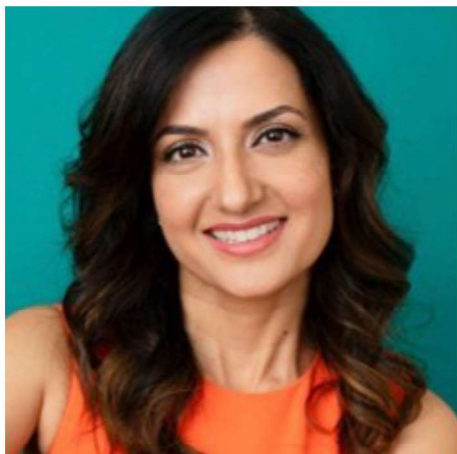


THE ART OF PERSUASION FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

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We all sat around the table, anxiously waiting to find out why we were called in to the meeting. With his head down and in a shaky, hesitant voice, the executive read from the paper in front of him, “I’m so excited to share an amazing opportunity with you.” The rest of the speech was a blur. We were all too focused on the clear mismatch between his body language and words we heard. His presence was full of nervous energy. The lack of eye contact, the contracting of his upper body, and the unnatural tone of voice made everyone in the room distrust anything that was shared. No amount of exciting benefits and opportunities would convince the room that the change being introduced was one in their best interest, even if it was. All they heard was that they were losing their jobs. Simply put, they weren’t persuaded by the facts.

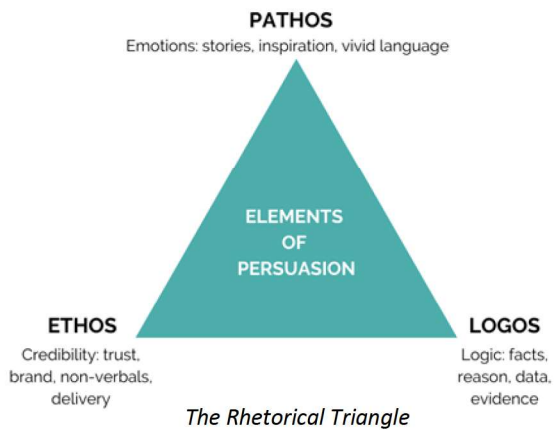
It happens every single day, inside and outside of work. An idea is presented, regardless of its potential positive impact, that’s met with doubt, skepticism, and fear.

Someone wants to make a career change, but their spouse believes it’s too risky. An employee wants to incorporate a new program, but their manager only sees the costs. A manager wants to change workflows for increased efficiency, but staff fear loss of freedom.

In these scenarios you might share the WiiFM (what’s in it for me) benefits. To get buy-in, you list out the reasons why it’s a good idea. “This will improve customer satisfaction, it will save you time, it will help you develop new skills.” They push back even more. You share more data and figures showing the positive changes that would result, but to no avail. They stand even firmer in their opposition.

The truth is that majority of our decisions are heavily influenced by our emotions, not logic. The delivery of our message is also quite important in persuading someone. We are constantly looking for cues on what to believe, think, and do. Who is sharing the message? Do I trust and believe them? Why should I care?

Ethos (credibility), pathos (emotions), and logos (logic) are critical elements of persuasion, based on Aristotle’s rhetorical triangle.



Corporate managers often rely on logic, but few have mastered the ability to appeal to people's imagination, values, and need for trust and human connection. It's often what distinguishes a manager from a true leader.

This is where the speaker's qualifications, reputation, and personal brand come into play. People want to know the source of the message and decide if they trust it. Additionally, audiences are searching for authenticity. Even a well-respected leader could deliver a message poorly if they do not seem transparent and forthcoming. People will wonder what they're hiding and begin mistrusting the leader and possibly the organization.

Studies have shown that people appreciate transparency so much that they are more willing to forgive a service provider for being late, and wait, when the delay was communicated as early as possible, and the customer could decide how to respond. Complaints usually come in when there is no transparency or acknowledgement, and the customer is left wondering and anxious.

Emotions are also a significant driver of motivation. Both negative and positive emotions can move a person to act. Leaders who understand the power of emotions and successfully use them can connect with people in a way that will either inspire them to move forward or dissuade them from taking a negative action.

In the first example, the executive did not come across confident or authentic in his message. There was no sign of empathy or desire to understand potential downsides from others' perspective. He relied solely on logic

and failed to build trust, inspire possibility, and ultimately persuade the audience to believe in the change. Your past credibility, reputation, and authority is important but so is the delivery of your message. Even the most respected and admired leaders can fail to inspire or generate true connection with others.

Before you try to persuade others to believe an idea, ask how much you believe in the idea yourself. Your non-verbal language gives away a lot more than you may know. In fact, experts state that anywhere from 70—90% of our communication is non-verbal. This would include your eye-contact, body posture, hand gestures, voice tone and pace, facial expressions, and even our energy. We give away who we are and what we believe without even saying a word.

Another mistake is failing to inspire people by painting a vivid picture of what is and what could be. Find out the current pain your audience is experiencing. You want to begin by describing the pain first through examples and stories. Use analogies and metaphors. Help people visualize the situation and the negative consequences of the status quo, specifically on them as well as others. This not only helps people relate and put the idea into context, but it'll also help you empathize with your audience. Jumping straight to benefits, without any

their pain points, then you can shift to painting a picture of the brighter future, of what's possible. The key is to utilize the power of emotion to move people forward.

The next time you want to influence someone, consider incorporating all three of the elements of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos, the Greek words for character, emotions, and logic. Along with the message itself, think through how you want to deliver the message. Remember that people need time to process emotions and thoughts. Rushing through the process of gaining buy-in of an important message will only end up taking more time later to overcome resistance. Take the time to understand people's potential concerns, questions, and fears so you can build in stories and examples in your communication. Take time, even if it's a few moments at the start of a critical meeting or presentation, to acknowledge people and their pain points. Set yourself up at start to be the kind of person people want to entrust in and follow.

The art of persuasion is a skillset all leaders ought to develop and thankfully can be learned. As with any art, it takes times to create your own style as well as practice to develop confidence. As your persuasion skills grow, so will the level of positive impact you make on others.

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