

PERSUASION AND INFLUENCE

by Paul Reilly and Tom Reilly

The ability to influence others is a key, core competency for salespeople. The purpose of this whitepaper is to help you become a master of influence by teaching you how to become more persuasive. After reading this, you will be able to:

- Define persuasion;
- Describe personal characteristics of masters of influence;
- Discuss persuasion as a process; and
- Explain fourteen ways to become ten times more persuasive.

What is Persuasion

Persuasion is about moving people. It is the process of influencing others to act on your requests. It is more than arguing someone into submission; although, it is argument in the rhetorical sense. Persuasion happens directly and indirectly, as it operates on the mind and the heart. Persuasion is art and science. It is one-part message and one-part messenger; one-part content and one-part context; and one-part substance and one-part style. In Value-Added Selling, persuasion happens at the strategic level with positioning and differentiation, and at the tactical level with presentation technique.

Persuasion is not making someone do something that the person does not want to do. It is not manipulation or deception, though some people misuse persuasion this way. Ethical persuasion can involve finesse and nuance to make it easier for the receiver of the message to process the request. It can be achieved in a single conversation or exposure to a message or result from an ongoing campaign that surrounds the receiver with the message. In Value-Added Selling, persuasion follows the need-satisfaction model of communication. Because the object of persuasion is based on a customer need, this is customer-focused communication.

Personal Characteristics of Masters of Influence

In *The Art of Rhetoric*, Aristotle outlined the three essential elements of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. Respectively, this refers to the character of the sender of the message, the emotional energy implicit in the argument, and the logic of the argument. These and more are contained in these characteristics of masters of influence.

- **Credibility**—your experience, record of success, credentials, education, training, certifications, professionalism, gain potential, and the consistency between your behavior and your message are some ways you build your credibility in the receiver's mind.
- **Sincerity**—buyers want to do business with people that they trust. People see through superficiality and transparent attempts to "fake it." Your integrity and

authenticity make you sincerer. Do you genuinely care about the impact of your message and request on the receiver? If the answer is "yes," your sincerity will win the heart of the person (audience) that you are trying to persuade.

- **Passion**—this is the energy you infuse into your message. It is your zeal, confidence in the outcome, and raw enthusiasm for your argument that ignite others to act. Passion sells and enthusiasm is contagious. If you cannot get excited about what you are presenting, how can you reasonably expect the receiver of the message to get excited?
- **Expertise**—your knowledge of the topic and your audience makes you an expert. This is the same effect the white lab coat has on people when they visit their doctors. In our three studies spanning twenty years of research of top-achieving salespeople, knowledge is the number one characteristic that buyers want from salespeople. Organizational psychologists have long recognized expertise as a form of legitimate power in group settings. The expert, by his or her knowledge, commands the respect of the group.
- **Likeability**—your relationship with the receiver of the message increases the likelihood of his or her accepting your argument. If the receiver likes the sender, the receiver is more open to the request. The key to your likeability is your charm, charisma, and authenticity. People are impressed with your successes but identify with your failures. The quickest way to make people like you is for you to like them first. Find something that you like about the receiver of the message and focus on that. If the other person perceives that you like them, it makes you more likeable in their eyes.
- **Empathy**—this is your ability to understand and express your understanding of the other person's condition. When the receiver of the message knows that you understand his or her problems and struggle he or she is more open to your request. Empathy is fundamental to your likeability, sincerity, and credibility. This goes to the heart of Aristotle's pathos. Since effective communication requires an understanding of the receiver, empathy is implicit in persuasion. You cannot change someone's mind until you first understand his or her mind.

Need-Satisfaction Model of Persuasion

The ethical model of influence parallels the need-satisfaction model of selling. People change when they understand that there is a need and then recognize the value of the solution. All persuasion follows this format:

Attention—begin your campaign by getting the receiver's attention. This applies broadly to all forms of influence. The noise level and competition for the receiver's attention is at an all-time high. Consider this:

- W. Edwards Deming wrote that the average worker faces fifty interruptions per day. He wrote this prior to the Internet and the consequent avalanche of email and text messages.
- People multi-task, so you can anticipate that customers will respond to the chirp of their cell phones during your conversations.
- Consumers receive daily approximately 600 advertising exposures.
- Requests by bosses, peers, subordinates, customers, and family members trump your attempt to get the buyer's attention.

The media—the professional attention seekers—know this. Newspapers grab your attention with bold headlines. Advertisers hook you with fantastic claims. Powerful hooks and headlines separate you from what you were thinking about prior to your exposure to their medium. That is the purpose of these tools—to get your attention so that you are open to their message. You should not begin your messaging campaign without the receiver's attention. Your attention-getter can be a question, startling statement, or surprising statistic or quote that grabs the receiver's attention.

Need—expose and develop the need for acting on your request. Sometimes, receivers are aware of the need to act; other times, you must awaken the receiver to the need that precedes your request. Fully expanding this need means helping the receiver understand the full impact of this need on his or her world, the advantage of acting on this, and the consequences of inertia. Doing nothing about a need is still a decision. It is a decision to do nothing. Doing nothing has consequences. Exposing, expanding, and developing the need is raising the pain level. Pain is a powerful motivator. It is what causes people to submit to root canals and other invasive medical procedures because it hurts too much not to do it. For salespeople, this constructive pain comes from the realization that the buyer has an unmet need that is causing a problem. Without the buyer's recognition of this pain and its potential impact, there is no motivation to act. The greater the pain, the greater the motivation to act. People may naturally resist or defend against this pain. It is your job to bring it to the level of consciousness and acknowledgement.

Satisfaction—the pitch or the offer answers these questions: What is it? What does it do? What will it cost me? What is the payoff? Where is the proof? What happens if I choose not to do this? Is it worth the sacrifice I will make to do it? Making your argument by answering these questions will help the receiver make a more rational response to your request. A key to effective communication is simplicity. This is the case where less is more. Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it enough." The most famous speeches in our history—The Gettysburg Address, Ronald Reagan's Challenger Address to the nation, and FDR's Pearl Harbor Speech—shared a common denominator. They were simple, short, and powerful. Reagan's speech was 652 words; FDR's speech was 521 words; and Lincoln's address was a scant 268 words. What they lacked in total number of words, they made up for with eloquence.

Call-to-action—seek a commitment to act. Ask the receiver to do something to advance your agenda. It is the next, best step that will move your request along the path to completion. Invite the receiver of the message to join you in pursuing the great opportunity that you are proposing. This is the most basic rule for professional selling: Always finish a sales call with action. You planned for this; you must finish with this.

7 ways to be more persuasive

Research shows that masters of influence that use four or more sources of influence are ten times more persuasive than those people that use only one source of influence. This blend of motivational, emotional, and practical strategies and tactics provide you with sources of influence that will help you design and execute compelling persuasion campaigns. Combining these multiple sources of influence will increase your persuasiveness and odds of success.

Plan with the end in mind

Persuasion may happen spontaneously. More often than not, persuasion is the result of a concerted effort by the sender of the message. It generally involves in-depth planning and purposeful execution. These design principles will help you map out your strategy. Begin with the end-result in mind. What outcome do you want to see happen? What action do you want from the receiver of the message? What do you want the other person to think, feel, and do at the end of your pitch? Collect and design the support material that you will need to build your argument. This includes proof sources. Plan with these questions in mind: What is the need for what I am proposing? How compelling is this need (i.e., the impact of this need on the receiver)? Does the receiver recognize this need? What is the payoff for the receiver to act on my request? How will I awaken the receiver to the need and move this person to act on my request?

Be receiver focused

Ethical persuasion requires that you create messages that are receiver focused. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the receiver of your communication is bombarded with hundreds or even thousands of messages and interruptions every day. How will you get and keep the other person's attention? Your communications must be receiver oriented, both in content and context. Focus on the receiver: Who is the receiver of the communication? What problems or issues is this person dealing with? How serious are they? What is the level of the decision maker (1-2-3) that you are targeting with this communication? Why would this person be open to your message?

Pre-dispose the receiver to your message

Military commanders throughout history have understood the importance of prepping the battlefield before a major engagement. The battle for your customer's business is fought on the battlefield of their minds. Prepping the receiver's mind is pre-disposing him to hear your message. This begins with an awakening and then an understanding that there is a need to be open, followed by a chorus of persistent and subtle messages about the value of your idea. In marketing, this is called positioning. It is the relentless campaign of surrounding your buyer with your messages of value.

You are creating the image of a solution that stands alone in its ability to satisfy customer needs. You are positioning your offering on higher ground than the competition, a position occupied by most victors. Executing this campaign strategy requires planning, patience, and redundancy.

Less is more

Your communication should be long enough to convince and short enough to hold the other person's interest. The problem with most rhetorical writing is that it takes too long to make the point and suffers from clutter. Your message must be tight. Fewer words are better. The average attention span of workers is three minutes. The average television ad is between fifteen and twenty seconds. The average movie scene is approximately sixty seconds. You do not have long to make your point.

Mark Twain once wrote, "I did not have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one instead." You do not enjoy his luxury of long communication in the soundbite world in which we live. Your proposition is best expressed in a single sentence. This is the most difficult part of persuasion—reducing your message to a few words.

Contrast, not camouflage

While reducing the distance between you and the receiver, increase the distance between you and the competition. As much as your approach parallels the receiver's approach, make it easy for the receiver of the message to understand the differences between you and other alternatives. The distance between you and the other alternative must be significant. Use comparison and contrast to illustrate your argument. Welcome opportunities to explain this distance. The buyer is thinking, "Why should I pay a dime more for your solution when I don't see a penny's difference?" Resist the temptation to match a competitor's offer. Matching another's price, quality, packaging, level of service, etc. provides camouflage for a weaker competitor. Fight your competitive battle on the ground of your choosing, not the competitor's choosing. Present to your uniqueness. Turn up the contrast so that the receiver of the message immediately recognizes that these are two completely different alternatives. Your approach, presentation, support materials, product demonstrations, etc. are all points of differentiation. The greater the distinction that the receiver is able to draw between you and the other alternative, the easier it is for the receiver to say "Yes" to your request.

Ingratiate your buyer

Robert Cialdini, an Arizona State University professor and expert on persuasion, advocates the principle of reciprocity as fundamental to influencing other people: You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. When you do favors for other people, they feel obliged to return the favor. Dale Carnegie wrote about this early in his work. To become a friend, you must be a friend. Look for ways to do things for your target of influence. Do special favors. Go the extra mile for the person. Make special deliveries. Offer exceptional service that is above and beyond the call of duty. Help that person succeed at what he or she does, even if you do not benefit immediately from it. Refer that person to others that can help. Be an important resource to them. Become so valuable that the other person feels responsible for returning the favor. That person may go out of his or her way to return the favor. When you make a lower-level buyer look good in the eyes of his or her superiors, you have created a strong ally. Sharing the credit and the spotlight for good work accomplishes the same thing. Every

time you do this you are making goodwill deposits in your relationship bank account. At some point in the future, you may need to make a withdrawal from this account. It helps when the account is filled with goodwill.

Demonstrate congruence

There must be congruence between your plea and the other person's mission, attitudes, or values. Study their messaging to determine themes of what they value: quality, service, thrift (not price), innovation, etc. Congruence means philosophical overlap. The greater the overlap, the less change that is required by the receiver. Their vision is your vision. Their values are your values. Their attitudes are your attitudes. People that think this much alike should be doing business. This is the birds-of-a-feather concept at work. People trust others who are very much like themselves. This is one way to reduce the psychological distance between you and the receiver of the message. When you tie your idea to something they intrinsically value, you are tapping into a powerful form of internal motivation. People have a need to act consonantly. It is a deeply rooted psychological need with a biological basis that causes people to want homeostasis, balance, or stability in their lives. Acting consonantly on a request that is congruent with how the receiver does things gives the receiver a feeling of staying with the tried-and-true successes.

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