

Persuasion and Influence

by Tom Reilly, author of *Value-Added Selling*

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:

1. Define persuasion;
2. Describe personal characteristics of masters of influence;
3. Discuss persuasion as a process; and
4. 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 or acquiescence; 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 more sincere. 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 vulnerability. 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, challenges, and payoffs, 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.

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 50 interruptions per day. He wrote that 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 it 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.

18 Ways to Become 10 Times 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 I 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? Transmit on the channel that buyer's listen to—WIIFM? Speak the receiver's language; use their words; and make it task or people focused. 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? What is the one question that this person would want you to answer about your proposition? What is the one thing that would induce them to comply with your request?

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. It is the steady flow of information about the receiver's condition that precipitates their openness to your message of value. You follow this awakening-to-need with a campaign of information about your solution.

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 15 and 20 seconds. The average movie scene is approximately 60 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 sound-bite 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. There are few things

as powerful as a one-liner that hits the receiver in the solar plexus. Memorable phrases and slogans stick. People remember them. Keep it short. Avoid clutter. Trim.

Persuasion is all about distance

You want to reduce the distance between you—the sender of the message—and the buyer, the receiver of the message. Decreasing the psychological distance is a function of your customizing your message and methods of delivery to the buyer's needs and ability to process information. You can decrease the psychological space by pacing the other person. Pacing is creating a presentation context in which the other person feels most comfortable. This receiver-oriented climate subtly encourages the receiver to relax his guard. Dress as he dresses; speak as he speaks; and read what he reads. Move at a pace with which the other person feels comfortable, and respect the receiver's priority—task or people. Some buyers are all business; other buyers are more social. Adapt to the person with whom you are communicating. Speed it up; slow it down. Talk business; talk baseball. It is so much easier to trust you when the receiver perceives that you are a real person—just like him or her.

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 will scratch your back. 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.

Break through the barriers to resistance with a breakthrough strategy

Change agents use highly visible, short-term, and leveragable successes to create even bigger change. This is called a breakthrough strategy. You can achieve big victories with these small wins. You must be patient enough to take "yes" for an answer. A small win is the next, best step along the path to your ultimate goal. In sales, there are a number of these next, best steps that ultimately lead to the sale. This includes getting the other person to agree to a trial use, a follow-up meeting, or even a smaller initial order. Once you achieve this small win, you leverage this success to create bigger change. The term "sunk-cost" refers to someone continuing on a path because that person has invested so heavily that quitting would appear to be a big mistake. Software companies have successfully cemented their relationships with clients by offering updates that the client pays for with an annual renewal fee. Once the initial cost is absorbed and the updates paid for, the client is too far down the path to abandon the software in favor of a different solution. You will hear people say, "We are too pregnant on this project to quit now." It is as if the project has taken on a life of its own and the person is merely along for the ride. Short-term, leveragable successes are self-reinforcing. This is why gamblers continue to place bets when they are on a roll. The winning streak is too tempting to resist. Change agents will say, "I need a win, any win, to keep this thing going." The combination of success and momentum has proven to be a juggernaut for many masters of influence. Make it easy for the other person to say "yes" to your argument.

Maximize the information flow

Provide a steady flow of information to maintain your momentum. Even if you are in the early stages of change, be relentless in your giving information on how things are going. Keep the other person abreast of your progress. Studies have found that people are highly motivated by reports of their progress on a project. In your progress statement, assume that the other person is already on board and a necessary link the information

chain. This helps acclimate the other person to change. Maintain momentum by assuming that it is going somewhere. You are providing vital updates while previewing the success for the receiver of the message. There is an element of boldness in this approach. Sometimes, people require a nudge. Sooner or later the other person believes and buys into this. Advise the other person of what you are doing to sell the change, implement the change, and assure the value and efficacy of the solution. This continues throughout the Critical Buying Path[®]. The other person is always in the loop. In the selling phase, you want the other person (who has not acted) to feel that they are missing something. In the transition and implementation phase, you want to dispel buyer remorse and reassure them of what you are doing to support them. In the execution phase, you want to reinforce your value-added. Progress reports, performance reports, updates, and reminders must be part of this data stream that communicates your value.

Create a positive sense of urgency

Urgency is a powerful motivator. People act when they feel the time is right or time is limited. Scarcity impels action. Pain and gain are opposite sides of the same coin. The greater the pain, the greater the impetus to act. The greater the gain, the more powerful the motivation to act. Masters of influence use the allure of exponential value to incite action. You incite buyers to act when they realize the overwhelming appeal in your value proposition. The exponential value of your idea creates desire beyond hesitation because it carries the advantage of an annuity. Your proposal may have minimal short-term benefits, but the long-term gain may be substantial compared to the short-term gain. Weight control is a good example of this. When someone diets and loses weight, the short-term benefits include clothes fitting better and drawing compliments from those who notice the weight loss. The potential long-term gain is exponentially greater than the short-term gain; the medical benefits alone are substantial. When presenting the long-term gain, pile on. Make it overwhelming and still believable. Most people have a temporal bias for immediate gratification, so your proposition for long-term gain must overwhelm the short-term inconvenience that your idea creates. Pain, fear, and greed incite people to act.

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.

Demonstrate the do-ability of your idea

People avoid change because they perceive too many obstacles. Eliminating these obstacles and removing these barriers builds confidence in the object of the influence. Show the other person how you will help them train, transition, support, implement, transform, convert, and capture value from your idea. It is not simply up to them to get the value—you will help them make it happen. You must be their co-pilot on this flight. They are not alone in their efforts. The other person must feel that he or she can make this happen—that it is do-able. This is the fundamental question that someone asks when contemplating reaching out in new areas: Can I succeed if I try? Your job is to demonstrate how and why the person will succeed. They must feel that they can do this. Asking questions about what is causing them to hesitate is an effective way to identify perceived barriers and dismantle the wall of resistance brick by brick. You can then demonstrate the do-ability and assistance you will offer.

Help buyers own before they buy

Buyers must see the payoff for their acting and the value of this payoff. This is done with product demonstrations, hands-on applications, samples, trial runs, and documentation of what they can expect. Make success real and the receiver will act. Projecting ownership is putting the other person into the role of using or consuming your idea versus merely considering your idea. Acclimate them to the idea of ownership. In this way, not buying becomes a loss of something that they already possess. Projecting ownership engages buyers. The more you involve the receiver in the object of the message, the more possessive they become of the benefit. As you involve the receiver in the ownership process, it lowers resistance to change. Most times, your request for action involves change. The receiver's involvement creates ownership of the process as well as the outcome. Rather than change being forced on the other person, the receiver is embracing it. People do not resist change as much as they resist being changed. As the receiver perceives this change as something over which he or she has some control, you have one less obstacle to overcome in your persuasion.

Use social proof to make your case

Social proof is the validation and credibility that other people contribute to your campaign. You need not approach your persuasion project alone. Enlist the aid of others to make your case. This includes a mentor, guide,

or coach. This person can help you navigate the waters of change through the target organization. The "inside" information you receive allows you to tailor your message and approach to reflect the interests and situation of the target audience. Opinion leaders and influencers can also help you make your case. Identifying who these supporters are is the first step in soliciting their help. People feel better when they know that others believe in you and have enjoyed success from your ideas. Social proof includes testimonials, case studies, industry experts, consultants, legal advisors, and accountants. Anyone with credibility in the eyes of the receiver is a potential source for you. Social proof is especially effective when dealing with the emotional component of change. Advertisers have long used the concept of celebrity endorsements because consumers trust these people. Sports figures, actors, and other celebrity endorsers add credibility to a brand. It is as if the advertiser is co-branding with the endorser.

Offer rational arguments

While social proof engages emotion (pathos), rational argument engages intellect (logos). Buyers may want to act, but need reasons to act. This is the logical proof that you offer to prove your argument. This includes data, third-party endorsements, statistics, industry awards, newspaper and trade journal articles, recognition from credible and trusted sources, customer retention scores, customer satisfaction data, safety ratings, etc. Rational arguments support your claims and shore up your argument about the efficacy of your solution for the organization and the personal payoff for the buyer. Demonstrating a compelling benefit with tangible proof increases your odds of success by at least 42%, according to Doug Hall's studies of innovation. The payoff for the other person (and to his/her organization) must have value to that person: Is it worth it? Is it equitable? Am I getting at least as good as I'm giving? Is the reward worth the risk? How do I know that this will happen? These are a few of the questions that the other person will ask. What are the short-term rewards and the long-term (exponential) gain? Prove the incentive to act. In the absence of quantitative data, you may have to use overwhelming qualitative arguments. Facts make people think; they know with logic. Emotions make people feel; they act because of the emotion. The ROI of doing nothing is nothing! The ROI of change is higher (and possibly lower). Which offers the greater risk: doing nothing or doing something?

Emotion energizes

If you want to move people, touch their heart. Rational arguments and objective data make people think. Emotion energizes people to act. Humans act on emotion and often use reason to justify their emotional decisions to do something. Advertisers appeal to our better angels, tug at our heart strings, and tease our vanity to induce us to buy what they are selling. Politicians create elaborate arguments to convince people that their agendas make sense, but if the politician wants to really connect with the voters, he or she appeals to the voters' hearts. Great speeches throughout

history struck an emotional spark that lit up a generation. John Kennedy's inaugural challenge, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" inspired a generation of young people into public service. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech touched the emotional core of an entire country and signaled that there was no retreating on civil rights. Ronald Reagan's "Shining city on a hill" speech fanned the flames of patriotism and awakened a pride in America that seemed to be waning. Understanding the emotions of the receiver helps you tap into this special energy. Whether you appeal to the other person's greed, fear, pride, or anger, you are using an energy that is already moving the other person. Recognizing that the receiver of your message is operating from a position of fear, you can fashion a solution and an approach that alleviate his or her concerns. Someone operating from a position of greed wants more of something—something you can help this person achieve. Ignoring the emotion in an interpersonal communication is like ignoring how much fuel is in the gas tank of your car. Even the most technical, business-to-business sale runs on emotion, the fuel that propels the change engine.

Master the language of the masters of influence

Great communicators understand the art and science of their craft. Like all artisans, they understand which tools to use and when to use them. These language tools include metaphors, similes, and analogies. People process incoming information quicker and more effectively when it resonates with what they already know. This is why these tools work well. When your idea is analogous to other changes that the receiver has made, it makes your request more reasonable. Metaphors are widely used in therapeutic conversations, as patients often find the taste of the metaphor easy to swallow. Great communicators use the power of repetition. They do not rely solely on one pronouncement of a thought. They strike the theme over and over again as a carpenter drives a nail deep into the wood. Repeat your value-added theme often so the receiver forms the association between your idea and value-added. Double down on benefits. If one benefit is impressive, two are twice as impressive. Demonstrate how your idea saves money and increases productivity; saves time and increases quality; increases worker safety and satisfaction. Invoke the rhythm of the magical number three. This is known as the tricolon: We came; we saw; we conquered. In your attempt to make your presentation more alive with language, practice economy. More words alone do not make a presentation more persuasive. Write and re-write until you are convinced the message is tight.

Use multiple tools of influence

Abraham Maslow said, "If your only tool is a hammer, you treat every problem as a nail." The purpose this tip is to give you multiple and varied tools for your tool kit. Some of the tools on this partial list have already been mentioned.

- Testimonial letters or quotes
- Customer satisfaction data
- Technical people in your company to help support your claims
- Manufacturer support (if you are a distributor)
- Literature used for positioning and proof
- Value calculators to demonstrate the fiscal soundness of your idea
- Facility tours to promote the perceived value of your company
- Industry experts that support your solution
- Print media support
- Favorable articles about your company
- Press releases that demonstrate your innovativeness
- Awards that recognize your value, quality and service
- Case studies and success stories of others who have benefited from your value
- A customer list to prove your wide appeal
- State/governmental licensing which reduces risk
- Proprietary designs and patents that demonstrate innovativeness
- Customer training that previews your value
- Independent testing labs that add credibility to your claims
- No-charge invoices that document your value
- Delivery and performance reports that reassure prospects and remind customers
- Project savings reports that quantify your value
- Project punch lists of completed activities to demonstrate that you deliver

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