

BECOMING MORE PERSUASIVE

Why are so many new ideas a tough sell? Isn't it true, as the old saying goes, that if you invent a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door? No, that's baloney! In fact, it's never been less true. For a variety of reasons.

For starters, people everywhere have become more savvy, skeptical, even cynical. We've all become more jaded about advertising, more suspicious of political claims, and less trusting of those who bring us a message, any message--even one that may be in our best interest.

Second, and most important, many people just aren't skilled at the art of persuading. No matter how brilliant your idea, no matter how technically advanced or economically sound it may be, it'll go nowhere unless you get others to go along with it. And the only way you do that is by persuading them, by communicating clearly why they really should want to do what you really need done.

Learning to improve our persuasiveness is both easier and harder than it used to be. Easier because we've now got E-mail and voice mail, CD-roms and cellular phones, satellites and skywriting, and a vast array of other tools for communicating. But it's also more difficult in that the deluge of messages and ill-equipped messengers cheapens them all. So nowadays, it's more crucial than ever to hone the skills that heighten our power of persuasion.

Here are some ideas, big and small, for making yourself more persuasive:

1. Ask yourself: What do I really want? Sure, we all want security, happiness, health, love, and fulfilling work. Digging a little deeper, we might find further shared values, such as recognition, power, freedom, and serving others. But what's unique to you? What do you think about alone at three in the morning? What really resonates within your soul? What would you, in a perfect world and freed of family, fiscal, or geographic constraints, most like to be doing? Think about these questions as a means of searching for your great "because-- the difference between your current situation and your desired situation."

2. Shift your focus to others. There's an old story of a young lady who was taken to dinner one evening by William Gladstone and then the following evening by Benjamin Disraeli, both eminent British statesmen in the late nineteenth century. "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England," she said. "But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England." If you practice attentiveness to others, you'll find it does wonders for both of you. They'll enjoy it; so will you. And together you'll accomplish much more.

3. Train yourself to remember other people's names. The sweetest sound, it's said, is that of your own name being spoken. And calling others by name is an important first step toward building rapport and, thus, persuasion. Roger Dawson, in his book *13 Secrets of Power Persuasion*, gives numerous techniques for overcoming this problem. One of the best: When you shake hands with a new person, note the color of his or her eyes. That forces you to make eye contact and, after a while, will also send a signal to your brain to store that person's name in your short-term memory. Use the name soon afterwards, and you'll have a lock on it. Try it!

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4. Empower others. Skillful persuaders send out the message, spoken or unspoken, that they appreciate others' abilities. For example, Minnesota Mining & Manufacturing (3M), the \$15-billion-a-year firm famed for its innovation, leaders still utter--and follow--the maxims of William McKnight, its legendary leader for half a century: "Listen to anybody with an idea..." "Encourage experimental doodling..." and "If you put fences around people, you get sheep; give people the room they need."

5. Hone your sense of humor. While being wheeled into the operating room after being shot by a would-be assassin, the ever-persuasive President Ronald Reagan got a chuckle when he wisecracked, "I hope the doctor is a Republican." We may not all be so cool in a crisis, but we can all profit by not taking ourselves too seriously.

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