



The Power of Persuasion

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A few weeks ago, I was at a sporting event when I overheard a tenacious seven-year old boy say, “Daddy, I want that sports jersey.” When the father politely suggested that the hefty price did not warrant the purchase, the boy defiantly screamed “I want it. I need it.” The father, embarrassed by his son’s tantrum and not wanting to cause a scene, reluctantly pulled out his credit card and purchased the jersey for his son.

Whether you want to admit it or not, people persuade you and you persuade others on a daily basis. Although you do not use the tactics of the defiant boy, you are required to make your voice and the voice of others heard. In the workplace, for example, the power of persuasion enables you to argue for or against ideas, decisions and actions that have a material impact on you and your customers. Persuasion is best defined as the process by which a person’s attitudes or behavior is influenced by communications from other people. It is an umbrella term for influence.

History and Methods of Persuasion

Persuasion began with the Greeks, who emphasized rhetoric and elocution at the highest standard for a successful politician. All trials were held in front of the Assembly, and both the prosecution and the defense rested, as they often do today, on the persuasiveness of the speaker. Aristotle identified three basic elements to every persuasive argument:

1. Ethos: The credibility, knowledge, expertise, stature and authority of the person who is persuading.
2. Logo: The appeal of logic, reason, cognitive thinking, data and facts.
3. Pathos: The appeal to emotions; the non-cognitive, non-thinking motivations that affect decisions and customs.

In the best-selling book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D. defined the following six “influence cues or weapons of influence:”

1. Reciprocation

The principle of reciprocity states that when a person provides you with something, you attempt to repay him or her in kind. Reciprocation produces a sense of obligation...a powerful tool in persuasion.

2. Commitment and Consistency

Commitment is an effective persuasive technique because once you get someone to make a commitment, they are more likely to engage in self-persuasion, providing themselves with reasons to justify support of his or her commitment.

Consistency allows one to more efficiently make decisions and process information. The concept of consistency states that if a person commits, either orally or in writing, he or she is more likely to honor that particular commitment. This is especially true for written commitments.

3. Social Proof

People often base their actions and beliefs on what others are doing, how others act and what others believe. Simply put, most people are influenced by others around them. And they want to be doing what everyone else does.

4. Likability

This weapon is simple and concise. People say “yes” to people they like. The two major factors that contribute to likability are physical attractiveness and similarity. Research documents that people who are physically attractive seem to be more persuasive. Similarity surrounds the fact that we are attracted to people where there is similarity in opinions, interests, hobbies, personality traits, background or lifestyle.

5. Authority

People are attracted to others who are knowledgeable and trustworthy. So, if your character traits demonstrate those two things, you will command authority. It is interesting to note that we tend to listen to people who are granted the authority to give orders, make decisions and enforce obedience.

6. Scarcity

According to Cialdini, “people want more of what they cannot have.” When something has limited availability, people assign more value to it. We all want things that are out of our reach. And, if we see something easily available, we do not want it as much as something that is very rare. To get people to believe in the scarcity principle, you must educate them on the benefits of the scarce product or offering.

I have been fortunate to have received significant recognition for the creation of the Beyond Insurance® Process – a four step assessment approach aimed at risk profile improvement. As I read the book *Influence... The Psychology of Persuasion*, I could not help but notice that the impact of the Beyond Insurance Process and success of the Beyond Insurance® Global Network (www.beyondinsurance.com) is a result of the utilization of all six weapons of influence as listed above.

What are Persuasive Skills?

Persuasive skills are the skills that enable you to present your case or ideas to others in a way that convinces them that your ideas have merit. Being persuasive consists of the following characteristics:

- You are able to analyze your audience and present your case in such a way that shows how your position is the right one.
- You are able and willing to listen to your audience and respond appropriately with responses regarding how your ideas help satisfy their needs or concerns.
- You can make a logical, well-researched argument that uses facts and data to back up your ideas or position.
- You can keep your cool and enter into an exchange of ideas without feeling compelled to argue in a negative manner or resort to personal attacks.
- You are able to articulate your case or idea clearly in speech and/or writing.

Persuasion skills are on display during events like presidential debates and campaign speeches. However, good persuasive skills are an essential part of everyday life as people in leadership positions, sales & marketing and client service rely upon them. Let's take a look.

Leadership: Persuasion is an essential leadership trait as leaders are required to influence others to achieve a mutually agreed goal for the good of the Team. It is about vision, people alignment, culture and communication.

Sales & Marketing: As you have experienced firsthand, the most successful salespersons and marketing representatives are those who persuade you to buy their product or service.

Client Service: If you are in a position that involves customer service, you know that your success depends upon the trust and confidence placed on your wisdom, guidance and direction. Your

persuasive skills allow you to communicate how your products and services serve the client's best interests.

The power of persuasion opens doors for you and makes your path to success much smoother. While there is no doubt that persuasion is important in the business setting, it is also important in personal relationships with your spouse, children, parents and other loved ones. Think how often those who depend upon you are asked to take a leap of faith based upon your sound judgment. Possibly, it was your decision to place an aging parent into a long-term care facility, your stance on alcohol and drugs with your teenager, or how you persuaded your son or daughter to try out for the lead in the school play.

8 Tips to Enhance Your Persuading Skills

Persuasion techniques have their roots in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) or empathy. To persuade, you must understand the person you are trying to influence. Females usually respond best to feelings. Men often respond best to visuals. And, some people are best affected by audio. To learn which is the best stimulus to focus your persuasion, study the other person's speech patterns. Do they say, "I see," "I hear what you are saying" or "I feel that...?" The more you become aware of the person you are dealing with, the more powerful your persuasion skills.

Matching body language is also a subtle yet effective persuasive techniques. An analysis of thousands of recorded sales interviews and negotiations in business encounters support the findings of Albert Mehrabian and Ray Birdwhistell through which they determined that body language accounts for 60% to 80% of business negotiation. Eye contact, gestures, posture, smile and touch lead the list.

While there are numerous additional activities that will enhance your ability to persuade, I would like to suggest the following eight tips:

1. **If you want to be heard, listen.** Giving the other person the chance to speak not only gives you vital clues to their wants, needs and mood, it also shows that you are there to look after their interests. Listening also makes it easier for you to outline the benefits of your offering in terms they can understand.
2. **Argue your case with logic.** Do careful research on your ideas and those of your competitors and make sure that any claims you make can be supported by your process.
3. The more **hesitant language** you use such as "isn't it," "you know," "um mm" and "I mean" the less people are likely to believe your argument.
4. **Use positive rather than negative language:** instead of saying "You're wrong about this," say "That's true, however..." or "I agree with what you say but have you considered...."

5. **Subtly compliment the other party.** For example: “I see that you’ve done some excellent research into this.” Even though they may realize that you are stroking them, evidence shows that they will still warm to you and be more open to you.
6. **Mirroring the other person’s mannerisms.** Research substantiates that 67% of people who use mirroring achieved a sale compared to 12% who did not. People you mirror subconsciously feel more empathy with you.
7. **Remember the names of everyone you meet.** It shows that you are treating them as an individual.
8. **Show gratitude.** Gratitude is an internally generated capability that allows you to strengthen relationships and increase productivity.

The Power of Persuasion...a skill set that will take you to new levels of success!

About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* “Entrepreneur of the Year” award as well as one of the “25 Most Innovative Agents in America.” Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.