where our attention is not.

If you face challenges in your life, wouldn't it be logical to fix these problems before checking out the latest airplane disaster?

If you are frustrated because you are overweight, wouldn't it be logical to focus on losing fat and gaining muscle instead of eating chocolate every day?

Unfortunately, most of these processes are not conscious. These unconscious choices are driven by our need to survive in an environment. We learned in the previous section that our life is not in immediate danger anymore. However, we are evolved for those dangers. When we feel fear, we overeat, or we get depressed, we just run our genetic program.

A chocolate bar would have increased your chances of survival hundreds of thousands of years ago. Today, you just get obese.

When I determined my values, health was an important factor for me. At the same time, I drank two to three liters of diet coke every single day. This horrible liquid weakened my bones and made my body acidic. Sometimes I also ate chocolate and fast food.

Back then, I didn't realize the following truth:

There is a big difference between values you claim to have and values you live by.

Your focus is valuable. Treat it accordingly.

Taking a Career Decision - Hints

Remember the story of the entrepreneur and risk taking? It's time to revisit the question. Which option did you choose?

- a. See what you need to do to get ahead, get promoted and make more money, even if you have to act against your values and beliefs
- b. Stay true to your values, and continue working hard
- c. Stay true to your values, but learn how to sell your performance
- d. Resign

You can read my answers here.

Option (a) may give you the highest short term benefit. Unfortunately, your self-esteem will suffer, and therefore, you will eventually make less money in the long run. Why? Because you concentrate on developing skills that you don't need. One day, you will resign or you will get fired.

Option (b) is not much better for your self-esteem even if you are treated like trash on a regular basis. Settling for horrible working conditions is not advised.

Back in the days, I chose option (c). This was a suboptimal choice for me. Selling your performance is a great thing in general. Unfortunately, I did it, because I compared myself to others, and I also wanted to impress my boss.

You can also choose option (c) because of a better motivation: out of the desire to help others understand how they can cooperate with us. I know, some of you may associate shame with marketing and sales. Deception is indeed not the best thing for your self-esteem if your product is bad. But hey, you are offering one of the best

products out there an entrepreneur can rely on. Being shy does not serve you. Being shy does not serve your leaders either.

Having lived through this situation, today, I would clearly choose (d). I had options to make more money and be respected at the same time. I just didn't know about them, and I believed I didn't have them.

Your priorities may be different. Maybe option (a) makes you a lot of money and helps you develop skills that are important to you. Maybe you are in the middle of a recession, and need a job badly, so you may choose (c) in favor of (d). Everything is relative.

Exercises

Open your journal, and write down the answers to the following questions:

1. Why did you become a software developer?
2. Identify and describe three social roles you play on a weekly basis. Include at least one role from your work.
3. Identify three activities in life that you focus on way too much even though you don't need them. Describe these activities in a few sentences, and write down what it costs you to keep pursuing these activities.
4. Identify three activities in life that you should focus on and want to focus on, but you still neglect them. Describe these activities in a few sentences, and write down what it costs you to keep postponing these activities.

Values and Charisma

When I was eight years old, once I fantasized about skipping school. Sure enough, I pretended going to school in the morning, but instead, I started discovering the streets near my house.

As time passed, I felt more and more guilty. I was supposed to be in the classroom already. I had never done anything similar before.

A few hours later, I met a friend of our family. We greeted each other, and I immediately started explaining myself. “There are dangerous dogs out there!” - I said, justifying what I am doing there during school time.

Our neighbor then warned my mother about me wandering around the district. She jumped in her car and found me.

Actually, I can clearly recall that at that time, my punishment was my own guilt. She respected me for my adventurous side, and asked me to promise her that I would not do this again in the future.

Fast forward more than twenty years. As a tech lead, I had a team member whose performance was not too good. We considered firing him, and he was aware of the pressure.

One day, I heard from a non-technical person that our team member apologetically explained himself why it takes him so much time to complete his task. He had never done this before. He felt guilty for being a lazy developer for years.

I know this developer very well. He is a genuinely good person, and he wanted to help. Unfortunately, instead of living his values, he took most of his decisions out of fear. The fear of not getting fired or punished.

Defying our values often causes guilt and apologetic behavior. Therefore, defying our values makes us less charismatic.

When we don't live according to our values, we tend to feel guilt, and we tend to explain ourselves even when we don't need to. Others pick up on our insecurities. After all, no-one finds an overly apologetic person charming.

When we stay true to our values, we tend to be unapologetic. We tend to be charming. Why?

Because unapologetic and confident behavior creates a vacuum. This vacuum attracts and absorbs the attention of other people.

When you display one of your values by acting in alignment with it, others will find you more charismatic.

When you act according to your values, you are unshakeable, centered, and grounded. We can even conclude the following:

Charisma is based on acting according to your values.

Let me conclude with one disclaimer. Pretending that you act according to your values does not work. You are charismatic if you don't try to be charismatic.

Charisma is a side-effect of acting according to your values. If you act just to be charismatic, your efforts won't work. Acting charismatic is not valuable. Your values are valuable. People are drawn to your values, not to fake behavior.

Exercises

1. Recall a situation when you explained yourself for something that needed no explanation. Did you act according to your values?
2. Recall another situation when you acted according to your values, and others looked up to you or praised your action.

Did you feel charismatic?

3. Recall a situation when you wanted to look charismatic, yet you failed to impress others with your efforts. Was there anything fake in your behavior?

Discovering Your Own Values

We are approaching the highlight of this chapter. You already know why values are important in life.

Your values are what you focus on. When you live according to your values, your self-esteem grows, because you respect yourself more. When you think of your values, think of the person you really want to be.

I will now lead you through a process of discovering your own values. I used this process when I wanted to discover why I was not happy with my life.

Step 0: Select some inspiring music you will play in the background. Be playful, and make sure the music does not drain your intellect. The [Shire track from The Lord of the Rings](#)⁶ will do. You could also use the [Southampton Montage from the Titanic](#)⁷⁸.

Step 1: For at least ten minutes uninterrupted, write about what you find important in your life today. What is your life about? What do you do on a regular basis? How do you act with friends, family, colleagues? What side-projects you pursue? What adventures do you enjoy?

⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LML6SoNE7xE>

⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfGYD1Vnk80>

⁸The idea of playing music while you perform a creative task is to unlock your emotions, get emotional leverage, and make you focused. Tony Robbins uses more than a hundred songs during his live events to lock in the emotional transformation the participants go through. Robbins Research keeps updating the songs they use during live events to put people into empowering emotional states. Youtube has many playlists that reveal the songs used. [This playlist](#) is one of them.

It is important that you should continuously write. If you can't think of anything, just write, "I ran out of thoughts". This exercise is called stream of consciousness.

Don't worry about structure. Just let your imagination flow.

Step 2: For priming you a bit more, let me share a great article with you on [Values inspired by the work of Tony Robbins](#)⁹. Read this article, and start reflecting on your own life.

Step 3: Go to [viacharter.org](#), and check out the six groups of character strengths on the [Character Strengths page](#)¹⁰. You can also use the [PDF version](#)¹¹.

Select your top ten values and order them.

If the order is not obvious, ask yourself which one is more important for you. Think deeply about edge cases and imagine yourself in situations when you can live according to one of your values, but you cannot live according to the other.

Don't limit yourself to the values in the VIA character strengths list. If you find another value important in your life, go for it!

Step 4: Register an account on [viacharter.org](#), and fill out the character strengths survey by clicking the Take the Free VIA Survey button on the [Character Strengths page](#)¹².

Creating an account, filling in the survey, and evaluating the survey is free.

Once you are done, you get a list of values to your inbox.

Step 5: Compare and contrast your results from the survey and resolve the conflicts between the two lists. Just like a good old git merge.

⁹<http://sourcesofinsight.com/change-your-values-change-your-life/>

¹⁰<http://www.viacharter.org/www/Character-Strengths#>

¹¹http://www.viacharter.org/www/Portals/0/Graphic%202_1.pdf

¹²<http://www.viacharter.org/www/Character-Strengths>

Values you selected as important, tend to rank low in the survey when:

- the value you selected is not your value, but a value you settled for. This can be due to social conditioning or parental influence. In this case, your value should go down in importance in your life.
- the value you selected is something you want in your life, but your actions do not show that you are living your values. Review your actions.

Congratulations for going through the exercises! You are a champion.

Hopefully you have more clarity over what behavior and actions are worth allowing in your life, and what behavior and actions you should stay away from.

In the next chapter, you will gain some confidence and courage to live according to your values.

3. The Courage to Live Your Values

In the first chapter, you went through a process to discover your values. To live your values on a daily basis, you have to develop some momentum. Set yourself up for success, and learn how to get the courage to set and defend your boundaries.

The Cost of Living Your Values

You learned in the previous chapter that your self-esteem shrinks whenever you don't live according to your values. Unfortunately, living according to your values is not always easy. Let me give you a hypothetical example.

Imagine you live in a relationship, where you two deeply care for each other. Suppose your significant other is about to develop an allergic reaction to a medicine, and you need calcium urgently to calm down this reaction. You are supposed to show up in the office by 9AM every day, so you call the office that you would arrive late because of an emergency. You sprint to the pharmacy and secure the calcium you need. Once the emergency is over, you arrive at work twenty minutes late.

Seemingly, everyone is settled. A few minutes later, your boss asks you to go with him to a meeting room. He went on a rant: "There are certain rules in this company. And these rules must be respected by everyone, without exceptions." He told me that I violated these rules and he is verbally warning me that this is the last time he accepts that.

At the end of this paragraph, stop reading this book for a moment, and start thinking about your reaction. How would you respond? Either write down your response in your journal, or record your sound with your phone.

I am not kidding. Do this exercise, you will benefit from this.

Welcome back and congratulations for doing this exercise. I will reveal my thoughts at the end of this chapter, just before the reading list.

Let's jump ahead a few weeks. Imagine you played by the rules and came in a bit before 9. Around 10:30, the head of HR asks you where your boss is. There is a candidate waiting for him to start an interview. You tell the head of HR, that you have no idea where your boss is. He appears half an hour later. You approach him and tell him, "HR was looking for you, she said it was urgent. Where were you?"

Your boss becomes speechless for a few seconds, then he mumbles, "I had an errand". He tries to establish connection with the candidate again, but fails. After some silent swearing, he continues work. You get a sense that he was caught off-guard, and he completely forgot about the interview.

All of a sudden, two sentences come to your mind. "There are certain rules in this company. And these rules must be respected by everyone, without exceptions."

What would you do? Write down your actions.

Fast forward another few weeks. Your boss is getting some heat. If you quit, he knows his project will fail, and that would have major consequences on his reputation. You are expecting guests who came to your city for the first time. According to your calculations, you could pick them up, escort them to your place, and come back to work by taking a lunch break of 1.5 hours. The rules set by your boss state that the lunch break is up to 1 hour long.

The day before the event, you inform your boss in writing cc'ing HR

that your lunch break may take half an hour longer than usual, so you'll come in half an hour earlier that day. He does not respond.

Just before you were about to leave for your break, your boss comes out of the blue and asks you to come back in an hour, because he wants to assemble a meeting with your team. What would you do in this situation? Write your answers down.

How do you feel about your decisions you took in these three scenarios?

If you are satisfied, chances are, you took some conflicts. Some of you might have resigned on the spot right after the first scenario. Actually, I respect you for your decision if it comes out of your values and beliefs and not due to ego problems.

If you live according to your values, conflicts are sometimes inevitable. These conflicts are the price of respecting yourself for your decisions.

Of course there are some situations where you have no other choice but to obey. In a war in the 19th Century, you did not have the luxury of defying orders, unless you wanted to face death penalty.

Therefore, in your situation, your answers might be different than my answers. In the short run, you may be forced to enter into compromises. In the long run, it is your responsibility to find colleagues or clients who enable you to work on your terms.

Remember, conflicts are sometimes inevitable. To successfully navigate around these conflicts, you need confidence.

Hacking True Self-Confidence in Your Career

A cornerstone in our career plan is self-confidence. The ability to feel that we are enough. The ability to feel that we are worthy of achieving any goals we want.

Confidence is a complex topic. Developing true self-confidence is a lifelong journey. In this section, you will just take one step. You will feel confidence in your abilities by discovering your character strengths.

You see, most people lack confidence, because they don't live according to their values.

I can still recall one of my interviews as a fresh graduate. I had many options, but most of these options didn't want to pay above a junior developer salary range. There were a few exceptions: consulting companies and some smaller companies that paid half of the salary in cash, without paying taxes and social security on the amount in cash.

This money trick bothered me a lot back then. I found taxes just a constant factor in the profits of a business. I reasoned, if a business is growing exponentially, it is their best interest to pay their developers legally. Some companies even invented a weird term for paying half the salary in cash. It was the "moving" part of the salary, as it moved undercover in an envelope.

I continued searching for options, but no-one wanted to bid for me in the range I wanted to be in. So I gave a company with the "moving" salary another chance. I went in the office, and started talking to employees there, discovering what projects they were working on.

I can still recall a demotivated employee telling me about the work he was doing, using a lot of hardcore terminology and

abbreviations I didn't understand. As I looked around, none of the developers wanted to change the world in there. I just couldn't imagine myself spending my next years in a dark office lit by neon lights, surrounded by demotivated people.

Eventually, I turned down the offer at an expense of settling for less money.

In hindsight, I found out that other fresh graduates were more successful than me in convincing their employers to pay them more. Whenever it came to the salary situation, I clearly felt uncomfortable. I wanted more money, but I felt I didn't deserve it. So people didn't place trust in my abilities.

In the job market, your grades do not matter. You have to convince your potential employers that they make a great deal by hiring you.

Respect has to be earned. If you don't think of yourself as an important person, others are less likely to respect you.

I studied and got good grades, because my mother conditioned this habit into me. I literally lived the life of a zombie who had no clue what his life should be about.

You may ask, what got me out of this miserable situation.

Sometimes I got into a deeply immersive experience Mihály Csíkszentmihályi¹ calls *flow*. Flow is a state when you are deeply immersed in an activity to the extent that you lose track of time. You stop being self-conscious. You just take action without considering how you are perceived and how other people judge you. In a flow state, you are naturally charismatic.

Flow experiences help you demonstrate your values to the fullest.

¹Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience (Harper Perennial Modern Classics) by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi

When you are in flow, you have everything you need to learn from this book or any course on charisma. Charisma is in you, as you are, without any changes. It is you.

You don't have to feel in a certain way or act in a certain way. You don't need to learn anything to be charismatic. There are situations in life when anyone can be charismatic. Flow states help you experience this.

When you are in flow, you are naturally confident. You are unstoppable.

Flow experiences helped me break through some of my limitations and give meaning to my life. I started enjoying some activities, and started controlling my focus.

Once I got control over my focus and values, I was more in alignment with what I wanted in my life.

You can experience the same effects on a daily basis. In the rest of this book, you will learn how to express your values better through seeking experiences that cause you flow. As an added bonus, you will enjoy these experiences more than your regular activities at work.

True self-confidence is a side-effect of high self-esteem. You build your self-esteem by living according to your values. Choose your battles, start small, and continuously expand.

Exercises

Most of us spend some time in depressive states, feeling frustration, anger, resentment, or grief. Remember, focus is power. By shifting focus, you can empower yourself.

1. Name a few things you really enjoyed and loved doing before the event happened that made you lose confidence in your own abilities.
2. Describe these events in the next ten minutes. Go on a rant of how great life was before this event happened. Give yourself permission, don't hold yourself back. If you are in a place where you are alone, you are not self-conscious, and no-one listens to you, talk out loud. If not, you can just write in your journal, and do the talking afterwards.
3. Find one activity you could really enjoy even if you are lacking confidence right now. If you can't find any, you will surely find something you can get deeply immersed in. This can be jogging, studying, a captivating movie, or even meditation. Anything that helps you experience some flow.
4. Notice how confident are you while doing that activity.

Confidence, Ego, and Narcissism

As I got stronger, I started asserting more space. People started listening to me more. As I started thinking of myself as an important person, my self-esteem got higher, and I got confident.

Many people are afraid of asserting themselves, because they associate confidence with narcissism and an ego-driven life.

Being narcissistic does not have much to do with being confident. Narcissism is a personality disorder, where you see a distorted image of yourself, and you want to be like your image. In the mean time, you live the path of self-destruction, as this false life slowly poisons your everyday life.

Ego-driven and narcissistic behavior are both compensations for lack of self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Asserting yourself means that you give yourself permission to pursue what you want from your life and your career. Asserting yourself means that you don't have to live your life according to the expectations of others.

You have your own character strengths, so the expectations of other people may not apply to you.

Once you stop pleasing other people at the expense of your own needs and desires, your life will be free.

To find out your true needs and desires, you need to know your values.

This is why we will continue with your values in the next section.

Exercises

1. Do you feel shame around being confident? Describe this shame in detail.
2. Are your negative feelings about being confident true, or they are just nonsense you poison yourself with? Support or deny your feelings about being confident.

The Courage to be Vulnerable

Now you know that narcissism is not a sign of true self-confidence.

Confidence is not about behaving like a jerk. Confidence is rather the side-effect of a healthy self-esteem.

When you don't work on your challenges and you don't live according to your values, you stop respecting yourself, and therefore, your self-esteem shrinks. This is an unconscious process.

Imagine your self-esteem as the immune system of your mind. If you don't respect yourself, you will poison your mind with negative self-talk.

Working on our problems is often hard, because life is far too comfortable even when we make absolutely no effort. Survival in today's world is not a challenging task at all. Most people choose the path of lower resistance. This is why today's society suffers from low self-esteem.

It may happen that you work on your problems on a regular basis. Yet, the results are not there yet.

Hard work is often not enough. The harder you work, the more likely it is that you don't want to come across as weak. As you start hiding your weaknesses and insecurities, you sabotage your own progress. This is why vulnerability helps you. You will not only get allies in the form of others helping you. Your biggest ally is yourself. By being vulnerable and by not caring about how you are perceived, you raise your self-esteem, and you focus on solving your problems instead of hiding them.

Many software developers tend to just nod and listen even when they have no clue what the other person is talking about. After all, we don't want to be judged for not knowing something, right?

The vulnerable solution is, you confess that you ask for clarification even at the expense of the other person figuring out that there is a fundamental flaw in your understanding.

No-one knows everything. Therefore, others will understand you when you are vulnerable. They may even support you.

When I was really down due to a personal issue, I called out my lead and told him, listen, I am facing a life crisis right now. I will do my best at work, but don't expect miracles until I resolve my issues. I thanked him for his understanding, and got maximum flexibility from him to resolve my issues.

Had I attempted to fake confidence, my boss would have discovered that something was temporarily wrong with my focus.

During my exams and job interviews, I always admitted when I didn't know something, and asked the cooperation of my interviewer. I put in my thoughts, my interviewer put in some hints about what he wanted to hear, and the result was an enjoyable conversation. Vulnerability made me relatable, because no-one knows everything.

It takes a lot of courage to be vulnerable. Most people choose faking confidence instead.

Exercises

1. Recall three situations in your life when your insecurities made you fake confidence, and you got caught.
2. Recall three situations in your life when the act of being vulnerable resulted in other people supporting you.

Integrity

You live your life with integrity if you live according to your values. You develop a moral code, describing how life works for you.

For instance, if leadership is an important skill for you, you will not wait for others to act when you can act too. You will also develop your leadership abilities even when no-one is watching.

Integrity is when you do the right thing even when no-one is watching.

Once it was Friday late afternoon. I was about to leave the office, when the managing director approached me with an urgent problem. As I was the only one around, I had to be the one who would fix the error in the system of another team.

My MD told me, it is all right to just kill the process that is currently running to avoid exposure to a security vulnerability.

I could have simply shut down the process and go home in ten minutes. Something was fishy in this story though, so I chose to explore it.

It turned out that the security vulnerability my MD had described simply didn't exist in the system. Once I got this suspicion, I could have just emailed the MD that the threat was not there, and my reasoning would have been defendable.

I chose to go on and prove the assumption instead. This took me another half an hour. Eventually, it was crystal clear to me that the security vulnerability was a false alarm. I informed my MD, and went home.

My MD didn't read the proof. I worked on the proof because it was the right thing to do given the severity of the problem.

Invisible victories slowly build your self-esteem, resulting in a confidence boost in other areas of your life.

If you think of yourself as an engineer, a professional, you do your best even on Friday evening, and even near the end of the last day

of your contract. Even when no-one is watching.

Exercises

1. Identify three areas in your life, where you need more discipline to commit to a decision. You may combat your addiction to social media, or lack of sports, or lack of being social.
2. Think about some situations when you had a chance to experience an invisible victory, but you didn't. Write down how you felt afterwards.
3. Set yourself up for success. Schedule three situations for each day in the upcoming three weeks, when you will do something that would result in an invisible victory. We are designing a new habit here, so you will need the commitment to follow through. Three times 21 small victories over the next three weeks. Write down how you feel each day.
4. After these three weeks, reflect on the changes in your life. Did these invisible victories make you a more charismatic person?

Exercising Your Boundaries

Values and integrity are great in theory. Unfortunately, we have no tools yet to put theory into practice. Therefore, it's time to learn about personal boundaries.

Your personal boundaries defend your integrity. Boundaries make it possible to live according to your values in the real world.

To exercise your boundaries, you have to believe that your opinion is important. Once you truly believe this, you will not chicken out

from entering into conflicts when someone tries to violate your boundaries.

What are examples for boundary violations at the workplace?

1. Your boss expects you to show up at his private party.
2. Your CEO orders you to vote for a political party.
3. Your product manager expects you to commit to a deadline without agreeing to the scope of the project, then he extends the scope after you agreed to the deadline, and keeps telling everyone that you committed to the deadline.
4. Your colleague never double checks his work, and expects you to take care of his flaws.
5. Your boss expects you to lie to management about the status of your project.
6. Your colleague sets you up for failure, then spreads lies about your performance to management so that he gets the promotion instead of you.

These boundary violations have one thing in common: people expect you to take responsibility for their own actions.

Remember as long as you live: it takes two people for a boundary violation to succeed.

If you let people get away with violating your boundaries, you are responsible for the consequences.

For instance, if you value honesty, you will not lie to management even if your boss orders you to. If you get fired, so be it. Software developers are still in high demand, you will find a job, where you don't have to lie.

You may say: "Jim, I understand you have reasons to blur the truth. At the same time, honesty is an important value in my life.

Therefore, I am not in a position to cooperate with you. Please leave me out from the meeting.”

This hypothetical answer defends your boundaries by asserting yourself in a vulnerable way. Vulnerability entails some form of a self-disclosure. You don’t explain yourself. You just show your values, and let the other person deal with his emotions. After all, your boss is responsible for his emotions, not you.

A brief side-note about bullying. I have more than ten years of experience in this field, unfortunately from the receiving end. Count me an expert. It always takes two to tango. It took me more than ten years to learn that I cannot let other people violate my boundaries. Once I started defending my boundaries, the same people who had been bullying me for years, stopped.

Defending your boundaries is the most important habit in this chapter. Spend a lot of time on identifying how your boundaries are violated, and how you react.

Exercises

1. Identify events in your life when you allowed other people to violate your boundaries. Make sure at least two of these events are related to your profession.
2. Formulate a constructive message for each event and practise it in front of the mirror until you strongly believe what you say.
3. Start small and plan in some small victories in your life when you defend against boundary violations in situations that don’t matter to you. One example is when someone jumps in the queue in front of you. Or you don’t pay a tip when you are not satisfied with a service. It is important that you experiment in a low risk environment.
4. Think of situations where you could have violated the boundaries of other people. Examine what you said and did and

change your behavior.

We will stop here with exercises on boundary violations. I cannot guarantee that after reading these two chapters, you will learn how to disagree with your boss when defending your boundaries.

For instance, if you are in debt right now, and you live in a small city where employment opportunities are scarce, disagreeing with your boss might not be the best choice for you.

There is an important negotiation concept called BATNA: Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement. Your BATNA is your best option when your boss fires you for disagreeing with him.

If your BATNA is unemployment, me advising you to defend your boundaries from your boss is dangerous advice. If your job is in real danger, I can only tell you to increase your BATNA before proceeding.

Be aware that after years of boundary violations, initially, you may come across as highly uncalibrated in your effort to defend your boundaries. Proceed with caution when risks are high, and seize every opportunity to grow when risks are low or your BATNA gives you a solid backup plan.

Living Your Values - My Solution

You had three scenarios at the beginning of this chapter. I asked you to write down your choice in your journal, but I haven't told you about what I think. This is unfair, isn't it?

First of all, let me add that this hypothetical boss was a horrible leader, and you deserve better working conditions just based on human rights. As soon as you find out that anyone in your company is treated like that, your first reaction should be to find a new workplace. There are more opportunities out there than you'd think. For some inspiration, check out [my article²](#) on this topic.

²<http://devcareermastery.com/find-the-workplace-of-your-dreams/>

Let me enumerate what I would have done in these situations.

If you hadn't realized in these three scenarios, your boss most likely wanted to exert his dominance on you and wanted to make your life miserable. The reasons do not matter. Most likely he wanted to fire you, but near the end, you found out that he temporarily needed you to complete a project. These situations are hostile from the perspective of your career. You have to treat them accordingly.

Scenario 1: an emergency is an emergency. My values dictate that I would even save a stranger had he asked for help on the streets. By the way, if you had first aid training, you would learn, this is your duty as a citizen even if you don't feel that way. My point of view on this matter is unshakeable, so I would tell my boss that life threats are considered as vis major events, and I am ready to get fired if he thinks that his rules are stronger.

Depending on your BATNA, you can do multiple things.

If you need your job badly, you may end the discussion there and start focusing on building your BATNA before fighting your boss. If you just go back to work and do nothing, your self-esteem will shrink.

If you know that your boss cannot fire you, because he depends on you, you may override the dominance hierarchy by reminding him of his position and telling him that he has violated your boundaries and this will be reported to HR. You may also tell him that in case you got any negative consequences, he would face a lawsuit.

If you can get a similar job at any time, your BATNA is high, so you have nothing to lose. You may just choose to resign right there and let your boss deal with the trouble he caused himself.

Scenario 2: I personally value integrity and taking responsibility. If I expect others to respect rules, I follow the same rules. I have no professional respect for people who preach one thing and do something else. On top of that, I strongly believe that if you make a mistake, you should admit it. My values are in clear conflict with

what my boss represents in this scenario. Therefore, it is evident that I will enter into conflict at the right time.

If your BATNA is low, you may just stay silent and double down on increasing your BATNA. You cannot lose anything by documenting this event and submit the description of both scenarios to HR once your BATNA is high. Possibly with your conditional resignation in the form of either you or him.

Scenario 3: If this scenario was in a vacuum, my personal values would not dictate a defined choice. Depending on the circumstances, I could choose to skip welcoming my friends and telling them that we would meet later, or I could choose to stick to my request. The history of events clearly indicate to me though that submissive behavior at this stage would open an endless vortex of boundary violations from the end of my boss.

By the time you reach this point, your BATNA should be high enough to risk immediate resignation. If not, notice that you most likely win time, because your boss needs you temporarily. You may choose to tell him that he violated your boundaries by delaying his answers by a full day. If he responds that he misunderstood you, or he didn't open your email, you may respond that it is not your problem. Or, if there are rules in the company on expected response time, you may tell him that he is expected to respect those rules too.

Note that you may face a dark triad (i.e. narcissistic, machiavellianistic psychopath), and in this case, you have to proceed with extreme caution with what you say, because he may choose an irrational lose-lose situation and fire you on the spot.

If you did an acceptable job with your BATNA, you should already have a saved template conditional resignation with a detailed description on what happened during Scenarios 1 and 2, and you tell HR that unless your boss is fired for abusing his power, you do not wish to work for an organization tolerating this behavior. If not, you just inform your friends that they have to wait fifteen minutes and you construct an accurate resignation letter. It takes

you one minute to submit your resignation, you leave for your 1.5 hour lunch break, and you let your boss worry and face the consequences.

This hypothetical boss was not charismatic in these scenarios at all. Let's conclude this lesson with a small lesson on charisma:

The carrot and the stick don't work with intelligent people in the long run. Intelligent people have options or find options fast when facing threat. Intelligent people are in for the journey if their values are in alignment with the values represented by their leaders. Govern based on values, not based on punishing people and exerting dominance.

Reading List

If you need more help with your professional code of conduct, assertive communication, nonviolent communication, and negotiation, I can recommend a few books for you.

Your best course of action is to read them all in the next half a year, and practice.

1. **Rober C. Martin: The Clean Coder.** This book gives you clear examples on how to set your boundaries at the workplace and how to keep your professional code of conduct.
2. **Manuel J. Smith: When I Say No, I Feel Guilty.** The best book I have ever read on assertive communication and setting boundaries. There are countless examples in the book for defending your psychological boundaries, while the other person does every dirty trick possible to violate your boundaries.

3. **Dale Carnegie: How to Win Friends and Influence People.** A classic book that helps you with communication in general. This book teaches you that there are only losers in an argument. You can reach what you want by listening to the needs of the other person and putting your ego aside.
4. **Marshall Rosenberg: Nonviolent Communication.** This book helps you defend your boundaries without leaving any room for a heated debate or argument.
5. **Chris Voss: Never Split the Difference: Negotiate as if Your Life Depended on It.** If you need some advice on negotiation, read this book.
6. **Marshall Goldsmith: What Got You Here Won't Get You There.** This book is relevant for work once you are promoted to heights where tech skills don't matter anymore. Everyone is good enough. Your soft-skills determine your success. This book gives you actionable advice on how to communicate at the workplace.

I can also recommend my book, [The Developer's Edge](https://leanpub.com/thedevelopersedge)³, where we go through most of the principles outlined in the above books in the context of software developers. Regardless of whether you own my book, you will thank yourself later for scheduling in the above six books on improving your communication skills.

I know, this is a lot of material. I just gave you the best ones according to my own opinion. Think about it. You may have lived twenty, thirty, or even more years letting other people violate your boundaries on a regular basis. Don't expect to read fifteen pages and experience a change overnight.

Read, learn your lessons, and put things into practice in low-risk environments. For instance, you can go to an interview even if you don't want to change your job. A tech interview is free communication practice. I can already see hiring managers hate

³<https://leanpub.com/thedevelopersedge>

my guts for this advice. I can only tell them that this is a way for them to give back to the developer community.

If you don't like reading, you can also listen to the audiobook version on Audible or Scribd. In both platforms, the first month is free.

4. Escaping the Charisma Paradox

This content is not available in the sample book. The book can be purchased on Leanpub at <http://leanpub.com/The-Charismatic-Coder>.

Defining the Charisma Paradox

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The Science of Flow

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Challenges and Feedback

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Gamify Your Experience

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Social flow

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The importance of enjoying the process

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Missions

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The Importance of Character Traits

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5. Habits - The Cornerstones of a Charismatic Life

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Your Habits

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How will I make time for all this?

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Nutrition

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Sports

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Meditation

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Arts, dancing, vocal coaching

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Arts

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Dancing

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Vocal coaching

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6. Reaching Emotional Freedom

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The reward of getting rid of limitations

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Understanding Limiting Beliefs

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Conditions for emotional change

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Limiting beliefs and your communication

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Inner and Outer Approaches

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