

PERSUASION

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IS ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON

Every day each of us engages—both consciously and unconsciously—in trying to change someone’s mind. If you are communicating with a friend or a family member, this act may be as simple as just asking for what you want.

But in a more formal work setting—whether it’s a client presentation, internal meeting about a new company initiative, or a one-on-one performance review—achieving your goal is bound to be more complicated. First, be honest with yourself. Most people could care less about what we want. People care about what they want. Persuading begins with listening and keen observation. Focus on the other person’s wants and needs, and then tailor your talk or conversation to help them achieve their goals.

To Change Minds, You Need Emotion and Conviction

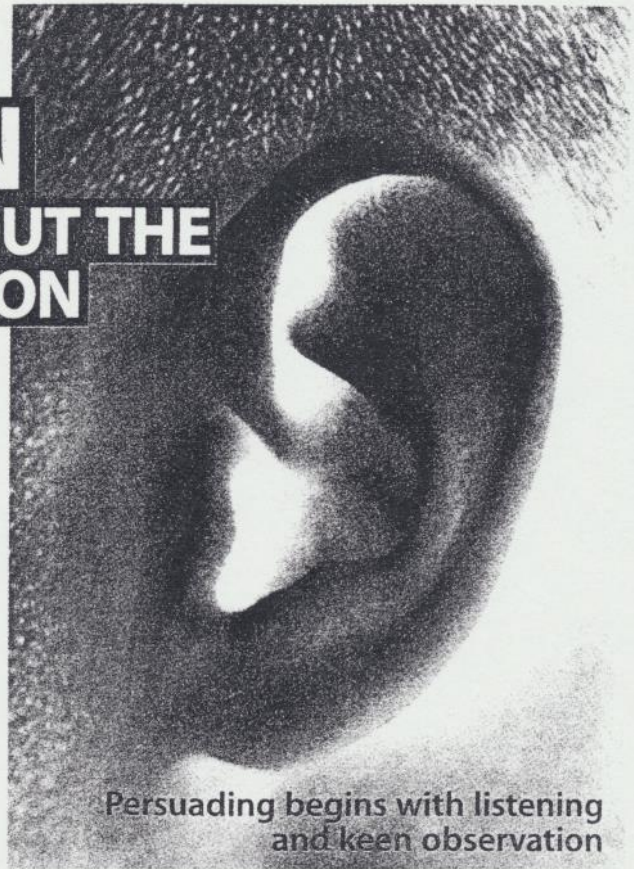
Information by itself, no matter how logically crafted, will not persuade most people. A healthy dose of emotion, conviction, and sincerity—coupled with a logical argument built around the other person’s needs and desires—will stand the best chance of carrying the day. Most important of all? Be sure to share your strong point of view with appropriate conviction. To shape opinions, you must be opinionated and energized!

Yet, when trying to convince an audience, most of us will hobble our presentation with a tedious information dump, hoping that others will find something appealing somewhere in this mountain of information. When trying to persuade, you must select the information you wish to present very carefully. Build your appeal around that information. Focus on why the audience should want to change their mind. What good things (benefits) will come their way if they do?

Non-verbal Signals Can Make a Major Impact

A persuasive message requires a strong presence to be truly compelling. Your audience is much more likely to be persuaded if your communication is backed up with solid non-verbal messages.

Most of the impact you have when speaking comes from your vocal and visual skills. Think about it. You see and hear someone tell you he has a great idea, but you notice a slight shifting of the eyes or a posture that doesn’t convey confidence. Chances are you will believe the non-verbal message over the words. But if the same person tells you about his great idea and backs up the statement with solid eye contact and some enthusiasm, you’ll most likely want to hear more.



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This non-verbal consistency is pretty straightforward: make good eye contact, keep a steady voice, don’t clutter your message with “uhs” or “uhms,” use relaxed gestures, smile, and stand up straight. Strong and consistent communication skills will give you an excellent shot of being heard all the way through, even if your audience is initially opposed to the ideas you are presenting.

Look to the Audience for Clues

Your best shot at persuading successfully is a face-to-face meeting, ensuring two-way communication and the general feeling that all sides are being heard.

While interest can be created with a strong point of view and confident non-verbal communication, to hit a home run you have to listen to and observe the audience’s reactions. Ask them questions about how they perceive your proposal and presentation to test their position and stand on the topic. Listen and watch for subtle verbal and non-verbal clues that will help you gauge the success of your appeal. For example, how emotionally attached are they to their current position? If you know that, you’ll know how far to push your audience.

Sometimes, even after your best effort at persuading, the audience may tell you they won’t change their mind. Restate your point of view and revisit the issue in a few days. Tenacity is often the secret weapon in influencing other people. ■

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