



The Art of Persuasion: How to Get Your Point Across!

The ability to communicate in any career is important but the ability to persuade others, to make an important or prompt case or an argument, or even to ensure the acceptance of a proposal, can be a vital skill and prove to be a difference maker, especially when everything could be on the line.

Simply put, persuasion is using and implementing exemplary communication skills to get people to agree to a proposal or recommendation and from the persuader's perspective, it is in the best interests of all the parties involved. At the heart of persuasion is a strong belief in achieving a WIN/WIN objective where all the parties come to a mutual agreement, and everyone walks away satisfied.

What Is Persuasion?

For many, we might think about persuasion as having a slightly negative connotation. We may be tempted to think of overly persuasive salespeople employing coercive high-pressure sales tactics and strong-arming hapless customers into buying something they may or may not need...achieving their goals unethically or selfishly.

First and foremost, persuasion is not now or ever been about coercion. And it is not about using intimidation or about employing ultimatums, undue pressure, or duress, or using your position of authority to achieve your goals. A more contemporary view of persuasion has really changed, and now persuasion is really about creating an environment and interaction based on mutual respect and being respectful to the needs and desires of the other party or parties.

Persuasion is the art of intelligently making your case or argument that is also beneficial to the other person or party by treating all the parties involved fairly with an aim of reaching a mutually satisfying outcome. In other words, persuasion is always about being unselfish and having the short-term aim of WIN/WIN in mind and the long-term objective of building better relationships.

Probably an example that most of us can relate to would be a situation where a patient's well-being and future could lie in the balance if their own doctor or surgeon fails to persuade them to make significant or lasting health changes or accept surgery that could save their life. In this case, the doctor strongly believes it is in the best interest of the patient and their health and persuades the patient and their family to make a beneficial health decision. If successful, everyone wins!

In a municipal setting, you may need to make a case, argument, or proposal to many people, all of which may be stakeholders in the final outcome. Successfully persuading people to agree with your proposed idea can mean moving forward with an agreement that clearly proves your complete understanding of the issues. You propose a solution and make a persuasive and comprehensive argument for your case, and the parties involved are won over an agreement is reached.

What Lies At The Heart of Persuasion

Before we look at skills of persuasion, there needs to be the **establishment of trust**, as in being viewed as honest, and open and that you speak from a place of experience and integrity. Trust is integral in all relationships, but in persuasion, trust must be earned as initially there may be resistance especially if the persuader is unknown or not well known.

We tend to listen to people if we perceive that they are speaking intelligently, and rationally. Persuaders strive to make sense of the argument and that they appeal both emotionally and intellectually to those who can see the logical reasoning and rationale behind what they are saying. They outline their argument or position so those listening can clearly visualize a proposed solution and understand how it makes sense. In this way, we build trust.

Finally, to persuade one would benefit from having an emotional connection to your position – so that when you make your case or argument, the other party senses and feels that you personally are committed to your idea. Great persuaders don't just say what needs to be said, they say it feeling, that they genuinely care about their solutions and that their position is meaningful to them. To win hearts, one would be wise to speak from the heart.

What It Takes to Be an Effective Persuader.

“There is nothing more persuasive in life than a GREAT listener” – Dale Carnegie.

Think about it. We are always going to be tempted to look out for our own interests, but great persuaders know that they succeed when they think about the other person's or party's needs and interests first and they accomplish that by placing all their initial efforts in listening first. The more we listen combined with the use of well-considered questions posed interactively, then the clearer the understanding will be of what the other person or party wants or hopes to achieve, and the more likely you will be able to tailor your proposal or argument.

Listening attentively and without judgment is another way that mutual trust can be established. It's about reciprocity *“If you are not listening to me, why would I listen to you?”* Great persuaders earn and win trust by showing that they are listening and have listened and are visibly receptive to hearing from the other parties before then proposing their solutions. Listening also means employing empathy to always think about what challenges the other person or party is facing and to verbally acknowledge that. Finally, one added benefit to active and attentive listening, is that the other person or party might even reveal exactly what you need to know or add to your argument to your proposal to make an agreement work.

It's All About Creating Rapport

It is well known that we tend to connect with and identify better with people who are like us or in who we can see a little of ourselves so great persuaders are really good at adapting their style of communicating and connecting to the people they meet. As an example, if they meet someone who is all business, all the time, persuaders become business-focused, serious, and straight talking.

Often referred to as “mirroring” we learn to size up someone and their behaviours, understand the characteristics and traits, and then make small subtle adjustments in how we communicate, connect, and behave, we discover a better fit or connection. Establishing rapport means sizing up the situation and then sculpting and crafting your message to increase connectivity, put people at ease, develop trust and establish a “we are more alike than different” feeling.

Persuasion is About Speaking From A Position of Certainty of Position and Confidence in Oneself

Effective persuaders build on years of person-to-person experience and wisdom and gained from that is the foundation from which they can best build their arguments. But there is something compelling and undeniable about the power and hold it has on people when speaking with certainty and confidence. If you truly, genuinely, and honestly BELIEVE in your advice or recommendations, you are likely to win the hearts and minds of others and in doing so pave the way for all parties to WIN.

At the heart of certainty and confidence lies your complete and unmatched understanding of the issue or challenge, not only from your perspective but from that of the other person or party. There is no substitute for having the knowledge of the potential solutions required and the clarity of vision needed to persuade others to your point of view.

To be a great persuader, one must be confident not only in one's position but also in all the details of your proposal. But where does that confidence come from? Confidence stems from trust in oneself and one's abilities especially in advance of a challenge and that happens when you are completely prepared and fully knowledgeable in your position. In other words, you know your stuff forwards and backward, and when entering into a discussion, you believe that there won't be any question or concern you won't successfully address.

In short, three words ...DO YOUR HOMEWORK! Effective persuaders make it their personal mission to be the best informed, most knowledgeable people in a discussion. They anticipate every conceivable objection or challenge and prepare a response in advance. That total preparedness inspires their confidence, drives their voice, and in doing so, establishes authority.

Just remember the old axiom ... "It is better to be over-prepared than ambushed."

Successful persuaders leave **nothing** to chance.

The K.I.S.S. Principle Really Applies In Persuasion

Distilling an argument or proposal down to its simplest elements and then presenting them simply as possible is often an effective strategy that often works best for the accomplished persuader. Keeping your messaging as simple and as easy for all to understand aids in making your argument clear, and easy to follow, and most importantly it mitigates the risk that complexity could generate more questions and more objections.

Begin by presenting your proposed solution or argument simply and then get a sense of the mutual understanding of your positions and if this leads to a positive or accepting response then you can drill down into the details. By presenting a simple set of messages, persuaders "set the table" and "tone" of their message and if they do this proficiently, it leads to greater attentiveness and understanding in the listeners.

All too often, a complex argument only creates more layers of confusion and that can lead to disconnection, or to questions and even resistance. Simply put, simple works. Win them with a straightforward outline of your position and then they will be better positioned to listen to the finer details.

Speak Positively, Sell A Vision And Transfer Your Enthusiasm for Your Proposal

There is an old saying about selling that it is the “transfer of enthusiasm.” Effective persuasion comes from two places, an intellectual and emotional connection to an issue. To sound and appear disinterested or to lack that passionate connection to your proposal might inadvertently imply that you personally are not sold on your own solutions. If you’re not sold or seem that way with your own proposal or argument, how do you expect to “sell” the other person or people?

A great persuader, beyond having complete belief in their proposal, knows that enthusiasm is essential in creating connections and winning over people. Furthermore, it might be very helpful to create a description and present an example or comparison so the other person can “visualize” what you are proposing. The clearer and more defined the vision of success in your own mind, the better it will be to translate that vision and propose your solutions. To succeed it certainly helps to personally see a successful outcome and to believe it and all that transfers to the listener.

Persuasion Generally Involves Small Compromises

Finally, throughout the give and take of a discussion or negotiation, to succeed at persuasion, you might need to offer some small previously considered compromises and be willing to offer them up if necessary to succeed so that you appear flexible and sensitive to the needs of others. Often, when we give something, it creates the obligation to return something and a sense of reciprocity. Compromises might involve providing more time for the other person to examine their options or feel less under pressure with a deadline.

Persuasion is an important tool in any leader’s toolbox, master it and get more and better agreements!

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