

Persuading for results

In today's enterprises truly effective leaders deliver outcomes by persuading for results. Without the ability to persuade, a leader is hamstrung and cannot realise her or his vision where this requires the collective actions of others – direct reports, peers, superiors, clients, suppliers and other stakeholders. Competence in the art of persuasion enables a leader to get things done without coercion.

In this post I am focusing on persuading rather than convincing or influencing others; I have a not-so-subtle reason for doing so.

Successful *persuading* results in actions, and actions produce outcomes [1]. On the other hand *convincing* others results in them changing their minds and modifying their attitudes. These are thinking and feeling domains that do not necessarily result in the actions, i.e. behaviours, sought by the leader. Let me stress, I am *not* saying persuasion is a case of 'Do as I say', i.e. telling or instructing. There's a toolbox of tactics and skills that you can learn to persuade in ways that do not require exercise of formal authority or positional power.

And I am also not saying that helping people modify how they *think* and *feel* is unimportant. It is, but not as important as what people *do*, i.e. the actions that produce desired outcomes such as faster cycle times, fewer customer complaints, more efficient use of assets, and higher returns.

The leader as persuader for results

The Centre for Creative Leadership [describes](#) how persuading for results can end up in one of three ways [2]:

- **Commitment** Well-developed persuasion skills deliver commitment; followers become volunteers. They act because they want to and know why they are doing things in a particular way. This reduces – even eliminates – micro-managing, a higher stroke rate, consistency across the team, singular focus on the desired outcome, and improved team work.
- **Compliance** Where a leader persuades in ways that border on coercion, however disguised they may be, followers become compliant. Their thinking and feelings do not change, they simply do what's required. As Tom Peters once famously put it: "They show up and shuffle". Compliance can be productive, especially for routinised tasks, but much more is required in today's fast-moving, complex and unpredictable environment.
- **Resistance** Where persuasion fails, resistance manifests in obstruction and/or sabotage, appealing to the boss to overrule the leader, arguments with the leader to change his or her decision, hiding behind excuses, or simply pretending to comply.

Methods used to persuade effectively include [1] reaching people by logic and intellectual explanation, [2] connecting with people's values and goals, and/or [3] by being inclusive and collaborative.

Each one of us prefers to be treated and persuaded in a particular combination of these three methods. Effective leaders tailor their method to the circumstances, the task and the constituency.



Logic is a left-brain function. Logic – the head – can be exercised by questioning assumptions and connections to reach deeper mutual understanding, by critical argument, by devil's advocacy and by [Karl Popper](#)-style debating.



Emotionally intelligent leaders understand the feelings – the heart – of others and persuade without avoiding or even necessarily resolving conflicts. Playing the emotion tactic unleashes passion and commitment in followers.



Persuasion by collaboration gets people working together for mutual gain and shared benefits – helping hands. Helping others generates reciprocity and bonds people together.

By being an inclusive, co-operative and collaborative role model as a leader you show others how to behave and share the positivity.

Learning to persuade

We can learn better persuasion skills; I recommend these [tips](#) from the Centre for Creative Leadership.

- ✓ **Understanding and navigating organisational politics**
Organisations have formal and informal structures. Understanding and effectively navigating through complex situations require political insight and sensitivity. Effective leaders adjust to the reality of internal politics and are sensitive to how the organisation functions.
- ✓ **Creating visibility**
To create new opportunities, effective leaders stand out and get noticed by others while staying authentic. They allow their team members to shine while not over-promoting themselves.
- ✓ **Building and maintaining personal trustworthiness**
Leaders ask others to take risks together with them. Therefore people must believe in the leader and their leadership. Leaders must show authenticity and integrity to be widely trusted.
- ✓ **Leveraging networks**
Forming and nurturing a network of relationships is invaluable in today's interconnected world. Networking allows leaders to generate new experiences and to tap into the skills and vision of others.
- ✓ **Clear communication**
Writing and speaking clearly and briefly and applying a variety of communication styles helps leaders to get the message across and to ensure the right impact.
- ✓ **Motivating others**
By motivating others, leaders create a climate in which people become engaged and empowered. Leaders understand the needs, styles, and motivators of others. People will like working with and for those leaders and will be more receptive to their influencing.

Read more on this topic

- ✓ [Influence without authority](#), a post written by me
- ✓ [Influencing: Learn How to Use the Skill of Persuasion](#) from the Center for Creative Leadership
- ✓ [How to influence others](#), a post written by me

[1] Persuasion is derived from 1600s Latin: *Persuasionem* was a noun describing persuasive *action*, hence relating to *behaviours* rather than thoughts and feelings.

[2] The Centre for Creative Leadership defines contemporary leadership as a collective social process that leads to direction, alignment and commitment of people to the organisation's outcomes.