

WHITEPAPER

**DECISION MAKING
AND THE
PSYCHOLOGY
OF PERSUASION**

Becoming a Master of Influence

Buyer Psychology and Decision Making

Have you ever done a great job of selling and the buyer did a lousy job of buying?

Maybe you made the right presentation to the wrong person. Maybe you made the wrong presentation to the right customer. Maybe you made the right presentation to the right person, but the buyer made the wrong decision. People decide and act in predictably irrational ways that defy convention and common sense. This irrational behavior is evidence that something in addition to reason drives people. Humans operate as *feeling and thinking systems*. Like all motivated behavior, buying decisions result from dynamic internal and external forces acting on the individual. Internal forces include emotion and cognition. External forces include organizational, market, and source issues.

Emotional forces excite, and cognitive forces evaluate. Ideally, emotion (feeling) and cognition (thinking) work together. That does not always happen. Humans make decisions in a context broader than self. The backdrop of the external conditions against which people make decisions is as relevant as the internal forces that drive behavior. These three forces—emotion, cognition, and context—can be seen as threads entwined so tightly that their separate functions appear to meld into one. Under ideal conditions, the synergy of these three forces maximizes the outcome for the decision maker. Under many circumstances, humans make flawed and irrational decisions that defy reason and can be attributed only to emotion.

Salespeople who understand the relationship between internal and external forces and make time to know their buyers are more effective. Knowing what the buyer needs is important, but it is not enough. It is imperative to understand why the buyer needs what he needs and how he will make the decision. This immersion into the customer's world helps salespeople fully understand the decision-making process. Humans are hard-wired for this type of empathic understanding.

"When we want to understand something, we cannot just stand outside and observe it. We have to enter deeply into it and be one with it in order to really understand. If we want to understand a person, we have to feel his feelings, suffer his sufferings, and enjoy his joy."

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*

The Emotional Buyer (Irrational)

"The heart has reasons that reason cannot understand."

Blaise Pascal

Humans are emotional creatures that often use reason to explain their emotional decisions. Reason makes people think; emotion energizes people to act. This is another way of saying that emotion is a catalyst to action while reason is the path to conclusions. Emotions play an organizational role in our bodies to prepare an appropriate response to our environment. They stir our passions as we reflect on our options.

If humans made purely rational decisions, no one would eat to excess, smoke tobacco, or overindulge in alcohol. Financial decisions would make sense. Everyone would live within their means. They would invest in things that yield an equitable rate of return. Young people would not text and drive vehicles at the same time. Drivers would obey traffic laws. These are emotional decisions, unsupported by reason. Emotion is the cauldron of irrationality. As emotion bubbles into action, evading the cooling process of reason, behavior takes the form of the irrational. Rationalizing decisions is not the same as rational decisions.

Buyers experience a range of positive and negative emotions: fear, greed, anger, guilt, sadness, contempt, discouragement, frustration, love, happiness, joy, pride, optimism, excitement, satisfaction, and confidence. Fear is a quick, powerful, and efficient motivator. We process fear quickly. It activates fight-or-flight responses. Fear provides valuable feedback for responses to perceived threats. Fear is the most powerful emotion. It even trumps greed.

Specific fears buyers feel include fear of loss, missing an opportunity, scarcity, making a mistake, risk or exposure, failure to perform, and no alternative. What is the greatest fear of all? It is the fear of the unknown, a fact recognized and exploited by filmmakers and science fiction writers. If fear can live in the imagination, hope can co-exist. The salesperson must tap into that same potential to make the gain as vivid as the imaginary threat.

The Thinking Buyer (Rational)

Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am.)

René Descartes

Humans are not doomed to be slaves to their passions. Humans can exercise higher-power thinking. Emotion is powerful. With practice, reason can modulate emotional impulses. That is the essence of cognitive behavioral therapy. Patients learn to have better, more rational conversations with themselves to override impulses that may be destructive to themselves or others. Ideally, these preferred mental conversations lead to desirable behavior.

Reason plays a role in decision making during the cognitive processing phase. Once the decision maker invokes reason, emotion is only part of the process. Decisions are the outcome of emotions and reason. If impulse is the outcome of emotion, cognitive reflection and processing are the outcomes of invoking reason.

Everyone is biased in some fashion. These cognitive biases influence decision making:

- Blind spot bias—those who claim unbiased decision making may find their lack of insight as their greatest obstacle to rational decision making. They cannot see their bias.
- Confirmation bias—this means seeking only information to confirm what someone knows or thinks. There is no will to find conflicting information.
- Status quo bias—this is seeking information that protects the way things are. Guardians of the status quo resist anything that disrupts present circumstances. They want to preserve what is.
- Bandwagon bias—this is following the herd because it is safe or fashionable. A variation of this is groupthink, adopting the attitudes and beliefs of the group.
- Control bias—this depends on how much control you feel you have over a decision. You may have an exaggerated sense of control and become overconfident. This is the basis for irrational exuberance.
- Victim bias—you perceive a lack of control and feel there is little use in trying. You are too willing to accept controllable circumstances as beyond your control.
- Attribution bias—this means you attribute motives to others' behavior. You believe that your crystal ball gives you special insight into the motivations of other people.
- Selfing—this bias means you are too self-centered in your view of the situation and the importance of the outcome to you personally.

- Halo bias—just because an approach was successful in one area, you assume it will work in other areas.
- Anchoring bias—this is weighing too heavily a single-decision variable. For example, price shoppers lock in on a specific price and that becomes their dominant standard.
- Diagnostic bias—this means that you process information based on your expertise. For example, a cardiologist may view your symptoms as heart-related while an endocrinologist may view your symptoms as chemically-induced.

Emotion is feeling. Cognition is thinking. Cognition is processing information in awareness versus acting impulsively, as with emotion. A thinking buyer, though influenced by emotion, will consider the facts and ideally maximize the expected utility of the decision.

Human beings are pleasure-seeking, instant-gratification, pain-avoiding, change-resistant, simple, decision-making narcissists. These facts will help you understand better your customers.

Things to Know About Buyers

1. Humans are pleasure-seekers. They love pleasure and hate pain. Pain is a more powerful motivator than gain. Because of this, people work harder to avoid pain than to pursue a gain. Along the same lines, losses loom heavier than gains. People have a bias for certainty. They prefer a bird in the hand to the two in the bush. Accordingly, people forego bigger future gains for a sure-thing, immediate gain. Additionally, people risk bigger potential losses to avoid a sure-thing, immediate loss. If the gain is small and certain, they will take the immediate gain. Even if the long-term losses are greater, they will wager those against the certainty of the immediate, known loss.
2. Negative emotions are a more powerful source of energy than positive emotions because they have greater operational value. Memories for negative events are stronger than memories for positive events. This plays an important role in survival of the species. It is more important to recognize and recall threats than to remember the tastiest berry on the tree.
3. Humans run on auto-pilot most of the time. They make automatic decisions 85-90% of the time. When decisions are automatic, it means they are largely emotional.

4. Change is uncomfortable, yet most people realize they must adapt to survive. It is not so much that people hate change; they dislike *being changed*. *Change from within is a powerful source of energy.*
5. People behave when they feel confident they can perform at a certain level, the behavior has a payoff, and the payoff is valuable to them.
6. Humans are social creatures and depend on others for learning and safety. One of the most fundamental human emotions is the need to fit in—to be a part of something greater than self.
7. People like the idea of choice but dislike choosing. Consequently, they use mental shortcuts called heuristics. Humans are wired for simplicity. It is more efficient for the brain to make quick decisions that require little processing. This is why buyers use heuristics. A cheap price is an example of mental shorthand. Contrast, novelty, past experiences, etc. provide the decision maker with a quick and efficient decision-making process.
8. Humans have a temporal bias for now. For most people, immediate gratification takes too long. This, coupled with certainty, make it difficult for people to appreciate fully the long-term benefits of a proposal.
9. Humans have an arbitrary sense of fairness which colors their perception of equity.
10. Some people maximize and choose the best possible alternative. Others satisfice (settle) for something merely acceptable.
11. Some people process their world with a holistic, big-picture view. Others process their realities with an analytical, detailed view.
12. People value their discoveries, insights, and ideas more than what they are told and sold. People care more about their motives than yours.
13. All buying decisions involve trade-offs. Sometimes, these are called opportunity costs—the cost of foregone alternatives. Every decision means forfeiting other options.

Contextual Forces

"Priority is a function of context."

Stephen R. Covey

People make decisions in the broader context of their worlds. The internal forces of emotion and cognition operate within the decision maker. External forces operate within the context of a bigger world. There is no escaping these external forces. To understand fully the buyer's needs, wants, and fears, salespeople must understand the context in which buyers make decisions. This includes the incentives and pressures they face. Their decision-making climate can have a profound effect on the buyer and his choice.

Organizational Dynamics

This includes three different forces that define organizations. First, the availability of resources like time, money, people, facilities, etc. Limited resources constrain buyers. The size of the budget compels the depth and breadth of the solution. Deadlines and urgency cause buyers to make quick decisions. If a buyer has limited internal technical resources, he or she may need to consider options with readily available technical support. Limited warehousing compels quicker delivery. A buyer for a small company may need to partner with a logistics powerhouse that increases their buying power.

Second, power distribution refers to who makes the decision. Where does the purchasing power exist? Is this a group or individual decision? Will the committee drive this decision? Are the decision makers insulated from their decisions because of group anonymity? How does groupthink affect the decision-making process? Are there power struggles within the organization? One purchasing agent summed it up succinctly, "You can call on engineering all you want, but they cannot issue the purchasing order."

Third, structural factors impede or facilitate decisions. Functional silos exist when one department operates as a separate entity, independent of other departments. It is a failure-of-systems in organizations that suffer from these silos. When purchasing fails to communicate with engineering or production or operations, it is as if purchasing is buying for itself instead of another entity. Geography is part of this structural silo. Many companies employ outside procurement agencies to purchase for them. These agencies understand the organization's needs as they are spelled out in the requisition. They may know what they need but not why they need it. When a purchasing group in Houston purchases for a mine in Wyoming, there is little physical contact between the two. From a procurement perspective, consolidating purchasing in one location may

sound like a great way to leverage purchasing dollars, but at what cost to efficiency and effectiveness? These silos create supplier issues for salespeople as they attempt to penetrate these accounts.

Market Dynamics

Markets are unique unto themselves. Commodity markets differ from capital-goods markets, and manufacturing differs from distribution. The service industry differs from all of the above. These markets are connected but separate. Market conditions include things like supply-and-demand issues, competitive threats, and general economic trends. An awareness of market conditions helps salespeople understand the world in which their customers operate—competitive threats and opportunities, customer demands, and other supply pressures. Market dynamics include competitors. Desperate competitors do desperate things. When a competitor offers customers an attractive offer at a much lower price, even the most loyal customers must consider it.

Source Issues

Strength of the message and credibility of the messenger influence decision making. A knowledgeable source is a credible source. A financially stable source reassures buyers. A close personal relationship with the seller is important. You are part of the context in which buyers make their decisions.

Pressure Points

Pressure points are any conditions that mitigate the importance of price in the buying decision. The more pressure points that are in a sale, the less important price is. This list of mitigating factors—buyer pressure points—will help you understand the pressures the decision maker feels.

- Timing and a sense of urgency—the buyer needs it ASAP;
- Safety, security, or stability;
- A unique problem that the buyer is experiencing;
- Brand preference for what you sell;
- Supplier preference for your company;
- This decision is critical to the customer's business;
- Availability of supply;
- A unique solution;
- Many barriers prevent direct product comparison;
- Many customers competing for your time;

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- A bad experience with your competition in the past;
- Few perceived substitutes for your product;
- A painless transition to your solution;
- Budget availability—the buyer has the money;
- Budget deadline—spend it or lose it;
- The buyer’s business is doing well;
- Compliance issues;
- Your location favors your company;
- “Cheap” impacts buyer’s image negatively; and
- Credit status—the buyer has problems.

Persuasion Is a Two-Faced Word

Janus, the Roman god of entrances and exits, the namesake of our first month of the year, is often depicted as having two faces—one looking backward and the other looking forward. Janus words, sometimes called contronyms, are words that have opposite meanings. For example, weather can mean wear away or withstand a storm. Hysterical can mean funny or out of control. Left can mean having gone or remaining somewhere. Right can mean correct or a privilege that one enjoys. Persuasion is a contronym, a two-faced word. For some people, to persuade has a negative connotation: seduce, force, or cajole. For other people, to persuade has a positive meaning: encourage, inspire, or motivate. In *Value-Added Selling*, persuasion is a good thing. It plays an integral role in how you communicate your value to customers.

Persuasion is about moving people. It is the process of influencing others to act on your request. It is more than arguing someone into submission or acquiescence, though that is *argument* in a 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; one-part substance and one-part style. Persuasion involves finesse, nuance, and direct requests for action. It can be practiced in a single communication or as part of an elaborate process for change. It is as simple as a parent's response to an infant's cry, as sophisticated as a presidential candidate's bid for office, and as common as a television advertisement promoting a brand. All people engage in persuasion, but few study with curiosity.

Research shows that masters of influence (those who use four or more sources of influence) are ten times more persuasive than people who use only one source of influence. This reading will show you how to become a master of influence by focusing your efforts on three things: the messenger; the message; and your method of delivery.

Persuasion has its own terminology. Though you may have used some of these terms differently under other circumstances, our use adheres to the study of rhetoric. In our view, rhetoric is a positive term—another Janus word—that means the art of discourse, written or verbal. You are the *medium, messenger, sender, speaker, and salesperson*. We use these interchangeably. The subject of your communication will be a message, request, idea, petition, pitch, plea, and argument (in a rhetorical sense). We use these interchangeably. The object or target of your persuasion is

the other person, receiver, customer, buyer, and audience. We use these interchangeably. I trust this will clear up any confusion you may experience while reading.

My hope is that you enjoy the journey into the world of influence.

One: Messenger

The medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

The Oracle of Omaha, Warren Buffett, has invited you to a meeting where he will share three inside secrets for investment opportunities. Would you attend this meeting? Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg is making a presentation on how to spot the next Internet innovation? Would there be standing room only at this event? Oprah Winfrey is hosting an event on how to break into network television. Are you in? Yes, yes, and yes. In each of these cases, the messenger is so impressive that it would be foolish to pass up the opportunity. Each is a master of influence in his or her field. Do your customers view you as a master of influence in your field?

The messenger is so vital to persuasion that advertisers spend more than \$1 billion annually for celebrity endorsers of their products. The advertisers hope the celebrity's personal magic rubs off on the products they pitch. Our research has found that 25% of the reason customers buy something is because of the person from whom they purchase. The skill sets for masters of influence include their ability to sell, not just tell; convince, not just communicate; and persuade, not just present.

The message is important, but even the most compelling argument sputters from the lips of a mediocre communicator. From early thinkers to contemporary social scientists, the messenger has been as much a focus of their work as the message itself. It follows that any study of persuasion must begin with you, the medium and messenger—your characteristics, power, and focus.

Characteristics

Aristotle wrote, "Character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion." In Aristotle's words, character (ethos) is one of three main elements of persuasion. It is the audience's perception of your credibility or trustworthiness. Experience, record of success, credentials, education, training, certifications, professionalism, and consistency build credibility in the receiver's mind. These three characteristics—authenticity,

charisma, and passion—are the foundation for your becoming a person of influence. Master these, and you master influence.

Authenticity

You can't fake that. Authentic individuals are true to themselves and transparent to others. This results in trust, the currency of good relationships. People want to associate with those whom they trust. There are three components of authenticity: credibility, sincerity, and expertise.

Credibility

Your experience, record of success, credentials, education, training, certifications, professionalism, and consistency build your credibility. The receiver of your message assesses your competence quickly to determine if you are believable. Do you walk the talk? People perceive consonance and reliability. Preparation and organization demonstrate your commitment and enhance your credibility. Accepting responsibility, taking charge, and demonstrating effectiveness make you credible. Following up, delivering on promises, and honoring your word increase trust. When people believe they can depend on you, you become more influential. Credibility is the melding of professional and personal integrity.

Sincerity

Authentic people are open. What you see is what you get. This transparency is refreshing and reassuring. If you care about your message and its impact on the receiver(s), your sincerity wins the heart(s) of the audience. When you make a difference for them, you become a person of influence. The cornerstones of trust—your credibility and sincerity—assure others they are dealing with a principled individual. Authentic people take their work seriously.

Expertise

Expertise is the reward of experience, and you are the beneficiary of this gift. Knowledge and skill are the outcomes of study and practice, but expertise comes from mastery in your field. The more experience you have in an area, the greater your expertise. Mastery is the upshot of practice. Expertise confers power on the practitioner of that discipline. The expert, because of his or her knowledge, commands the respect of others. Professionals have a specialized knowledge, skill, or expertise for which others pay. Your knowledge of the audience and mastery of your topic make you an expert.

Charisma

Charisma can be learned. It empowers masters of influence to inspire enthusiasm, affection, and loyalty among followers. The ancients believed that it was a divinely-bestowed gift to special people, enabling them to charm and influence others. Charisma is the star power of celebrities, the captivation of great leaders, and the magnetism of the cool kids at school. There are three ways to become more charismatic: optimism, likeability, and charisma.

Optimism

Share your optimism. Throughout history, masters of influence have shared with their followers a vision of a better time and place. Their visions inspired hope. The followers breathed in this hope as fresh air. It is not that people are mindless sheep. People want hope. They want to believe there is a better place than what they currently occupy. This is why charismatic leaders paint clear pictures for them. Value-added salespeople create the vision of a solution that makes the buyers' lives better, easier, and safer. They tap into the human desire for hope.

Likeability

Become more likeable. I can hear my mother's words, "The best way to have a friend is to be a friend." Likeability is one of Robert Cialdini's six principles of persuasion. He has researched this commonsense principle and concluded that it plays a major role in your ability to influence other people. Your likeability is tied directly to your focus on others. Focusing on others makes you immediately more likeable. The mistake too many people make is that they are more concerned with *being liked than liking others first. Find something you like about the receiver of the message and focus on that. If the other person perceives you like him or her, it makes you more likeable in that person's eyes.*

Empathy

Become more empathic. Empathy makes you likeable. Empathy is the ability to understand deeply the other person's condition. When the receiver of the message knows you understand his or her problems, challenges, and payoffs, that person is more open to your request. People are drawn to those who understand them. Charismatic salespeople have this effect on their customers. Customers are drawn to them because these salespeople like and understand them. Empathy is fundamental to likeability, sincerity, and credibility.

Your relationship with the receiver of the message increases the likelihood of his or her accepting your argument. If the receiver finds hope in your message, likes you, and knows you understand their plight, he or she is open to your request.

Passion

Passion is intense, active, and genuine emotion. It is the zeal, gusto, and excitement that move people. Authenticity makes you credible. Charisma makes you likeable. Passion makes you exciting. It compels. In persuasion, it is the energy you breathe into your message. Passion sells and enthusiasm is contagious. If you cannot get excited about what you are proposing, how can you expect the receiver to get excited? Though Aristotle wrote of pathos as an emotional appeal to the audience, passion and enthusiasm stoke the fire in their bellies. Your passion awakens their interest and fuels their enthusiasm. Passion touches the heart and soul.

Think of someone with boundless enthusiasm. How easy is it to get caught up in their excitement? Dr. Leo Buscalgia was a professor of Special Education at USC. To some, he was known as the “Love Doctor” following his book, *Love. He lectured on the healing and restorative power of love. Woven into his psychology of love was passion. Though his specialty was love and relationships, Buscalgia advised salespeople to fall in love with what they sell and then share that love with customers. This love is passion. Passion is focused enthusiasm. Passion grows with study. It grows as you closely identify with your cause. It flourishes as you understand the impact of your ideas on others. Like a great story, passion is best spent when sharing with others.*

Power

Any discussion of persuasion must include power. Powerful people are persuasive. Authenticity, charisma, and passion are powerful characteristics. Your ability to control resources, including information, your positional power, including the authority to punish or reward, all confer power on you. The latter form of power is formal in that you may command others to do something, and they must comply.

If you control resources, you possess legitimate power. This command of resources assigns power to the individual. If you control resources, you are a powerful person. Imagine a low-level employee who is tasked with maintaining inventory of necessary supplies. This person orders replacements, allocates supply, or refuses to distribute. That is real power, even if it reflects a narrow

slice of the organizational pie. A salesperson, selling in a strong-demand market, may have significant authority over which customers receive goods during shortages. It is called allocation, and it is a red flag for the customer.

An agency that regulates the amount of water that flows from a river into a recreational facility commands significant power over those who depend on water for their livelihood or recreation. Even a visit to the dreaded motor vehicle department demonstrates what happens when a low-level employee controls resources. You may wait in line for an hour only to be turned away because you failed to bring with you the necessary paperwork. The person who turns you away does not make the regulations but enforces them. Enforcement is power.

Station power is the legitimate authority that someone has over other people because of their position or station in the organization. This may be the teacher in a classroom, the coach of a sports team, or the manager of a department. Absent the power of their position, these people may lack any other forms of power, but their station gives them authority over others.

The legitimate authority to reward and punish confers on the sender of a message special status with the receiver of the message. It makes the message imminently more important to the receiver. When the sender is in a position of authority, the significance of that power is not wasted on the receiver. Authority amplifies influence. Those with legitimate power may find it easier to induce or influence others to act. Many other characteristics listed above confer power on senders. Your position of authority guarantees your power.

Salespeople may lack the legitimate power of a manager, but they are not powerless in the organization. Their status as producers grants them a respect from others who depend on their production for the security of their jobs. Their ability to make things happen grants them special status with customers.

Focus

Through which lens do you view your ideas—your lens or the receiver's lens? Sender-focused communication appeals to the messenger. Receiver-focused communication touches the listener. Effective persuasion is receiver-focused. Ask and answer these questions:

- Who is the receiver of the message?
- What problems or issues burden this person?
- How serious are they?
- Does the receiver recognize and understand the problem?
- What level is the decision maker you are targeting with this message?
- Why would this person be open to your message?

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- What does this person want you to say about your proposition?
- What is one thing that would induce them to comply with your request?

In Value-Added Selling, view your message as value-received, not just value-added. To become receiver-focused, demonstrate the same empathy that makes you more charismatic. The receiver's lens gives you special insight to make your message meaningful and compelling.

Equipped with the personal characteristics of a master of influence, power, and a receiver-focused mindset, you are ready to plan. Persuasion may happen spontaneously. Generally it is the result of purposeful effort by the messenger. It involves in-depth planning and disciplined 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:

- What is the need for what I am proposing?
- How compelling is this need (impact of this need on the receiver)?
- Does the receiver recognize this need?
- How will I awaken the receiver to the need?
- Can the receiver do what I am requesting?
- How can I move this person to act on my request?
- What is the payoff for the receiver to act on my request?

Once you have asked and answered these questions, you can begin to plan your message and your method of delivery.

Two: Message

Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet, just as it was in broadcasting. ... Those who succeed will propel the Internet forward as a marketplace of ideas, experiences, and products—a marketplace of content.

Bill Gates, *Content is King*

In the section on messenger characteristics, we studied ethos. In the next two sections—message and method—we study how emotion and logic play integral roles in your persuasion. This is pathos and logos respectively, the remaining two elements in Aristotle’s Art of Rhetoric. If persuasion is one-part content and one-part context, the message is content-oriented. It is the substance of your request. These six ideas will help you design your Value-Added Selling message.

Comparison and Contrast

When you purchase something, there are things you like and things you dislike. The tension of resolving this conflict may cause you to perceive it as too much effort. Why try? It may intimidate you into making the wrong decision. It may confuse you so that you reach a point of indecision. How you resolve these differences determines whether or not you make the purchase.

Comparison and contrast are rhetorical devices that call attention to similarities and differences respectively. Persuasion is about distance: the distance between the sender and the receiver of the message; the distance between the sender’s request and the receiver’s reality; and the distance between competing alternatives for the receiver’s interest. Comparison seeks to reduce the distance between the sender (or request) and the receiver by demonstrating compatibility. Contrast attempts to increase the distance between competing alternatives (competitors or ideas) by spotlighting differences. Differences, more than similarities, make it easier for the receiver to choose among competing alternatives.

Persuasion hinges on the distance between the sender and the receiver of the message. The greater the distance between you and the receiver, the more difficult it is to influence the other person. Communicating is like broadcasting over the airwaves. Too much distance between the sending unit and the receiving unit weakens the signal, opens it to static, and makes the communication difficult to understand. Reducing the distance between you and the receiver makes your task easier. It reduces noise and strengthens the signal. Distance is literal and figurative—physical, emotional, and psychological.

Humans have a strong need for balance in their lives. This is homeostasis in biological systems. In psychology, it is the integration of parts into the whole. Humans like it when the parts fit. This congruence feels right. Congruence is agreement or conformity. It is the alignment of parts, compatibility of elements, and synchronization of pieces. It is derived from the Latin word “congruere” which means to agree. In persuasion, it is establishing common ground. It is the coming together of sender and receiver, and the alignment of your request and the other person’s reality.

Distance between sender and receiver

Humans crave intimacy, closeness with others. If we desire closeness in everyday life, imagine how important closeness is in persuasion. Whom do you trust most? You. People seek others who share common ground. You must demonstrate inter-personal congruence in ways that emanate from your core. These are common attitudes, beliefs, and values. When your core mirrors the other person’s core, the comfort level opens the receiver to your messaging. The greater the philosophical overlap between sender and receiver, the less change or adapting is required by the receiver. This happens when their vision is your vision, their values are your values, and their attitudes are your attitudes. When people think this much alike, they should connect. There are six ways to achieve closer proximity between you and the receiver.

1. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

Straight-line communication is honest and transparent. Its clarity minimizes confusion and alleviates tension. There is no hidden agenda. Your motives are apparent to the receiver. Though your message is more direct, it is not rude or blunt. You can finesse your message without complicating it. A straightforward request for action is expected in a buyer-seller relationship. That is the point of persuasion—to ask someone to do something.

2. Find common ground.

Establishing common ground means you share similar interests. These interests offer more and varied dimensions for you to connect. Though it is believed that everyone is connected by six degrees of separation, fewer degrees of separation bring you closer to the other person. Smokers gravitate to other smokers. Sports fans find camaraderie among people with the same allegiances. People seek out their own in large crowds. Managers tend to hire people like themselves. To establish common ground, dress as he dresses; speak as she speaks; and read what they read.

3. Speak your receiver's language.

You must be multilingual to succeed in persuasion. Every receiver speaks a different language. Engineers, accountants, purchasing agents, salespeople, maintenance workers, plant managers, chemists, IT, and office staff all speak their own language. Different levels of decision makers speak their own language as well. A business owner has a different language than the warehouse manager. Every organization has its own buzz words and corporate speak. When the receiver of the message hears your message presented in their vernacular, it is easier to understand and process. It also demonstrates that you understand them. You speak their language. You get it. You are one of them.

4. Eliminate barriers.

Which of these common communications barriers interfere with your communication: location (busy office), time (doing something else), distractions (too much noise), technology (email or texting), physical barriers, semantics, emotion, systems or procedures, status, poor listening skills, or intellectual level? This is a partial list. There may be other barriers unique to your messaging. Corporations often have centralized purchasing departments that buy for all locations regardless of their proximity to the home office. Geographic distance is a barrier. Functional silos in organizations present significant communication challenges.

5. Pace the receiver.

Sender-focused communication expects the receiver to adapt to the sender's communication style. Receiver-focused communication expects you to adapt to the receiver's style. Adapting brings you closer to the receiver. Decreasing psychological and emotional distance is a function of customizing your message and methods of delivery to the buyer's needs and ability to process this information. Pacing decreases the psychological distance. Pacing creates a presentation context in which the other person feels most comfortable. This receiver-oriented climate subtly encourages the other person to relax his guard and "let you in." Move at a pace with which the other person feels comfortable. Some people are more intuitive and move quickly. Other people are methodical and move at a slower pace. There is a right and wrong way to pace. Right is that you move at a pace with which the receiver feels comfortable and can process your message as thoroughly as needed. Wrong is expecting the receiver to move at your pace. Speed it up or slow it down, depending on your receiver.

6. Mirror the receiver's priority.

Some people are all business; others are more social. Task-oriented receivers are all business. They focus on performance and results. People-oriented receivers are warm and approachable. They focus on the process of change and its impact on people. Adapt to the person with whom you are communicating. Talk business; talk baseball. It is much easier for the receiver to trust you when he or she perceives that you are a real person—just like him or her.

Distance Between Request and Receiver Reality

From sender to receiver, congruence extends from the distance between you and the receiver to your mission and the receiver's mission. When your cause, course of action, or mission parallels the other person's, you have a common purpose. Your plea is congruent with the receiver's plight. His or her challenge becomes your challenge. Implicit in this is the support you can offer each other. When two people or organizations have similar goals, they find themselves in a mutually supportive partnership. When your missions overlap, they coalesce the relationship. If you have similar objectives, you can share common strategies and tactics. Why not help each other?

The greater the overlap between your approaches, the less course correction must take place by the receiver of your message. When two people or organizations employ similar approaches, they can share resources and operate more efficiently. When your request and the receiver's approach are congruent, sharing information and resources makes you teammates.

My son came by the office one day for advice on how to penetrate an account at the highest level. None of his predecessors had any success getting an appointment. We spent about twenty minutes studying the home page on their website. There were three distinct themes: an obsession with quality, a passion for service, and a commitment to integrity in business practices. My son constructed a sales letter that said, "In reviewing your website, I was struck by three things: your emphasis on quality, service, and integrity. In reading this, it occurred to me that you could have been describing my company and our priorities. Two companies that think this much alike should at least be talking." He got the appointment with the president of the company by demonstrating the congruence between his company's core beliefs and business practices to those of his prospect.

Distance Between You and the Competition

Comparison focuses on similarities. Contrast focuses on differences. Reduce the distance between you and the receiver, and 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 see the differences between you and other alternatives. This distance must be significant. Differences simplify the decision. Similarities conceal, confuse, and complicate.

Humans are hardwired for contrast. Contrast makes things stand out. Being able to detect things that stand out—predatory or pleasurable—has great operational value to humans and other animals. Walking through a forest and noticing a snake on your path helps you avoid danger. Walking down that same path and spotting your favorite berry growing on a tree is a positive thing.

Contrast spotlights differences. Contrast is quick and efficient; it requires less mental processing. Greater contrast means quicker recognition. We process our world mostly through our eyes, as nearly 70% of the sense receptors in the human brain are in the eyes. Anything that increases contrast makes it easier for the brain to decode it.

When confronted by multiple choices, buyers seek different and unique because they simplify decision making. In this case, different is a mental shortcut that facilitates decision making. In a sense, the buyer is screaming, "Give me a compelling reason to choose your solution and cease this choosing process." Increase contrast so the receiver immediately recognizes different alternatives. You (credibility, charisma, passion), your approach, presentation, support materials, and product demonstrations are points of differentiation. The greater the distinction between you and other alternatives, the easier it is for the receiver to select your option.

Distance is an obstacle and an aid in persuasion. It is an obstacle when there is too much of it between you as the sender and the receiver. It is an aid when there is more between you and the competition. Closer proximity between you and the receiver coupled with greater distance between you and the competition should be a goal in persuasion. The interplay of comparison and contrast—similarities and differences—working together move you closer to the receiver and further from the competition. Make it easy for the receiver to say "yes."

Demonstrate Do-Ability

People act when they feel confident they can perform at a desirable level, achieve goals, and receive a payoff for their performance. Asking someone to do something—whether it is to purchase a product, follow a leader, or join a cause—requires that you tap into the receiver's confidence about the probability of successful effort. When you demonstrate the do-ability of your request, you embolden the receiver to act. Do-ability means successful execution. The other person can perform what you are asking; execute at the level you request; and achieve what you want. It is their confidence in their ability to perform, the perception of obstacles they face, and the value of the payoff to the receiver.

Can I perform at this level?

The first question the receiver asks is, "Can I do this?" Does the other person possess the skill and will to perform? If it is an organization that you are asking to do something, "Can the organization operate at this level?" Demonstrating do-ability means explaining how the skills, resources, and time are available to make something happen.

What obstacles do I face?

The next question focuses on perceived obstacles, "What will get in the way of my (our) successfully performing at this level?" These perceived barriers may be internal or external. Internal barriers can mean lack of skill or knowledge on how to perform. External barriers are anything that would interfere with successful performance: lack of time, resources, or opportunity. In many cases, external barriers are perceived to be an issue, though you may demonstrate why they will not interfere. In presenting your argument, finish with these two questions, "Do you think you can do this?" "Do you perceive any obstacles to your performance and achievement?"

Is there a payoff?

If the other person does what you ask, what is in it for that person? In addition to do-ability, you must demonstrate the positive outcome for the other person. Whether it is a product's benefits or personal gain, the other person must see a connection between performance, successful execution, and payoff. The payoff must be valuable to the receiver, something the person wants. Many times, the payoff may be valuable to the sender but not to the receiver. The receiver looks at the effort, achievement, reward, and determines if it is worth it. Being receiver-focused makes it easier for you to assess the value of the payoff for the receiver.

Simplicity

You've got eight seconds and thirty-one words to grab my attention! Now that you have my attention, you have ten minutes to make your best case. We live in an A-D-D chaotic world. We get news in sound bites, consume fast food, and read book summaries. We fly coast-to-coast at 500 miles per hour, communicate globally in real time, and run the mile in 3:43 minutes. We text and drive, gas and go, and eat on the run. We do everything fast. We are a distracted and hyperactive culture. These distractions cost U.S. businesses a whopping \$650 billion annually in lost productivity. People experience 56 interruptions per day; spend 28% of their days dealing with these interruptions; switch activities every three minutes; and face 600 marketing exposures every day. The noise level in the buyer's head is deafening.

The most famous speeches in our history—The Gettysburg Address, Ronald Reagan's Challenger Address to the Nation, and FDR's Pearl Harbor Speech—share 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 length, they gained with substance and style. As Cicero wrote, "Brevity is a great charm of eloquence."

Your communication should be long enough to convince and short enough to hold the receiver's interest. The problem with most rhetoric is it takes too long to make the point and suffers from clutter. Your message must be tight. Fewer words are better. Keep it short. Avoid clutter. Trim. 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. The average sentence length is 14.3 words, and the ideal length is 8 words or less for 100% retention. The average number of characters per word is 5.1 letters. You have precious little time to make your point.

Neuroscientists tell us that the human brain contains upwards of 100 billion neurons and is capable of processing 40 bits of information per second. In spite of our complex processing abilities, humans are hardwired for simplicity. This gives us the ability to process and respond quickly to our environment, which has been essential for our species to engage perceived threats.

Keep Things Simple

Contemporary marketing research supports that five or more decision variables overwhelm most people. In his book, *How We Decide*, Jonah

Lehrer writes, "Some scientists believe that any problem with more than four distinct variables overwhelms the rational brain." It is commonly known that our short-term memory is good for about seven pieces of information. Ironically, some salespeople, when facing buyer indecision, instinctively offer additional options that complicate the decision process further.

Complexity Overwhelms

It consumes more psychic energy to process complexity. Popular slang reflects this information-processing overload, "You're giving me TMI (too much information)." The need for simplicity causes people to adopt mental shorthand called heuristics to decide. Deciphering from previous experience, knowledge, and intuition, humans use these shortcuts when deciding.

Humans Love Paradox

Humans like choice but dislike choosing. Too many choices are a tyranny of choice that drives people to the familiar and the simple. The Internet has opened a Pandora's Box of supply alternatives which have left consumers with a misery of choices, in multiple colors, and myriad sizes. Walking down the cereal aisle in a grocery store exposes consumers to an array of options that defy reason. Do you want cold cereal or hot cereal and in what size? Do you want pre-sweetened cereal or sugar-free cereal? How much sodium do you require in your cereal? Do you have a peanut allergy to consider? The bulk pack offers a more cost-effective option, but the individual serving boxes offer convenience. You can get organic cereal made of natural ingredients or a box full of chemicals. Buyers faced with this many alternatives crave simplicity. Too much complexity fosters indecision. Is it any wonder that habit-buying simplifies life?

Television remote control devices come with multiple functions few people ever use. How many DVR's get used or are they too complex for the average viewer? Digital cameras have so many features that consumers ask for point-and-shoot technology. Smart phones contain so many apps that users feel dumb. Software programs offer an endless maze of functions and capabilities most people fail to use. People like the idea of functional possibilities but shy from use because of their complexity.

It is not so much what you say as it is how you say it. Framing is how you construct and present your message. It begins with how you conceive of an issue, shape it, and prepare it for communication. Framing is a mental shorthand that helps people make sense of the chaos in which they live. It adds meaning to the meaninglessness. Like a picture frame, your

Framing

message frame directs the other person's attention to the image you want that person to consider. Framing breaks through complexity and de-clutters the decision process. Framing your argument is a proactive strategy to shape the discussion. These framing techniques can help you shape and present your argument: euphemism, diversion, changing the context, positive focus words, re-framing the argument, and loss-and-gain.

Euphemism

Euphemism is a rhetorical device that softens. It is the spoonful of sugar that makes a word go down easier. Two equivalent arguments can be framed alternatively to evoke different reactions and decisions from other people. Framing makes the distasteful taste better, the complex simpler, and the painful tolerable. Framing makes your argument more acceptable to another person. Politicians do this all the time. They argue for gun safety versus gun control. Who can object to gun safety? Politicians do not want to raise taxes; they merely want to raise revenue. Revenue softens the argument. Today's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is more acceptable than the WW-I label, "shell-shocked."

The language of moderation is a form of euphemism. When a politician calls for reasonable measures or commonsense approaches, he or she is really saying that if you disagree, you are unreasonable or defy common sense. Sensible, moderate, practical, fair, open-minded, balanced, modest, limited, and tolerable are words that tone down the rhetoric. They make the speaker sound reasonable. When it is time for you to raise prices, it makes more sense to adjust prices. "Adjust" is softer. It could mean something other than increase. It sounds reasonable. You cannot cut prices or discount because that means you were charging too much from the start. However, you can change prices if you somehow change the package you deliver and maintain your credibility.

Diversion

A Red Herring is a rhetorical device that intentionally diverts attention from the central issue. It is described as a fallacious argument. Our use of diversion is a legitimate redirection of the argument on to other relevant but often ignored issues. How you frame and present your message determine how the receiver views it.

Suppose you want a co-worker to join you for happy hour, but this person does not drink alcohol. Further, you know this person is a sports fanatic. You may casually mention a new sports bar has opened and has multiple big-screen televisions with closed-circuit access to important sporting

events. Today, they are having a no-cover charge special for anyone who shows up before 5:30 PM. You have not framed this as getting a drink; it is checking out a new sports scene for free. You diverted the conversation from drinking to getting a freebie admission. The outcome is the same for you, but the motivation for your co-worker is different. You made it acceptable, more receiver-focused.

Another example is the buyer who obsesses over a feature of a product that is insignificant in the broader context of a discussion. Redirecting the buyer to an alternate feature is diverting the discussion. You are not misleading the buyer. You are leading the buyer in the right direction. The usage cost of a product is a legitimate diversion from the acquisition price of something. A longer lead time for a special order is a non-issue if the product will sit idle for weeks upon delivery.

Changing the Context

Enlarging the conversation is one way to present your idea in a broader context. A price discussion must be framed (enlarged) as a discussion about total cost. A discussion about the price difference between you and the competition must be framed (enlarged) as a comparison of your value vis-à-vis a competitor. Enlarging the discussion makes it easier for you to sell a higher price. When your price is higher, you can frame the price difference as a small part of the total cost of something. If your component costs represent a fraction of the total cost to build something, you may want to frame the price difference between your price and an alternative as an insignificant part of the total cost to produce something.

You can go in the other direction and change the context to minimize a price difference. For example, your price may be slightly higher, but if you were to break it down to small and meaningful units (cost per use, cost per copy, cost per application), it gives the receiver a different way to view the price. Minimize it further by discussing the price differential between your idea and the receiver's anchor price.

Positive Focus Words

Humans are hardwired to detect negativism. In a research setting involving sophisticated brain-imaging technology, the introduction of negative words triggers an immediate reaction of stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters. Do you want this triggered reaction associated with your product or idea? Choose positive focus words to describe your alternative. More uptime is better than less downtime. Quicker availability is better than less delay. Improving profits sounds more enticing than cutting costs. Greater yield is superior to less waste. If the other person

is attempting to reduce his or her customer's dissatisfaction, present your ideas as increasing user satisfaction, not reducing dissatisfaction. Some companies offer a money-back guarantee. Do customers really want that or do they want the company to guarantee their satisfaction? If you sell milk, 95% fat-free is received better than 5% fat. A twenty-cent discount for paying cash is better received than a twenty-cent surcharge for paying with credit. When you discuss your alternative, it is a solution; the competitor's option is a product. You want to become a partner; the competition is a supplier or vendor. This is not an ad-hominem attack on the other supplier. It is simple linguistic positioning that frames your relationship differently.

Re-Framing An Argument

Re-framing is viewing the other person's argument from a different perspective. This perspective opens the discussion to your position. This means you may need to de-escalate the tension, soften the language, and re-direct the conversation. Re-framing views a scenario differently. A buyer who is hung up on the cost of a new piece of equipment—one that is 30% more energy efficient and requires less service—must consider the ownership and usage costs of more energy if it is truly a money (not a price) decision. Re-framing restates the other person's argument in a way that is more sympathetic to your position. It gives you the opportunity to argue your case in a different light.

Loss and Gain

Losses loom greater than gains. Pain trumps gain. Jimmy Connors reflected on this reality, "I hate to lose more than I like to win." When you want to influence the other person to adopt something new, focus on gain—the incentive to act. When you want to influence the other person to reject something, focus on loss—the pain of choosing the wrong alternative. For someone to choose your ideas among others, they must reject the other ideas to make room for your ideas. For a buyer to change suppliers, two decisions must happen. The first is to let loose of the other supplier. This must occur before the buyer can perform the second, to welcome the new supplier. The sense of loss invokes negative emotions while the promise of gain activates hope.

Think of your message, request, or idea as a portrait with a frame around it. That frame adds context. An elegant frame adds value to the portrait. A cheap frame diminishes the portrait. If you invest handsomely in a family portrait to hang prominently in your home, would you choose a frame that enhances or diminishes your portrait? A portrait without a frame

spills aimlessly onto the wall. The frame directs the view. It adds discipline to the wandering eye. What discipline, what frame, and what context do you want the receiver to consider when processing your message?

Use the Language of Influence

Persuasion is one-part science, though it is more than that. Imagine how dull our conversations would be if they were all science and no art. We would read and listen to endless streams of formulae and algorithms. The chains of numbers and symbols would bore even the most dedicated mathematician. The human spirit craves more than that. The artistry in our communications feeds the heart as reason appeals to the head. The great challenge for masters of influence is breaking through the sound barrier with meaningful and memorable communication.

Our history is embedded in the stories that one generation tells another. We have relied on oral tradition for most of our history. It is only recently, by time's standard, that we have recorded history on cave walls, parchment, or stored it in the "cloud." Children learn by oral tradition, reciting numbers and letters of the alphabet. Parents read stories filled with messages and images that will be stored as memories inside those tiny skulls, later retrieved by verbal and visual cues. It is not just rote memory that builds these memories; it is the artistry of communication—the nursery rhymes and sing-song melodies. Feasting on the richness of our language begins early in life.

Poets and writers have employed what neuroscientists now understand. Memories are stored as mental images. Adults learn best when new material reflects what they already know; when new experiences reflect their real-life experiences; and when they can use current knowledge to process new information. Great communicators understand the art and science of their craft. Like all artisans, they understand which tools to use and when to use them. The language of influence includes analogies, similes, and metaphors. These work well, not because of rhetorical flourish, but because they tap into stored mental images.

Analogies

Analogies are parallel arguments. They call attention to similar things the receiver has said or done. Psychologically, you are invoking the power of cognitive dissonance. You are asking the receiver to think or act consistently. But, it is more subtle than that. The power of analogies is in their ability to facilitate understanding, make things vivid and interesting, and lower perceived risk and resistance. With the analogy, focus on key points that demonstrate similarities between two different things. For example, if you are proposing a change in technology, you can draw an analogy to

how the receiver has made other significant technology changes in the past with success. If you are proposing the importance of social media as a form of business communication, demonstrate how the receiver employed other promotional sources when they first became available. The strength of the analogy is that it ties your idea to other successful ideas that the receiver has employed. People process incoming information quicker when it resonates with what they already know. When your idea is analogous to other changes the receiver has made, it makes your request reasonable and familiar.

Similes

Similes compare things by pointing out their likenesses even though they may be different objects. They usually contain the comparatives *like, than, or as*. *If you are promoting a new way to solve a problem, you may use a simile to argue your case: "Our technology to solve this problem is like the assembly line was to mass production." If you are promoting an Internet security solution to the military, you could argue, "Our software protects your data like your security fences protect your facilities." Similes employ the use of analogies. The key difference is that the analogy explains the relationship in greater detail while the simile is a straightforward likeness of two things.*

Metaphors

Metaphors merge two things into one image. They identify two objects as one. A metaphor is more forceful than a simile because it does not need a comparative term (as, like, etc.) to make its point. Metaphors use one figure of speech to mean something else. This special report is your road map to persuasive speaking. Metaphors, analogies, and similes are brushstrokes on the portrait you are painting with your argument. In Value-Added Selling, every single thing you do to paint a complete picture of your end-to-end customer experience is a brush stroke of value. Metaphors are so powerful a communication tool that they are widely used in therapeutic conversations. Patients often find the metaphor a better-tasting medicine to swallow. Humans make great use of imagery in thinking and processing information. It is estimated that we use six metaphors per minute in our spoken language. Metaphors make use of what we already know to illustrate a point.

Becoming a master of influence is hard work. If anyone promised you that this would be easy, they lied. You can add rhetorical flair to your argument with analogies, similes, and metaphors. They tap into the mental imagery stored in the receiver's mind.

The Magic Number Three

What do comedians, playwrights, and politicians know about communicating that you must know, study, and use to persuade, influence, and convince others that your ideas are worthy to act on? They understand the power, magic, and impact of the number three. One is lonely. Two is ambivalent. Four is excess. Three is perfect. Three is magic. Three is the right number for you.

What is magical about the number three? Since we live in a three-dimensional world, we are innately programmed to respond to this number. Maybe it is the rhythm, cadence, or coalescing of words. Maybe it is the wiring of human brains that reacts to a sequence of three items. Maybe it is the simplicity of three things linked that make it easier to process. It works. Three is represented in all areas of the physical and metaphysical.

There is the spiritual, The Holy Trinity. In sports, three strikes and you're out; three goals in hockey is a hat trick; and you may win the Triple Crown. Phil Jackson was obsessed with his three-peat win. With some luck, the third time is a charm. There were three little pigs, three stooges, and three blind mice. You go to school to study the three R's: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. You go to the circus for three-ring entertainment. If you consume too much alcohol, you end up three sheets to the wind. If you are a Clint Eastwood fan, you probably like *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*. If you are a patriotic citizen of the United States, you show reverence for the red, white, and blue. In real estate, it is widely known that the secret is location, location, location.

Freud wrote about the three elements of personality: ego, id, and super-ego. Contemporary personality theorists have written about the three ego states: parent, adult, and child. Plato believed that "Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge." The poet, Robert Frost, wrote: "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on." Benjamin Franklin quipped, "Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days." The philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, viewed three as the perfect number, expressive of "beginning, middle, and end" and made it a symbol of Deity. Romans believed the world was ruled by three gods: Jupiter (heaven), Neptune (sea), and Pluto (Hades).

The United States Marines have adopted The Rule of Three as an organizational model (three-person fire team, contained in a squad of three fire teams, contained in a platoon of three fire teams, three platoons in a company, etc.). They even used a rhythmic advertising slogan: The few, the proud, The Marines. When the U.S. Air Force studied the effects of pilot training, they evaluated the impact of three learning phases: pre-flight briefing, in-flight learning, and post-flight de-briefing. This three-phase approach allowed them to understand where the most learning takes place.

The rule of three is not limited to science, sport, or spiritual. Great communicators understand the magic of three. They know that we are somehow primed for past, present, and future; before, during, and after; beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle saw the three elements of persuasion: logos, pathos, and ethos. Great speeches follow the rule of three: tell 'em what you are going to tell 'em, tell 'em, and tell 'em what you told 'em. The three-act structure is used by storytellers to divide fictional narratives into three parts: the setup, confrontation, and resolution. Julius Caesar coined his famous saying when describing his first-century campaign in Britain: Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, I conquered.) One of the greatest documents in the history of mankind, The Declaration of Independence, promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. America's greatest orator, Abraham Lincoln, spoke his vision of a United States in his second inaugural speech: "...with malice toward none, with charity toward all, with firmness in the right..." You are learning to become a master of influence by focusing on the messenger, the message, and the method of delivery.

Current marketing research has found that for the purposes of persuasion, three product claims are the optimal number. Two are not enough, and four are redundant. The tactical side of selling includes call preparation, calling, and post-call review. Salespeople take advantage of this rhetorical device when they present a trio of benefits. Salespeople take full advantage of this rhetorical device when they present their triple threat—three key selling points for each of the three dimensions of value: the product, the company, and themselves. To add a third layer of power, design a presentation for each of the three levels of decisions makers: L-1 logistics buyers, L-2 users and influencers, and L-3 owners and executives. Each would be interested in your three dimensions of value.

Three is a magic number. It is simple, memorable, and rhythmic. Once you begin the cadence of this triplet, it feels like an incomplete thought if you stop at two. Give the receiver of your message three good reasons to buy your idea.

Three: Method

Art and science have their meeting point in method.

Sir Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton

Persuasion is one-part content and one-part context. The message is chock-full of content. It meets context in method. Your method of persuasion is how you deliver and support the message you crafted in the previous section. It provides a setting, context, and backdrop for your substance. Though more persuasion strategies exist, these five will help you increase your influence.

Surround the Receiver

Surrounding the receiver with your message is getting in his or her head. It is inhabiting that special place reserved just for you. Surrounding helps you get heard when the noise level is high and the time is right for action. You build curiosity, recognition, and message stability.

Surrounding provides a steady flow of information to maintain your momentum. Even if you are in the early stages of change, provide regular progress updates. Keep the other person abreast of your progress. Studies have found that project progress reports motivate people. In your progress statement, assume the other person is already on board. This helps acclimate the other person to change. Maintain momentum by assuming 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 promote the change, implement the change, and assure the value and efficacy of the solution. This continues from concept through implementation. The other person is always in the loop. In the selling phase, you want the other person (who has not acted) to feel they are missing something. In the transition and implementation phase, you want to assuage buyer remorse and reassure them of what you are doing to support them. In the execution phase, you want to reinforce your value-added to demonstrate your impact.

A steady information stream of progress reports, performance updates, and reminders keep your message top-of-mind with the receiver. Favorable articles about your company or your idea, press releases that demonstrate your innovativeness, and awards that recognize your value, quality and service reassure the receiver of the credibility of your idea. Testimonial letters or quotes, customer satisfaction data, and independent testing labs add credibility to your claims. Technical people in your

company, industry experts who support your ideas, and manufacturer support (if you are a distributor) invoke social network support. The repetition of your themes and the redundancy of your messaging sustain your momentum.

How much should you reach out to the receiver? Often. You want your messaging to be a campaign, not a single exposure. Frequency is less important than the redundancy. You want to avoid exposure fatigue, but remember that persuasion is an ongoing process. It may be difficult to forecast which exposure point will trigger action. It is not difficult to forecast that more exposures are better than fewer.

Create a Positive Sense of Urgency

Our world has sped up, not our planet's rotation. It is the speed of how we live. People want everything now. Humans are an impatient breed. We live in a sound-bite world of instant connection and communication. We receive our news in real-time as it is happening from any corner of the world. We text because it is efficient. We email because it is quicker than snail mail. Inventory systems and logistics programs promise just-in-time delivery or just-before-time delivery with consignment. Same-day delivery is so commonplace that some companies now offer twice-daily delivery for their most impatient customers. Real-time is a term now used to describe events unfolding as you witness them. FedEx is so much a part of our culture that it has become a verb.

People from different walks of life agree on the impatience of human beings. Carrie Fisher sums it up nicely, "Instant gratification takes too long." In classic psychoanalytical thinking, Sigmund Freud described the id—a pleasure-seeking mechanism in which the wants of humanity simmer in a cauldron of desire, nudging the individual to satisfy primal urges, and to satisfy them immediately. Adam Smith viewed this through the eyes of an economist, "The pleasure which we are to enjoy ten years hence, interests so little in comparison with that which we may enjoy today, the passion which the first excites, is naturally so weak in comparison with that violent emotion which the second is apt to give occasion to, that the one could never be any balance to the other, unless it was supported by the sense of propriety." All concur. Urgency is powerful.

As a master of influence, you can wield urgency as a positive and dynamic force. If urgency compels action, you want it working for you. Create urgency by tapping into a compelling need, certainty, timing, scarcity, deals, and surprise.

Compelling Need

People who feel the intensity of desire act. When the receiver of your message feels the pressure of his or her circumstances mounting, he or she will act sooner versus later. This pressure may come from others who seek resolution, prior mistakes, a preference for your idea, losses, competitive threats, available resources, or the pain of status quo. Few things motivate people to act quicker than a red-hot, burning issue. In negotiating, these compelling needs are framed as pressure points—conditions that mitigate other issues, even price. When someone needs something in a hurry, price is rarely the issue. When the decision is vital to the receiver's mission, the viability of the outcome is more important than most other things. If you understand the pressure under which your receiver makes decisions, you can frame your request in a way that alleviates the pressure. Your ideas should be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Certainty

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. This idiom was coined by someone who understood the power of the known. Research shows that people will forego bigger, future gains for immediate, smaller gains. This bias for certainty is so powerful that it borders on the fear of the unknown. When your service or quality is known to the receiver of the message, there is implied risk if they go another direction. There is little risk in your certainty. You must frame your message and present it so confidently that the receiver experiences it as reality.

Timing

Urgency is a hurry-up sickness. For many people, doing the urgent is a time management problem. People act when the time is right or time is limited. Few things compel like a deadline. Cyril Parkinson, author and British Naval historian, wrote a tongue-in-cheek essay in a 1955 issue of *The Economist*, "Work is elastic in its demands on time. Work expands to the time allowed for its completion." *How many times have you acted because of a real or artificial deadline? A positive sense of urgency demonstrates how acting now is a benefit because of what the receiver will gain. The loss is implied but not stated. Creating urgency must emphasize the positive. For example, "The real advantage of moving forward on this project is ..."*

Scarcity

Restrictions, limitations, and allocations. Scarcity moves people to hoard during these periods. Scarcity speaks to that part of the brain that causes people to prepare for the worst. This is the relentless force behind

hoarding supplies. Rumors of a toilet paper shortage send rational people to the nearest wholesale club for multiple bulk packs of the soft tissue. Government restrictions on incandescent bulbs incite a feeding frenzy that empties store shelves of remaining inventory. Worries over a rise in gasoline prices cause people to fill every empty container in their garages. A positive sense of urgency demonstrates to the receiver how acting now ensures they have what they need when they need it. "The real advantage of moving forward is because we have inventory, we can meet your timeline for delivery." Implicit in this selling point is that a delay may result in a backorder.

Deals

Deals are scarcity dressed up like opportunity. Deals accomplish much the same thing. People respond to one-time deals, limited-time offers, or significant savings. Deals trigger an adrenaline-type rush. 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 allure with overwhelming value that incites action. You incite buyers to act when they realize the appeal in your value proposition. Your proposal may have minimal, short-term benefits, but the long-term gain may be substantial compared to the short-term gain. When presenting the long-term gain, pile on. Make it overwhelming and believable. Most people have a bias for immediate gratification, so your proposition for long-term gain must overwhelm the short-term hesitation.

Surprise

Unpredictable rewards are exciting for people. Researchers are now beginning to understand the neuroscience of surprise. They have discovered that surprise is addictive. People are wired to crave the unexpected. The pleasure center of the human brain lights up when people receive something unexpected. It is nice to get a present for a special occasion, but it is more powerful to get a present when it is not a special occasion. Surprise amplifies what people feel. If it is a pleasant surprise, the pleasure is greater because it is unexpected. Masters of influence know that the right offer at the right time tips the scale in their favor. Last-minute surprises move people to act. This is why some negotiators use a hold-back position to offer at the right moment to create movement. Negative surprises also tag the event for people. The research on recall demonstrates that memory for negative events is stronger because it has greater operational value.

Urgency is a powerful motivator. When people feel a compelling need, embrace certainty, face the tyrant of timing, fear scarcity, get seduced by deals, and are pleasantly surprised, the urgency of the emotion and the moment cause them to act.

Offer Social Proof

From the beginning of time, human survival has depended on the social nature of man. We banded together for procreation, safety, and learning. We enter this world as infants, totally dependent on those around us for the necessities of life. In many cases, we depart this world with that same dependence on others. In spite of our pursuit of autonomy and independence throughout life, we are interconnected and interdependent beings.

Humans are hardwired to connect. Watching mothers and infants is the most compelling argument for man's social nature. They move in unison out of the womb as they did when they were one. Children find peer pressure and the need to fit in a powerful motivational force. Even technology recognizes the need for people to interact with others as we have coined a twenty-first century phrase (social media) to describe this. Research shows that people spend nearly 80% of waking hours in the company of others.

Social proof is the validation and credibility 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 receiver 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 co-brands with the endorser.

Faced with uncertainty, people often reach beyond themselves and seek the security of the herd. There is safety in numbers. That others move in the direction we deem appropriate validates our thinking. After all,

this many people cannot be wrong. In decision making, the herd offers anonymity to those who wish to limit their exposure. It is reassuring when the herd may have the information that one lacks. It allows the decision maker to tap into the knowledge base that another possesses. This saves time and effort. In these cases, herd behavior is a sort of mental shortcut for decision making. To find safety and reassurance in their decisions, they look at what other people do. This is called the bandwagon effect in sales.

Humans are an interdependent community. From safety to learning to reassurance, we depend on each other for information and resources. Social proof taps into this dynamic. When you use champions, experts, and other credible sources to support your argument, you rely on this human tendency to reach out to others for help. Your receiver depends on this, too.

Engage the Receiver

Involvement sounds passively interested. Commitment sounds actively involved. Engagement sounds dedicated to something. Think of the various ways people use engagement. It is that period of time prior to marriage when two people express their commitment to each other. Some use it to describe employment. The military uses it to describe combat operations. All of these have a sense of permanence to them.

Engaging the receiver of your message draws him or her deeper into your initiative. Their active participation makes them a stakeholder in your request. It lowers resistance because they feel they have something at stake in the process. It helps transfer ownership of the request to the receiver. This presumes, of course, that you are receiver-focused in your approach and the receiver can see the benefits of joining you in your cause. You can do this with the puppy-dog effect, projecting ownership, employing the stakeholder effect, taking advantage of the endowment effect, establishing an emotional connection, using the sunk-cost trap, and implementing a breakthrough strategy.

Puppy-Dog Effect

Active engagement in sales means buyers must see the payoff for their acting and its value. This is done with product demonstrations, hands-on applications, samples, trial runs, and documentation of what they can expect. These activities make success real and encourage the receiver to act. The greater the buyer involvement the more powerful the engagement. When a salesperson places the product in the buyer's hand, the buyer mentally takes ownership of it. This is why product demonstrations work well. When a seller tells a buyer to take something home and try it for a few days, the sale is made because the buyer owns it psychologically. In some literature, this is called the *puppy-dog effect*. *No one ever returns*

a puppy after taking it home for a night. The physical connection between a buyer and a product forms a bond that no one wants to break.

Project Ownership

Projecting ownership is putting the other person into the role of using your product versus merely considering it. Familiarize them with ownership through vivid imagery. Your idea becomes their idea as they assume ownership. In this way, not buying becomes a loss of something they already possess. Projecting ownership engages buyers. The more you involve the receiver in the subject 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. Instead of 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.

Stakeholder Effect

The *stakeholder effect* means you have an interest in the outcome of something. You are more than involved, you are committed. Involvement is sitting in the audience. Commitment is being on stage as an actor in the performance. Actors are stakeholders because they stand to benefit or lose in the outcome. Studies show that commitment and engagement are powerful dynamic forces in getting things done. A decision maker who is committed to the process and invested in the outcome will drive a project to the finish line and find ways to make it work. The more committed people are, the less likely they are to abandon the project. This personal stake can explain the intensity of emotion that someone feels. The difference between commitment and compliance is the energy one invests in the outcome. Committed individuals play a crucial role in getting things done. The commitment acquired by ownership engages the receiver fully in your request. Ask yourself this question, "Does the receiver feel like a stakeholder in the outcome of this?"

Endowment Effect

The *endowment effect* of people committing to something—a product or a cause—makes them reluctant to give it back or give up. They are reluctant to release their grip to abandon a prior commitment. One explanation of this is cognitive dissonance. When people make a commitment, they feel the need to defend their decisions and actions. There must be

consonance between thought and deed. The person may say to himself, "Since I made this decision or commitment, I must honor it. To abandon it would mean that I made a mistake." That admission does not sit well with most people. The other dynamic at work here is loss aversion. Once someone commits to a product, changing may symbolize losing it. This dynamic follows the path of loss aversion. The pain of loss weighs heavier than the pleasure of gain. The person views the abandonment as more painful than the promise of gain. This is the power of political incumbency. Those in power, whether it is a political candidate or an established supplier, enjoy a special status that invokes resistance to change or loss. This idiom reflects the *endowment effect*: "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't." Ownership of something confers more value on the object—whether it is a product, an idea, or a course of action. This may come from the personal stake invested, the loss of abandoning something, or the fact that one has identified the hidden value in its utility. The message is simple: Find a way to become the incumbent.

Emotional Connection

Establish an *emotional connection* to the receiver. Blaise Pascal wrote, "The heart has reasons that reason cannot understand." Related to the endowment effect is emotional branding; the customer feels an emotional bond to the product. Companies like Harley-Davidson have taken advantage of this dynamic force and created a lifestyle that people buy into and products to satisfy their wants. In this case, the emotional connection means abandoning a lifestyle, complete with friends, activities and an identity.

Sunk-Cost Trap

In a related example, most software companies earn significant profit on software upgrades. Customers already own the software, and they feel it makes sense to upgrade versus starting over with a different platform. The *sunk-cost trap* discourages people from changing course, even if the present course is wrong. Their attitude is, "We have too much invested in this now to change course." The *sunk-cost trap* looks to the past versus the future. Previous expenditures of money, time, and other resources lead people to make imprudent decisions they would not normally make. Past expenses are now unavoidable costs, but buyers do not treat them as such. This view of prior expenditures contaminates the decision under consideration.

This tendency of the emotional buyer contributes to bad buying decisions. In an effort to avoid the pain of loss, and more powerfully the desire to avoid regret, people continue down non-viable paths because they

have invested too much to quit now. Investors in the equities market will hang on to stocks long after they should have sold because they have trouble cutting their losses. Committees continue to pursue a project because they are too pregnant on it to quit now; they have too much invested. Continuing down this path is throwing good money after bad money.

Breakthrough Strategy

Break through with a *breakthrough strategy*. This method of persuasion has been variably called the foot-in-the-door technique, small wins strategy for change, and the minor concession close. In Value-Added Selling, we call it limited-objectives selling. This means at each step along the path to success there are immediate, next-best steps you must achieve to bring the sale to fruition. The theory is that it is much easier for people to accept a small change than a big change. Once achieved, the small change can be leveraged to achieve greater victories. Select high-visibility, high-probability, immediate successes that can be used to justify greater successes. Look for immediate, next-best steps or small wins, and seek commitment to these. With each small and subsequent victory, you are closer to achieving your overall persuasion goal. This incremental approach to major victories makes the change you request manageable for the receiver. Be satisfied with each “yes” that comes your way.

Fairness

Embedded in our collective psyche is fairness. Lady Justice, the ubiquitous statue outside court houses and other government buildings, can trace her family roots to ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. She is often depicted as blindfolded and holding the Scale of Justice. She weighs the evidence of both sides and hands out justice impartially and objectively. It is not only the justice system that has embraced fairness. It is present in our idioms: “What’s good for the goose is good for the gander.” “One’s fair share.” Even the media advertises “fair and balanced” coverage of the news. The principle of fairness is deeply entrenched in the human psyche.

Psychologists have long recognized that we carry around with us an arbitrary sense of fairness as a perceptual filter to help us process life. Marketing research shows that consumers are more concerned with how fairly they are treated than they are the outcome of the transaction. For those pushing through price increases, the perception of fairness determines how well customers accept the news. If it is a level playing field where no one escapes the increase, the news is received better. As a master of influence, appealing to fairness creates a more positive dynamic for the receiver to act. There are three ways you can do this: reciprocity, process, and outcome.

Reciprocity

You scratch my back and I will 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. The other person may feel so obligated that he or she will go out of their way to initiate payback. 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.

Process

The receiver's perception of your request process plays a role in their accepting your request. Their perception is your reality. What really matters is how the other person *perceives* your treatment of them during the request process. If they feel you are treating them fairly, they are more likely to accept your plea. If they perceive unfair treatment, they will want that resolved before buying into your idea. Studies in customer service have shown that it is the customer's perception of how seriously you take their complaints that leads them down the path to resolution. Resolving things quickly demonstrates you understand the urgency in their requests.

Outcome

The outcome or result you are attempting to create must appear equitable to the receiver of the message. They must perceive a win-win outcome. This is the opposite of the zero-sum game where you have a winner and a loser. If the receiver believes they must lose for you to win, do not expect much cooperation on their part. On the other hand, if the receiver understands that both of you benefit from this outcome, it is a stronger dynamic for change. Ironically, gain-potential influences your persuasiveness. Senders of a message or request who have little or no gain-potential are seen as more credible sources. Too much gain-potential may signal that the sender's only concern is winning at all costs.

Fairness in influence is a powerful dynamic. Perception of fairness is the reality you must deal with as the sender of a message. Tilting the scales in your favor happens when you perform acts of consideration for the receiver. The sense of indebtedness lingers long after the kindness. Invoking the principle of reciprocity provides fertile ground for future requests. Fairness occurs also in the process and outcome of your messaging. If the receiver perceives your treatment and request as fair, he or she will be more open to acting on your request.

Summary

Persuasion is one-part message and one-part messenger; one-part content and one-part context; one-part science and one-part art. It happens directly and indirectly, as reason and emotion touch the head and the heart. Masters of influence, those who use four or more ways to persuade others, are ten times more persuasive than those who only use one way to persuade. There are three ways that you can become more persuasive: work on the messenger, develop the message, and improve the method of delivery. Within these three areas are dozens of tips to become more persuasive.

About the Author



Tom Reilly is co-author of *Value-Added Selling*, 4th edition (McGraw-Hill 2018). Additionally, he has written twelve other books including the hot-selling *Crush Price Objections*. His award-winning column appears in *Industrial Distribution Magazine*. Tom has a Master's degree in psychology and is a faculty member at the University of Industrial Distribution. He began his career as a salesman for a Fortune 500 chemical company and then opened his own distribution company in Houston, Texas. He sold that in 1981 to pursue a full-time speaking and sales training career. You may contact him through his website www.TomReillyTraining.com.

Pre-Seminar Assignment

Please complete this assignment before you attend the seminar. It will prepare you to complete a persuasion project during the program.

Step One: Work on the Messenger

Becoming a master of influence requires that you do three things: Work on the messenger; prepare the message; and plan your method of delivery. Step One is your pre-seminar assignment. Complete this list of questions to help you become a more persuasive messenger.

How can I become a more authentic communicator?

- How will I increase my credibility?

- How will I demonstrate my sincerity?

- How will I display my expertise?

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How can I become more charismatic?

- How will I communicate my optimism?

- How will I project my likeability?

- How will I express empathy?

- How will I demonstrate my passion?

Power is tricky.

- What power do I possess?

- How will I prudently wield this power?

How would I describe my focus?

- Who is the object or target of my persuasion? Be specific here.

- Through whose lens do I view my request—mine or the receiver's?

- Describe the problems or issues the receiver is experiencing and continue to answer the questions that appear on page 12 in this paper.

Step Two: Prepare the Message

Step One is designed to help you work on your personal persuasiveness. During this exercise, you were asked to check your focus. This means that you began to think of the object or person for your persuasion project. In this section, describe your request of this person. You need not detail your plan for this. We will do this in the training. This step is to help you form an idea of what you want from the other person. It could be some action you want from a customer or prospect. It could be your appeal to your boss for a raise. It could be your attempt to sell your significant other on your desire to take a trip somewhere. Simply clarify your vision of what you want the other person to agree to or do.

Step Three: Method of Delivery

There is nothing that you need to do at this point. This step will be completed during the training.