

## **The necessary art of persuasion**

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Most executives equate persuasion with selling products and sealing deals. Many also think that persuasion is a devious method adopted by people to misguide and manipulate others. However, used well, persuasion becomes a process of negotiating and learning. Far from begging or cajoling, it involves thorough preparation, proper framing of arguments, intelligent presentation of facts and supporting evidence, and striking an emotional chord with the target audience.

Effective persuasion is not a one-step event, but a process involving discovery, preparation and dialogue. Good persuaders rigorously look at every possible angle, and try to eliminate loopholes that might have crept into their arguments. Dialogue helps them gain insight about the audience's opinions and concerns, before the persuasion process, and get honest feedback during the process.

The most effective persuaders do not thrust their opinions on others, but are flexible and open to feedback. This makes colleagues respond positively.

Effective persuasion comprises 4 key steps: establishing credibility, framing goals that are in line with the stakeholders' expectations, using compelling language and apt examples, and last but not the least, having an emotional connect with the audience.

**Establish credibility:** We must first gain the trust of our colleagues. For this, experience in the field and relationships matter. If we do not have enough background and experience, we must interact with more knowledgeable people, or study relevant sources of information. We should also try to meet every key person we are trying to persuade. Taking the help of colleagues, who already have a strong connect with the target audience, also might work.

**Frame for common ground:** We must be skilled at projecting our point of view in a way that highlights its advantages to the target audience. Identifying these mutual benefits may sometimes be very easy. In other cases, where it is not very obvious, we must adjust our stand. We should spend enough time gathering information, and discussing with close associates. This will give us insights about whether our ideas will appeal to the audience.

**Provide evidence:** We must augment numerical data with gripping examples, stories or historical evidence. Sometimes, these analogies impart the punch that would be missing in a completely technical argument that people may not be able to grasp easily.

**Connect emotionally:** We must show that we are passionate about the cause that we are standing for. We must also gauge the emotional state of the audience, and act accordingly. No effort to persuade can succeed without emotion. But showing too much emotion will be as counterproductive as being emotionless. The key point is to resonate with the emotions of the audience.

The power of persuasion often baffles executives. It backfires if used inappropriately, so that many try to evade it. But effective persuasion can bring people together, propel new ideas, and create innovative solutions. To do all this, persuasion must be recognized as an art of learning and negotiating as opposed to convincing and selling.