

# The Art of Persuasion

Three critical components.

**AN ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TRAIT** of a good leader is the art of persuasion. Persuasion is the ability to influence others to believe and engage in a common goal or idea. Some may think that persuasion involves the use of master tactical skills or the manipulation of others for personal gain. Persuasion is actually the opposite of manipulation. It flows naturally when three noble goals converge: setting a clear outcome; creating concrete details; and operating within an environment of trust.

It's worth briefly examining these concepts, because the lack of one or more may be diluting your ability to persuade those you are currently leading.

The first component of the art of persuasion is setting and communicating a clear understanding of your destination or outcome. Determining what you are trying to accomplish and what the end result will be is critical in painting an accurate and consistent future picture. Communicating that clear picture to your team will provide both direction and a common purpose. Think back to a discussion you have had with people of differing opinions. Was the end goal of the discussion communicated? You will achieve a far greater success rate if each person starts with the desired outcome in mind.

When leaders help others understand what they really care about and want to see achieved, it is far easier to persuade like-minded individuals and reach a successful result. Knowing the desired result also reduces distractions and the tendency of some to hold on to irrelevant points.

The second component in persuading others is providing concrete details. Include enough detail to make your goal or idea both appealing and tangible to the audience. The art of this component comes from knowing your audience and what is important to them. Imagine that you were trying to persuade a friend to attend the 2009 movie *The Blind Side*. Which argument would be more effective? Stating that the movie earned over \$125 million at the box office in its first two weeks of release? Or noting that the movie is about a topic you care about deeply: at-risk youth? It tells a true story about a Christian family that adopts a homeless teen, Michael Oher,

who becomes a rookie tackle for the Baltimore Ravens. Astonishingly, the story rose to number one on the charts in its first few weeks of release.

Although both examples use concrete facts, the second example is more compelling to an audience that cares about the future of at-risk youth and also wants to enjoy a well-crafted film. Someone who typically enjoys this kind of film will be persuaded by those facts much more easily than by revenue statistics. Alternatively, if you were trying to convince the heads of a large movie studio to see the movie, the first fact would be more compelling given their goal to make similar movies that earn high revenue. In generating concrete details, seek to consider the needs, motivations, and objectives of your audience.

The third component in persuading others is operating within an environment of trust. It is critical to build strong

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relationships with those you want to influence. We cannot overemphasize that relationships are foundational to a leader's ability to engage and influence others. The key ingredients of respect, rapport, honesty, and credibility will also reap the benefits of open communication, good listening, reciprocal care, and win-win approaches. If a relationship does not exist, persuading others requires much greater effort. Also, take care when persuading those who have experienced hardship. Past hurts or offenses can easily lead to poor communication and self-protection. When tensions are not resolved, trust is diminished and the opportunity to successfully persuade is often unachievable.

A leader's art of persuasion is evaluated and determined by each person in the audience. As the leader develops these three core competencies, new doors of opportunity will emerge. It requires time and effort to master the art of persuasion, but it is worth it, because followers will readily embrace and support a persuasive leader. ●



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