PERSUASION: 
The Science and Art of Effective Influence

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John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
“What is distinctively human at the most fundamental level is the capacity to persuade and be persuaded.”

Bertrand Russell
Outline of Philosophy (1927)
Selected Principles of Persuasion

1. The Three P’s: Power, Payment, and Persuasion
2. Simplicity/Clarity
3. Know the audience and its predispositions
4. Salience
5. Storytelling
6. Reciprocity/Concession
7. Liking: Similarity and Empathy
Managers and leaders who fail generally do so not because of things they don’t know, but because of things they know perfectly well that they just aren’t doing.
“Learning is when you suddenly understand something you have understood all your life, but in a new way.”

Doris Lessing
British Author
The “Three P’s" of Social Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>Command, assertion, force, coercion, threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAYMENT</td>
<td>Material incentives, reward, compensation, negotiation, exchange, bargaining, transaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSUASION</td>
<td>Communicating with others in a way that induces them to voluntarily think or act differently</td>
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Simplicity/Clarity

Keep your message simple and comprehensible. KISS.

The challenge: our subjects are complex and we are logos-oriented.

Tip of the iceberg.

Question: what is the one thing the audience will remember?

Recall and number of points in the argument.
Recall and Number of Points

Recall

Number of Points in an Argument

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Know the Audience

The power of predispositions.

Cognitive conservatism. Confirmatory bias.

Listening, empathy.

We typically know our audiences in a half-baked way. We need to use all available resources to know the audience

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War.*
“If I had 9 hours to cut down a tree, I would spend 6 hours sharpening my axe.”

Abraham Lincoln
Salience

• The importance, relevance of an issue.
• Agenda setting
• A fundamental idea: audience sovereignty
Storytelling

- “The key to leadership is effective persuasion through stories.”
  “Narratives are the most powerful currency of persuasion.”
- Retention by students
- Religious Texts
- Stories:
  - Represent an intrinsic reality, have credibility.
  - Capture attention and engage the mind.
  - Let the listener interpret the message in his/her own terms.
- Never a statistic without a story, never a story without a statistic

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We are more likely to persuade someone if we have given them something.

Concessions: what can I afford to give away?

Substantive and stylistic concessions

Listening is the cheapest concession you can make.
## What Reciprocity (Concessionary) Language Is and Is Not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know It Alls</th>
<th>“Reciprocators”</th>
<th>Know Nothings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperious</td>
<td>Respectful (of others and their views)</td>
<td>Indecisive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogmatic</td>
<td>Acknowledge (other possible viewpoints)</td>
<td>Doubtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condescending</td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Meek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td></td>
<td>Timid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infallible</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smug</td>
<td></td>
<td>Equivocal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disdainful/Disparaging</td>
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<td>Mousy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contemptuous</td>
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<td>Wishy-Washy</td>
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Liking: Similarity and Empathy

We are more likely to be influenced by people we know and like.

Who do we like? We like people:

1. Who are similar to us (Similarity Principle)
2. Who like us.

“Like” = We like people who are positive, respectful, appreciative, empathetic.

Are you liked? That is, do you like others?
Liking: Similarity and Empathy (continued)


People who are effective and not likeable.

Likeability and assertiveness are not two ends of the same dimension.
### Assertiveness and Empathy

1. Conventional understanding: this is one dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertiveness</th>
<th>Likable/EI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standing up for your views and principles</td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conviction</td>
<td>Concern for process and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>interpersonal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High standards</td>
<td>Respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Care and concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the argument, the data (logos oriented)</td>
<td>Appreciative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complimentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive/upbeat</td>
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2. This is a false choice. There are really two dimensions.

Assertiveness

Likable/EI

high

low

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About Abraham Lincoln…

“Not often in the story of mankind has a man arrived on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock, and soft as drifting fog. There was in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace, unspeakable…”

Carl Sandburg
Address to U.S. Congress on the sesquicentennial of Lincoln’s birth, February 12, 1959.

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Power

Negotiation

Persuasion
Uncertain Election

When there is a conflict, who has a more legitimate claim to the presidency?

挑战
人性的弱点
出人头地的捷径

20世纪最伟大的成功导师
戴尔·卡耐基/著

学林出版社
Principles of Persuasion

1. Logos, ethos, pathos, agora, and syzygy
2. Simplicity/Clarity
3. Know the audience and its predispositions
4. Salience
5. Analogies/Metaphors
6. Storytelling, Examples/Demonstrations
7. Counter-intuitive sources and arguments
8. Active vs. Passive Audience
9. Repetition
10. Personalizing

(continued)
Principles of Persuasion (continued)

11. Authority/Credibility
12. Conformity/Social proof, Similarity
13. Reciprocation
14. Humor
15. Liking/Association
16. Scarcity
17. Commitment/Consistency
18. Contrast
19. Four types of attitude change
20. Empathy, Listening and Feedback
Biggest Challenges to Persuasion

1. Persuasion principles are self-evident. Persuasion is too easy.

2. Persuasion is unethical. It is mere manipulation.

3. Persuasion is an innate skill. Persuasion is too hard. Some people are natural born persuaders, most aren’t.
Logos, Ethos, Pathos

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*:

- **Logos**: logical, coherent, cogent argument.
- **Ethos**: the characteristics of the messenger.
- **Pathos**: the motives, feelings, attitudes, and knowledge of the audience.

**Logos:**

- Necessary but not sufficient
- Frequent failure of good logos argument
- Cognitive and affective attitudes

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Agora

A gathering place, especially the marketplace in ancient Greece.

The context:

  a. Where? The physical milieu: setting (place, culture), channels, rules

  b. When? Timing
Syzygy

'siz-ə-jē (from the Greek syn, to join, and sygon, to yoke.)
The rare alignment of celestial bodies, such as the sun, moon, and earth during an eclipse, influencing the earth’s gravitational system.

Persuasion goal: combining and balancing logos, ethos, pathos, and agora. Aligning the key elements.
L = Logos

E = Ethos

A = Agora

P = Pathos

S = Syzygy
### LEAPS Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logos</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Content of the argument, reasons, data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos</td>
<td>Messenger</td>
<td>Character, credibility, plus other characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathos</td>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Emotions plus other predispositions (affective and cognitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agora</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Where or when (setting, channels, rules, timing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syzygy</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Reasonable balance among the other elements</td>
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Analogies/Metaphors

- Using existing categories in people’s minds (recall selective perception exercise).
- Retention by my students: stickiness
- Religious texts
- Lincoln, Reagan
- Must get metaphor “right.”
Counter-intuitive

• Counter-intuitive sources and arguments.

• Novel, fresh, surprising information may be necessary to cause people to modify their predispositions and beliefs.
Commitment/Consistency

People feel personal and interpersonal pressures to honor and to behave consistently with their prior commitments. People wish to be (and to appear to be) consistent with what they have already said and done.

Small initial commitments (foot in the door) can be leveraged into much larger commitments.

Commitments are most powerful when they are:

1. Active (ex. written vs. oral)
2. Public
3. Effortful
4. Felt to be an inner responsibility (one has voluntarily chosen to make commitment without strong outside pressure)

Action Question:

Can I do this persuasion in stages so that I can get an initial commitment?
Active vs. Passive Audience

- Commitment Principle
- Capturing attention vs. engaging the mind.
Repetition

• More learning and more retention with repetition.

• “Double your pleasure….!”
# Coins (of the Realm) and Their Flip Sides

## Principles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KISS</th>
<th>When They Go Wrong:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over-simplifying</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know the audience and its predispositions</th>
<th>Pandering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mere storytelling, war stories</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storytelling</th>
<th>Ad Nauseum</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repetition</th>
<th>Over-personalizing</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personalizing</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“smarty-pants,” “know it all”</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Excessive certitude</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Conviction</th>
<th>blind zealotry</th>
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Authority/Credibility

We are more likely to be persuaded (even without the inclination to do so) by someone who is perceived to be an authority.

The two key elements of credible authority: knowledge/expertise and trustworthiness.

Conviction

Milgram experiments.

**Action Questions:**

Why should the audience accept my word? Especially if I am not well known to the audience: How can I convey my expertise and integrity? Who else/what else can vouch for my credibility? Can I say something which is apparently contrary to my self-interest?
Conformity/Social Proof

People are often persuaded to change their attitudes or behavior in response to real or imagined group pressure.

The power of social norms.

Conformity is a time-saving device, increases chances of being correct, yields social approval or avoids disapproval.

Solomon Asch experiments.

**Action Questions:**

Who else can speak for me or my cause?

Who can better invoke peer pressure than me?
Tips on Listening

1. Suspend judgment.
2. Paraphrase your understanding of speaker's words.
3. Ask questions for clarification (with genuine intent to learn).
4. Acknowledge the speaker's concerns, strengths, feelings, efforts.
5. Be an active listener. Avoid rehearsing your next response while "listening." People can usually tell when someone is listening with their full attention.
6. Good body language (e.g., eye contact, empathetic noises, nods).
Reciprocity

1. Tangible (free samples)

2. Intangible
   a. Ideas, Information
      ex: Info for the Media
   b. Expressions of Appreciation, disclosure, acknowledgement
   c. Concessions: What Can I Afford to Give Away
      1. Substantive
         ex: Recommendations (conveys objectivity, honesty)
      2. Stylistic
         Verbal and Non-Verbal
Reciprocity

Special challenge for high achieving smart, logos-oriented, strong conviction.

Al Gore

Concessionary language which does not compromise your authoritativeness
Reciprocity

Balancing other principles
Authority (esp. principles)
Knowing your stuff vs. know it all

Agora (context)
History and Nature of Relationships
Organization and cultural norms
(esp. Dominate subordinate)

Power vs. Persuasion

Donna Dubinsky
Humor evokes:

1. The Reciprocation principle.
2. The Liking principle.
3. Interestingness.

Humor which is self-deprecating, self-mocking, self-parody is effective (reciprocation, concession, and vulnerability).
Liking/Association

We are more likely to be influenced by people we know and like.

We like people:

1. Who like us.

2. Who are similar to us.

3. Who have cooperated with us for common goals.

4. With whom we have pleasant associations.

Lois Weisberg, a Connector
Liking/Association (continued)

“Like” = positive, respectful, appreciative, empathetic

The power of genuine praise, compliments (versus flattery). George Burns.

**Action Questions:**

What *genuinely* admirable qualities does my audience have?

Is there a *genuine* similarity between me and my audience?
Likeability and assertiveness are not two ends of a single dimension. To be “likeable” we need not relinquish our critical faculties.

Abraham Lincoln.
A confrontive question: are you “likable,” i.e. do you “like” others?

Effective but unlikable leaders: Persuasion vs. Power
Short run vs. middle, long run

Dale Carnegie.

Emotional Intelligence: substantial overlap with Liking.

The Good news about Emotional Intelligence and persuasion
(The Talent Myth, etc.)
Liking/Association (continued)

The Association principle: connecting a person, product, or idea to something we feel positive about.

- Food Stamps
- Australian immigration human rights vs. national security

Framing: Either you frame your issue, or you get framed.

Face of the Issue
- Position
- Values
- Performance

Video ads
Learning and Developing the Artistry of Persuasion (Mostly Good News)

1. Persuasiveness is not entirely innate.

2. We can learn, acquire, develop, cultivate new habits and skills of persuasion and improve old ones.

3. Other personal talents (e.g. intelligence) are more difficult to nurture and change.

4. Success in adult life (professional and personal) probably depends more on persuasion skills than on native intelligence.

5. It is extremely unlikely that a person will totally transform his/her persuasion skills.

6. Rather, people can make marginal improvements in their persuasion skills.

7. But these marginal improvements can be decisive in how successful people are in persuasion. That is because we rarely lose our most important persuasion projects by a lopsided landslide.
Scarcity

• Opportunities seem more valuable when their availability is limited.

• Applies to information and ideas, not just commodities.

• Couch your persuasion argument in terms of what an audience stands to lose, not just in terms of the anticipated benefits (since loss appears to be a more motivating concept than gain).

• Information that is scarce, new, or exclusive should be stated early in a persuasion message (establishing a strong reason for people to listen).

Action Questions:

Can I tell my audience something that is scarce, new, or exclusive?
Can I help my audience avoid a loss?
Four Types of Attitude Change

1. **Conversion**
   
   | X = Your view |
   | Y = Opposing View |
   | Y → X |

2. **Reinforcement**
   
   | X |
   | DK? → X |

3. **Activation**
   
   | DK? → X |

4. **De-activation**
   
   | Y → DK? |

Have your strategic objective clearly in mind. Which type of attitude change is most appropriate for your persuasion situation?

We tend to assume that conversion is always our goal.
C A R D

C = Conversion

A = Activation

R = Reinforcement

D = De-Activation
Targeting Strategies

- Unmovable Opponents: No Effort
- Opponents: De-activate or Convert
- Uncommitted and Uninvolved: No Effort
- Uncommitted and Involved: Activate
- Allies: Reinforce
- Hard-core Allies: No Effort

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Primer for Polemicists

Owen Harries

Rule 1: Forget about trying to convert your adversary. In any serious ideological confrontation the chances of success on this score are so remote as to exclude it as a rational objective.

Rule 2: Pay great attention to the agenda of the debate. He who defines the issues, and determines their priority, is already well on the way to winning.

Rule 3: Preaching to the converted, far from being a superfluous activity, is vital. Preachers do it every Sunday. The strengthening of the commitment, intellectual performance, and morale of those already on your side is an essential task, both in order to bind them more securely to the cause and to make them more effective exponents of it.

Rule 4: Never forget the uncommitted: almost invariably, they constitute the vast majority.

Rule 5: Be aware that, at least potentially, you are addressing multiple audiences. Decide whether, on a particular occasion, you want to make a broad appeal to many audiences, which will usually involve compromise and restraint in presentation, or whether you want to make a sharply focused pitch to a particular audience, even at the risk of alienating others.

Rule 6: Be prepared to go around the block many times. When you have a good point to make, keep repeating it.

(continued)
Rule 7: Shave with Occam’s razor. Knowing what you can afford to give away is one of the greatest arts of polemic.

Rule 8: Be very careful in your use of examples and historical analogies. Both are often powerful and persuasive ways of bringing a point home, particularly when the analogy links the subject at issue to the personal experience of the audience. But you should generally be economical in the use of analogies, choose carefully, and be well armed to develop and defend the ones you choose.

Rule 9: When bolstering the authority of what you are saying by the use of quotation, give preference whenever possible to sources which are not identified with your case.

Rule 10: Avoid trading in motives as an alternative to rebutting the opposing case.

Rule 11: Emulate the iceberg. In any polemical exchange, make sure that you know several times more about a topic than you can conceivably use or show.

Rule 12: Know your enemy. Always bear in mind John Stuart Mill’s observation that he who knows only his own position knows little of that. Take particular care to understand the position of your adversary—and to understand it not in a caricatured or superficial form, but at its strongest, for until you have rebutted it at its strongest, you have not rebutted it at all.
Three Persuasion Clusters

**Logos**
- Simplicity/Clarity
- Analogies/Metaphors
- Counter-intuitive
- Storytelling
- Salience
- Scarcity
- Contrast
- Repetition

**Ethos**
- Authority/Credibility
- Liking/Association
- Reciprocation
- Listening
- Personalizing
- Humor

**Pathos**
- Know the audience
- Know the context
- Conformity
- Commitment
- Active vs. Passive
- CARD
Attribution Errors

When trying to explain why someone behaved in a particular way, we can attribute the causes of that behavior either to:

1. **Dispositional causes**: something **within** the individual (e.g. personal attitudes, beliefs, character, personality traits), factors mostly within the individual’s control

OR

2. **Situational causes**: something **outside** the person in the social or physical environment, factors mostly beyond the individual’s control.

**Two common biases:**

1. **When explaining others’ behavior**
   
   We tend to overestimate dispositional causes and underestimate situational causes. (Accuser bias)

2. **When explaining our own behavior**

   We tend to overestimate situational causes and underestimate dispositional causes. (Bias of the accused)
Biggest Challenges to Persuasion

1. Persuasion principles are self-evident. Persuasion is too easy.
   
   Answer: Conceptually that is true, but not in practice.

2. Persuasion is unethical. It is mere manipulation.
   
   Answer: The techniques of persuasion, like many other technologies, are neither inherently good nor evil. They can be used to advance noble or pernicious purposes.

3. Persuasion is an innate skill. Persuasion is too hard. Some people are natural born persuaders, most aren’t.
   
   Answer: That is true. However with sustained practice most of us can improve our persuasion skills, and that may be decisive.
In management, 2 percent of the problem is making a decision, 98 percent is persuading others to accept the decision.

Elliot Richardson

• U.S. Attorney General
• U.S. Secretary of Defense
• Secretary of Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
• Secretary of Commerce
• Under Secretary of State
• Ambassador to Great Britain
• Massachusetts Lt. Governor
• Massachusetts Attorney General

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“The means by which enlightened rulers and sagacious generals moved and conquered others, that their achievements surpassed the masses, was advance knowledge.

Advance knowledge cannot be gained from ghosts and spirits, inferred from phenomena, or projected from the measures of Heaven, but must be gained from men for it is the knowledge of the enemy’s true situation.

Sun Tzu, The Art of War
“Faced with the choice between changing one's mind and proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof.”

John Kenneth Galbraith
“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower
“The feeble tremble before public opinion, the foolish deny it, the wise judge it, the skillful direct it.”

Jeanne-Marie Roland
French Revolutionary (circa 1792)
In Conclusion:

What do we do next?

Where do we go from here?

- The two responsibilities of persuasion:
  To be ethical and to be effective

- An answer to the biggest challenge:
  Is persuasiveness fundamentally innate?