

CUES: Charismatic Communication with Vanessa Van Edwards

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SPEAKERS

Intro, Roger Dooley, Vanessa Van Edwards, Outro

Intro: [00:00:00]

Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley shares powerful but practical ideas from world-class experts, and sometimes a few of his own. To learn more about Roger's books, Brainfluence and Friction, and to find links to his latest articles and videos, the best place to start is rogerdooley.com. Roger's keynotes will keep your audience entertained and engaged. At the same time, he will change the way they think about customer and employee experience. To check availability for an in-person or virtual keynote or workshop, visit rogerdooley.com.

Roger Dooley: [00:00:37]

Welcome to Brainfluence, I'm Roger Dooley. Today's guest returns with new ideas I know we'll all find incredibly useful, both at work and in our personal lives. Vanessa Van Edwards is the lead investigator at Science of People. She's the best-selling author of *Captivate the Science of Succeeding with People*, now in 16 Languages. Vanessa teaches science-backed people skills around the globe, and more than 50 million people have seen her video tutorials and her TEDx talk. No doubt this conversation will further boost those numbers. Vanessa's new book is *Cues: Master the Secret Language of Charismatic Communication*. Welcome back to the show, Vanessa.

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Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:01:13]

Thank you so much for having me back. It's good to be back.

Roger Dooley: [00:01:16]

When we last spoke Vanessa, we were not quite at the outset of the pandemic, but it was really early on. And I'm curious, since then, what have you seen or what have you learned that's changed, particularly about virtual communication? Because then we knew quite a bit, even a few months in, but I'm sure you've gained new insights.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:01:35]

Oh, my goodness. I had the luck of writing this book in quarantine, which helped because we are in the middle of this transition. I signed the book deal in June of 2020 and I was writing as we were so remote. And what was great about this is it really made me focus on what are the differences between the cues that we use in person and virtually, and how are our cues changing as we move to a hybrid workplace? And what's been really interesting is that I think a lot of our social muscles, they atrophy if they aren't used. And so, I think as we're beginning to come back into the world, there's this newfound awkwardness that people have where they're like, "Are we handshaking? Oh, my gosh, I haven't seen you in three years. Do we hug? Should I not hug. We're in a work setting, but gosh, we've been through it, and I've seen your kids, and I've seen your dining room, and I've had coffee with you in my pajamas." What's great is we're at the cusp of this new chapter, and I think we can go into it more prepared if we know what our cues are doing.

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Roger Dooley: [00:02:33]

Yeah, that is a difference. I was just in an in-person meeting last week and we had exactly that sort of awkwardness that you described where somebody reaches out to give you a big hug and someone else is, ummm, maybe not, how about how we bump elbows or something else? I think eventually they all sort out.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:02:50]

Yeah. Here's a little cute just to help. So, we know as humans when someone's going to come at us with one hand forward and one shoulder back, the opposite shoulder back, if you come in this way, you are cueing people that you want a handshake. Now, it's really important, actually, that the moment someone first sees you, when you walk into a room, when you enter the waiting room, when you get to your car, you are cueing the touch or the greeting you want. So, if you want a handshake, I would lead hand first. I mean, literally from across the room, "Oh, it's so good to see you." If you want to hug, the universal gesture of hug is an open body with two open palms. And you can literally approach people, "Oh, it's so good to see you." If you don't want any touch at all, you should leave your hands by your side and give a nod from far away. "It's so good to see you," with a little nod. So, we have to be more purposeful because that's the only way we're going to conquer this awkwardness. So, before your next interaction, think about what touch you want or no touch at all, and be sure you cue it ahead of time.

Roger Dooley: [00:03:50]

I'm sure that 100% of our audience wants to be more charismatic Vanessa, and I guess a two-part question. First of all, is that hardwired? I think I know the answer

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to that one, but people think that gee, there are some people who are just biologically charismatic and I'm not that person. But also, then what are the two factors that really influence charisma?

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:04:12]

Yeah, luckily you're right, charisma is not innate. And by the way, that is a big myth to bust. We usually talk about charismatic people as if they have this mysterious X factor, but luckily, thank goodness for not naturally charismatic people like myself, I'm a recovering awkward person, charisma can be learned. And what researchers from Princeton University found is that highly charismatic people, what makes them charismatic is they have a specific blend of two traits. They have a high warmth and high competence. And what's important about these is that they have these in not only high amounts, but also equal measure, that when they meet people, they are cueing others or socially signaling first warmth, trust, likability, friendliness, but at the very same time, credibility, competence, importance, and power. That secret combination, the reason we're so drawn to charismatic people is because we love to be around people who are friendly and credible. Not only does that make us feel good, we're like, "Okay, whew, I'm around someone who I can trust and they know what they're talking about." But also, our charisma cues are contagious. And this is what got me so excited about this research in the first place is that I want you to be charismatic. Everyone who's listening, I want to help you be charismatic for you so you can be more empowered in your interactions. But the side benefit is that if you show up as your most charismatic self, you actually trigger others to be their most charismatic self. That when we show up as our warmest, most competent self, when we are signaling cues of warmth and competence, other people are more likely to catch those cues of warmth and competence, which in turn, turns on

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their own warmth and competence. I think this is a very unique way of interacting.

Roger Dooley: [00:05:58]

Vanessa, can you unpack competence a little bit? Because I think we both know competent people who are not remotely charismatic, but they're very skilled at what they do. They know a lot. So, competence really goes beyond just that sort of basic ability to get the job done right.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:06:14]

Yes. So, I think that you and I have very, very smart readers. We have very smart listeners. So, our students are high achievers, they are off-the-charts smarts, and this is actually a problem. And the reason for this is because smart people rely on their smarts. In other words, smart people know they have great ideas. They feel that their ideas can speak for themselves. The problem is, and this is directly from the research, competence without warmth leaves people feeling suspicious. And this is really important because smart people think, "Okay, the more I have a solid idea with data, and percents and a plan and details, then people will have to believe it. It's a solid idea." But the problem is we cannot swallow or digest competence without warmth. And that's because competence is not just smarts, it's the ability to get it done. It's not only saying I have a good idea; it's relying on your research, relying on your capacity, thinking about your capability, and also making sure that you are the person that I can trust with that information. And so, the problem that I see, and this is the opening story in the book was I was watching Shark Tank, one of my favorite shows, and I notice there was a pitch many years ago by Jamie Siminoff. Jamie Siminoff is the founder of Ring, which is

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a major, huge company with millions of doorbells, if not billions of doorbells around the world. Jamie Siminoff has a massively successful company and had a brilliant idea, but he went into Shark Tank and it totally bombed. And a few months later it got invested by Shaquille O'Neal, Richard Branson, and acquired by Amazon for \$1,000,000,000. So, we know his idea was good. He's brilliant. The problem is his delivery. He walked into the shark tank relying too much on his idea. And because he didn't have any warmth, the sharks doubted his competence. Every step of the pitch, the sharks were going, "I don't know. I don't believe it. How about the competitors? I don't know about those numbers." And so, for smart people listening, this is not just about your brains, your training, your IQ, it's also your capability and people's trust in your ability to get that done.

Roger Dooley: [00:08:21]

One of your examples is Margaret Thatcher, who is considered charismatic, even though she was not a particularly warm person, perhaps sort of the opposite of warm, but how did she manage to sort of fall into that charismatic water? And you might explain your little charisma warm framework.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:08:41]

Yes. So, what's really important is highly charismatic people are in control of their cues. They know. Margaret Thatcher knew she did not have a lot of warmth. She knew this about herself and so she had to purposefully dial up her warmth. You also have very highly warm people who know they're highly warm and have to purposely dial up their competence. This is actually a mark of charismatic people. I think that we have this mistaken belief that charismatic people are these cool as cucumbers, everything's natural, they don't work at anything. And that could not

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be further from the truth. Actually, highly charismatic people cultivate their cues. They know exactly how they have to dial up and where they have to dial up. So, Margaret Thatcher, what's fascinating is they found surviving speeches of hers, and after she was already in office, so she had already won election, she was already quite successful and powerful, she still, even after being elected in her speech, had notes to herself on her own vocal charisma. "Pause. Take a deep breath. Use passion." And one of her tricks was that she would do is when she wanted to sound competent and imposing, she would drink ice water. And then the same broadcast, if she wanted to sound warm and nurturing, she would drink hot honey water. And that was the way that she literally changed the sound of her voice. Now, I'm not doing that now in my podcast. I don't recommend that you necessarily drink ice water and hot water during your meetings, but I do think this shows us something, which is this is something that we can cultivate and work on, that if we are really honest with ourselves and how we're coming across, we can leverage our natural strengths. Margaret Thatcher had many natural charisma strengths, but she had to dial up and work on some of them to make sure they were hitting correctly.

Roger Dooley: [00:10:26]

You know, the warm drink thing reminds me of some research. I'm not sure if it's been reproduced or not, but about how even holding a warm beverage can change your emotions and make you feel differently about the person that you're with. Now, it seems like that was in that sort of weird category of research that may or may not be 100% reliable. But nevertheless, I think that's interesting, too, that it can affect one's persona as a speaker or communicator.

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Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:10:52]

And that's ... you mentioned an interesting set of cues. So, we talk about cues, cues are the social signals we send to others, and they're actually four modes of cues. A lot of the times we only focus on body language and words. So, nonverbal is one, that's body language, gestures, facial expressions, posture, movement. Words, of course, is another, our verbal, our syntax. But third is actually vocal, how we say our words, our volume, our pitch or cadence or accents. And the last one is one that you just mentioned, which is imagery, the ornaments we use, the props we carry, the fonts we use, even the fonts we use have personality, the colors we wear, the props behind us in our background, what we're holding in our profile pictures. Those are also imagery cues. And I think what's interesting is a lot of very smart people, they make the mistake of under cueing. So, what happens here is when you think about the charisma framework, you have warmth cues. So, there are 96 cues in the book, 90 cues that I think people should know. There are warmth cues, there are competent cues and there are charisma cues, cues that I think everyone should know. But there are also danger zone cues. Danger zone cues are cues that no one should use. What can happen is as we get into our work, as we become experts in our domains, as we learn technical skills, we focus a lot on our skills and our ideas, we think less about our delivery. And so, it can happen is very successful people will begin to under cue because they don't know which cues to send at all. So, they'll think, "I don't know what's warm, I don't know what's competent, I'm just going to under signal. I'm going to become stoic; I'm going to become unreadable. I'm going to become really still. I'm not going to let anyone leak or see any expressions." The problem is muting is a danger zone cue. So, muting is in itself a cue of anxiety, of hiding, of being closed-minded. And so, that's a mistake that people make, is that they're not sure what to do with their cues. They just don't send any cues at all. And that actually is a cue in itself,

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kind of a fun, a weird what we got wrapped around there. But that's [unintelligible 00:12:48] our cue, it's not so good.

Roger Dooley: [00:12:50]

Well, let's drill into that imagery thing a little bit Vanessa, you mentioned like a social profile photo, like a LinkedIn profile photo, but also many of us have websites where we may be able to use a little bit more, a larger number of images and perhaps richer images than you can fit in a little profile photo. What kind of ... obviously, I guess it depends on what you are trying to communicate about yourself, but what are some things that you might suggest that a business person incorporate into their imagery, whether it's on their own website, their company's website or on a profile?

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:13:25]

I love it. So, this is actually a really important aspect of your website. Your website is your digital first impression. Your website is a way that you can be charismatic without having to show up charismatic. So, actually, your website can do work for you if you let it work for you. I highly recommend counting the number of warmth cues on your website and the number of competence cues on your website. So, let's talk about what these are. So, competence cues; numbers, percents, proof, data, awards, certifications, degrees. Those are competence cues. That shows me, wow, you know your stuff, you're getting it done. Warmth cues; personal stories, smiling people, anecdotes, case studies, gifts, funny videos, memes, our about page. Those are all warmth cues. They're really, really good websites, what they do is they actually have a blend of both. An example I gave in the book and I break this down in detail is Casper. So, Casper is a mattress company and they have

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done a great job in their marketing of blending warmth and competence. Here's how they did it. So, first of all, their tagline for many years, I don't know if it's still their tagline, but in a lot of their commercials was "Obsessively engineered with outrageous comfort." That tagline is like the perfect balance of warm and competent words obsessively engineered. Highly competent folks are like, "Yes, engineered" and are highly warm side of us go "Ooh, outrageous comfort. Ooh, I like that." So, first, the tagline hits the perfect sweet spot. Then if you go on their website, they have pictures of floating clouds and people bouncing on mattresses; warmth. But then they have their Casper labs with a video of their data and their scientists in white lab coats; high competence. Then they have a quote from Vogue That's kind of funny, "Where you'd like to work all the time from bed." But then they have a very serious quote from Consumer Reports. They're bouncing between and your brain goes trust, reliability, capable, friendly, likeable, powerful, memorable. Our brain is so happy with that balance because they are literally just hitting all those different signals.

Roger Dooley: [00:15:36]

So, I know you do some public speaking, quite a bit of public speaking, Vanessa. And the meeting that I alluded to last week was actually a meeting for speakers. What would you suggest that a speaker do in the first few minutes? Obviously, there's a whole series of things they could do through the course of a presentation or speech to communicate both warmth and competence. But how can they make a good first impression just in that first, maybe 60 to 90 seconds on the stage?

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:16:04]

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Yes. So, this is actually incredibly important for your entire speech. I think that the first, I'll even say 10 seconds sets you up for a good or bad speech or good, or bad presentation, or good or bad pitch. Speaking can come in many different formats. It doesn't have to be a big room full of people. It can be three people if you're doing an important presentation. So, we analyze thousands of hours of TED talks in our lab looking for patterns. We wanted to know what makes a TED talk go viral. Why is it that certain TED talks don't hit? Because when you look at TED talks, these are all experts. A lot of them, when they first get to talk, are relatively unknown academics or authors. But some talks immediately get millions of views, and other TED talks never get above a couple of thousand. And I wondered why. So, our team, we spent hours and hours coding these TED talks for gestures, smiling posture, gender, movement on stage, everything you could think of. One of the biggest ones, one of the easiest ones was hand gestures. Specifically, we notice that the best TED talkers, the ones with the most view counts, not only used more gestures, they also used explanatory gestures. So, they got on stage and they would say "good morning," and they have their open palms "today I have a big idea," and they'd hold big like it was a beach ball. And they would say, "I want to talk to you about three different ways," they'd hold up their hands three, "that can change your life," and they point at the audience, I could almost always tell you without letting the view count, if a TED Talk had a lot of used simply based on how many purposeful hand gestures were used in the first 10 to 20 seconds. Now, what's important about these is these were gestures that helped lower the listener's cognitive load. A TED talk typically has a very big idea, there's lots of information happening, and so for someone to digest it quickly, especially at their computer eating lunch, you want to make it as easy for the listener to get what you're talking about as quickly as possible. So, if I were to say to you "today, I have a really big idea," and I held my hand up as if I was holding a penny, you would be like "Vanessa, it's not very big. It looks really small," and your brain goes, it's small, it's small. But if I were to say today, I have a really big

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idea as if I'm holding a beach ball or a bowling ball, it actually helps your brain digest that word. So, explanatory gestures are actually nonverbal notes for your listeners, and it also is a signal it cues your audience. I know my content so well I can speak to you on two tracks. I can speak to you with my words, and I can even non-verbally outline for you with my hands. That is a high competence cue. Explanatory gestures are incredibly important for high competence because we know if someone knows their stuff, they can do it on multiple levels. The last benefit of using explanatory gestures is actually for you. So, if I were to, for example, give this entire interview with my hands behind my back, it would not only be bad for you and me, it would also be bad for my brain. It's really hard to be fluent when you're not using gestures. Researcher Susan Golden Meadow has a beautiful book called Hearing Gesture, and that we actually can hear. It helps our fluency gestures. And so, as a speaker, the more you can dial up and dial into your gestures, actually, the more fluent you become, which is like this amazing loop.

Roger Dooley: [00:19:13]

Let's switch topics to a topic that is everybody's least favorite thing, perhaps.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:19:18]

Oh, no.

Roger Dooley: [00:19:19]

Yeah. This sounds like a killer for the audience, right?

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Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:19:22]

Can I guess, were you going to say networking?

Roger Dooley: [00:19:25]

No, I actually was going to say meetings. Well, they're both pretty bad I guess. Everybody has their own worst. But people complain about meetings constantly, they have way too many of them, they last too long, they are productive, and so on. But you have some specific advice for in-person meetings, like where to sit and how to participate in them. And also, if you can give us sort of that general advice, but then if you could drill into something that is kind of a relatively new thing. They've been happening for years, but now we're having these hybrid meetings where you've got virtual participants and in-person participants. And so, are there any special techniques that you can cope with that regardless of which situation you're in?

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:20:05]

Yes. Okay. So, this is in the verbal chapter of the book and it's towards the end of the book. So, I'm so glad we're talking about it because it's a small one, but it's super powerful. With in-person meetings, with remote meetings, with hybrid meetings, we all fall into the same problem, which is autopilot, slightly negative, waste of time, small talk in the first 5 minutes. This is the crippling aspect of meetings. We don't mind getting stuff done right. As humans, we want to get it done, we want to talk about our work. What just kills us, what just drains us is when you start off any kind of meeting like this, "So we're going to wait while

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people log in. How's everyone doing? Cool. Great. Good weekend. Yeah. Good, good." Oh, like those are the worst. It doesn't matter what kind of meeting you're in. So, what I would highly recommend, we have this on our team, I advise with all of my consulting, so have a structure in place for the start of every meeting. If it is a collaborative or bonding call, if you're talking to your team and it's a catch-up call, it's a weekly thing, great. Initiate the first 3 minutes of every call. You are all sharing something good. My team knows this. They come to the meeting prepared to celebrate and have something good. So, latecomers. If they miss it, it's okay. Whoever is on the call first, you start with something good. So, something good goes around. "Oh, I'm learning Mandarin." Someone says, "Oh, I'm planting my garden." Someone says, "Oh, my daughter just graduated fifth grade." Okay, so everyone has something good, it takes about 3 minutes, everyone gets a quick share and it makes those first 3 minutes structured with something positive, there is an end on it, and there's no chit chat. If you have meetings where you got to get her done, you've got to be task-oriented be very clear about this. So, say "We're going to start at 3:05. If you have to go to the bathroom or grab coffee, do it for the first 5 minutes. We are going to start right at 3:05 and a minute and Tim is going to dive in with his agenda item right when we begin." That way, we're removing that horrible beginning piece and also starting our meetings at 3:05 or 3:35 to give people a little bit of that time if you don't want to have that tell me something good at the beginning.

Roger Dooley: [00:22:11]

I guess we'll have to save networking for our next conversation Vanessa.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:22:15]

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I'll do that working really quick, which is just ask nonboring questions. Just ask not boring questions. Don't say what do you do? Where are you from? How's work? Just say working on anything exciting, doing anything exciting, have any fun plans? That's a quick one. Quick, quick, quick.

Roger Dooley: [00:22:30]

That's great advice. And it's not necessarily totally uncommon, but I think that we all fall into that trap of asking the same old questions of what do you do, or who are you with? And that's great. Vanessa, we could go on for certainly much longer, but why don't you tell people how they can find you in your ideas?

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:22:47]

Oh, yes. So, Cues is available wherever books are sold. If you like my voice, I do the audible. I have lots of fun with that. Also, if you're curious where you fall in warmth and competence, you can check out science at people.com/charisma. We have the charisma quiz from the book that you can just take. So, you can take it as many times you want. It's free. That will tell you exactly where you fall in warmth, competence, or charisma. You can also send it to a friend and have them take it as you. So, if you're wondering how you come across to others, it's a really good test. We have it up for free just so that people can take it multiple times or have other people take it. And that can be a nice starting point for dialing up your charisma.

Roger Dooley: [00:23:26]

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Great. Well, we will link there into any other resources we spoke about, including of course, Cues, the new book on the show notes page at [rogerdooley.com/podcast](https://www.rogerdooley.com/podcast). Vanessa, it's been a lot of fun. Thanks for being on the show.

Vanessa Van Edwards: [00:23:40]

Thanks for having me.

Outro: [00:23:41]

Thank you for tuning in to Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one and to access all of Roger's books, articles, videos, and resources, the best starting point is [rogerdooley.com](https://www.rogerdooley.com), To check availability for a game-changing keynote or workshop, in person or virtual, visit [rogerdooley.com](https://www.rogerdooley.com).

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