

Artful Influence – The Power of Persuasion

Contrary to popular belief, persuasion is not a “bad” thing. As businesses move into the future, persuasion is fast becoming a necessary and valuable communication tool. Our companies and management styles are evolving to accommodate our changing world and workforce. Gone are the days of the top-down management style and autocratic decision makers. Some of the most effective, competitive companies are adopting team approaches and empowering workers to think and perform on their own. Effective communication is becoming more important than ever, especially as workers are being encouraged to ask the question “why?” Technology makes information more widely available and delivered more quickly than ever before, forcing us to move quickly on new market decisions and strategies. The more adept we are at the art of persuasion, the more likely our objectives will be met with the least resistance and frustration and the faster we’ll facilitate effective changes, thereby giving our company the competitive edge.

Persuasion isn’t just for sales people or used to close deals, it’s a skill that can be brought into our day to day actions in the workplace. It strengthens our ability to negotiate, which is what we do with others daily in our work and lives. However, for persuasion to be effective some essential steps can be followed to increase the odds of success.

Effective persuaders:

- Establish credibility
- Highlight the common good for all involved parties
- Communicate the supporting evidence with a presentation that has impact with the audience
- Establish an emotional connection with those involved

When most of us think of persuasion, we don't consider these steps.

However, if you want a successful outcome, doing your homework can mean the difference between success and failure.

Often, establishing credibility requires a great deal of groundwork. Credibility stems from two resources, expertise and relationships. As the persuader, the audience must trust you and be confident with your level of knowledge. There's no big secret to demonstrating expertise. Hiring an expert, like a consultant, can bolster one's credibility as well soliciting input from experts in your staff. If you've established credibility through your own work in the past, you're most of the way there. Strong relationships can be built by enlisting like-minded co-workers on a project or meeting one on one with key individuals. The more others are involved, the more likely you'll get their support.

Highlighting the issue to the common good requires the ability to understand other's points of view and priorities. Know what aspects will be valuable to the audience. Be socially sensitive, well informed and empathetic. Keep an open mind. Effective highlighting requires the persuader to collect

information, see mutual benefits and take a thoughtful and flexible approach, remaining open and unemotional. As you gather additional information, your ideas may need adjustment. After all, everyone should be happy with the end solution. Persuasion that is force fed can lead to eventual resentment and distrust, and that is not the objective.

Present your evidence with impact. Use metaphors and examples that will resonate with the audience. Charts and numbers alone don't have the same impact as stories do. Make a point to connect through vivid examples the audience understands. If you create a thread they can follow, you draw them into your process and make it "real." Be sure you've brushed up on your speaking and communication skills. Practice before hand. Then, *make it personal*. A vivid and tangible presentation will definitely give the persuader an edge.

Finally, connect emotionally with the group. Match their energy level as you deliver your message. You can get an idea of the energy around a proposal by speaking with individuals ahead of time and sampling their reactions. You should be doing this anyway, as you're building relationships and doing your homework for finding common ground. If you, as the persuader, are over-emotional, credibility can be lost. If you're too cold and distant, the connection never happens. Meet the audience at their own energy level and adjust accordingly for the most effective connection.

Effective planning, communication and presentation skills are all assets to effective persuasion. These skills are transferable. Our day to day work is made up of plans, communications and presentations, so why not add persuasion to the toolbox of skills? Persuasion dovetails with many other skills such as communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, analytical skills, decision making skills and more. If a person lacks in one of these areas, as they gain proficiencies in that area they will reap rewards on other skill sets as well.

Persuasion is a form of effective communication. It is a compromise that moves to successfully negotiate the needs of everyone concerned, thereby creating more buy-in and less resistance. Persuasion is not the same as manipulation. The difference is the intent behind the action. While, persuasion can be used as a tool to manipulate, ill intent and self-serving motives are the hallmark of manipulation. If you believe your proposal will serve the welfare of the organization, rather than only yourself, you can be assured you're on the right track.

The artful influence of persuasion is a wonderful tool for moving organizations and people forward, inspiring others to reach beyond their current borders and creating motivated teams. The best leaders have a firm grasp on how to motivate and inspire others, stirring trust and ownership, through the art of persuasion. Individuals who aren't leaders can use the art of persuasion in their lives influencing those with whom they work and live. Persuasion in the hands of ethical people is a very good thing.

Consider your own goals and objectives, whether they are for business or life. Being effective in the art of persuasion gives you the ability to drive your ideas forward, unimpeded. What does this mean for you? Higher profits for your organization, a promotion, more flexible work time, a bigger market share? Whatever you dream, you make it happen by effectively planning, communicating and presenting it to others. Demonstrate your knowledge and build relationships. Show others how and why they'll benefit. Present your proposal in a way that resonates with what they know and believe. Connect with them emotionally. Use your influence to serve others well and it will serve you well.

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Resources: *The Necessary Art of Persuasion* by Jay A. Conger*