



Mpowerment Matters

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Management Mpowerment Associates

Forward to a Colleague



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As we have all learned by now - some of us the hard way - leaders are paid for results, for getting things done. Far-reaching vision, brilliant strategy, intelligence and creativity are all wonderful and important attributes for leaders and organizations. But without execution, without bringing those great ideas to fruition for the benefit of the organization, the value is not there. Execution is key. Stakeholders want results.

As Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan state in their book *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, "Execution is a systematic way of exposing reality **and acting on it.**" Leaders must act and must get those with whom they work to act, individually and as a group.

Persuasion is an extremely important tool for promoting action. But being able to persuade is much more than being glib.

We at **Management Mpowerment Associates** understand the issues facing leaders on a daily basis. We can help you learn to develop and utilize your skills to execute your plans and to persuade others to want to execute along with you. The ability to persuade can be dependent upon

the individual doing the persuading or the one being persuaded, their prior history and how previous attempts have turned out; on organizational culture, on emotional intelligence, and on any number of other factors of which a leader must be aware.

Persuasion based on threats or power trips is not the answer. Leaders who truly learn *the art of persuasion* have developed a number of interrelated skills and competencies that will serve them well in leading their organizations. They will persuade based on a combination of logic, emotion, and an understanding of others.

Further, they will have created or supported an ethical culture built on credibility and personal involvement, in which desired behaviors are rewarded. The ability of a leader to persuade can be a strong sign that the company's foundation is solid, and that employees follow along because the leader has a proven track record of actions consistent with the vision and the mission of the organization. **Management Mpowerment** can help you build that type of track record in your organization.

Leadership by Persuasion

As a leader, your success depends upon your ability to get things done: up, down and across all lines. Today's organizations are politically complex and fluid, which blurs lines of formal authority.

To survive and succeed, you must learn to persuade people: to convince them to take action on your behalf and under your direction, often without formal authority. Even when you do have formal authority, you may be hesitant to use it.

Persuasion is widely perceived as a skill reserved for sales and negotiation. Now, it's an essential proficiency for all leaders.

Defining Our Terms

"Effective persuasion becomes a negotiating and learning process through which a persuader leads colleagues to a problem's shared solution."

-Jay A. Conger, PhD
Professor of organizational behavior, London Business School
Author, *Winning 'Em Over: A New Model for Management in the Age of Persuasion*

Persuasion involves leading people to take a position they don't currently hold. You must not only make a rational argument, but also position your information, ideas, approaches and/or solutions in ways that appeal to basic human emotions. Dr. Conger describes the traditional view of persuasion: "First, you strongly state your position. Second, you outline the supporting arguments, followed by a highly assertive, data-based exposition. Finally, you enter the deal-making stage and work toward a close."

Discovery, Preparation, Dialogue

Any attempt to persuade may provoke colleagues to oppose and polarize. If, according to Dr. Conger, persuasion is a learning and negotiating process, then it must include three phases: discovery, preparation and dialogue.

Before you even begin to speak, you must consider your position from every angle. Getting ready to present your ideas may take weeks or months of planning, as you learn about your audience and prepare your arguments.

Dialogue occurs both before and during the persuasion process. You must invite people to discuss solutions, debate the merits of your position, offer honest feedback and suggest alternatives.

To effectively persuade, you must test and revise ideas to reflect your colleagues' concerns and needs. Success depends on being open-minded and willing to incorporate compromises.

Four Steps to Successful Persuasion

Leading through persuasion requires you to follow four essential steps:

1. Establish credibility.
2. Understand your audience, framing your goals in a way that identifies common ground.
3. Reinforce your positions with vivid language and compelling evidence.
4. Connect emotionally with your audience.

To avoid failure, your strategy for persuasion must be as compelling as your arguments.

The Importance of Credibility

Credibility develops from two sources: expertise and relationships. Listen carefully to your audience's suggestions, and establish an environment in which they know their opinions are valued. Prepare by collecting data and information that both support and contradict your arguments—a step that sheds light on your position's strengths and weaknesses. Place others' best interests first so you can validate that you truly care about the team's well-being.

Frame for Common Ground

You must be adept at describing your positions in ways that illuminate their advantages. The primary goal is to identify tangible benefits to which your targeted audience can relate. This requires multiple conversations, meetings and dialogue to collect essential information by asking thoughtful questions. This process will often prompt you to alter your initial argument or include compromises.

Identify key decision makers, stakeholders and the organization's network of influence. Who is supportive, unyielding or neutral? Pinpoint their interests and how they view alternatives.

Provide Evidence

Persuasion requires you to present evidence: strong data in multiple forms (stories, graphs, images, metaphors and examples). Make your position come alive by using vivid language that complements graphics. In most cases, a rock-solid argument:

- Is logical and consistent with facts and experience
- Favorably addresses your audience's interests
- Eliminates or neutralizes competing alternatives
- Recognizes and deals with office politics

- Receives endorsements from objective, authoritative third parties

Connect Emotionally

Your connection to your audience must demonstrate both intellectual and emotional commitment to your position. Successful persuaders cultivate an accurate sense of their audience's emotional state, and they adjust their arguments' tone accordingly. Whatever your position, you must match your emotional fervor to your audience's ability to receive your message.

Virtual Teams

It's even harder to persuade when your relationships are electronically based. Without face-to-face meetings, you cannot gather critical nonverbal cues that help you connect with others. If you usually communicate by email, arrange frequent phone conferences to interact on a more personal level. While actual meetings require travel expenses, they may be well worth the cost.

Four Ways to Fail at Persuasion

Most leaders attempt to persuade through logic, persistence and personal enthusiasm. In reality, this model is a setup for failure. You blunder when you:

1. **Make your case with a hard sell.** Assailing colleagues with preconceived ideas from the get-go gives potential opponents a clear target for battle.
2. **Resist compromise.** To buy into your proposal, people want to see if you're flexible enough to respond to their concerns. Compromises often lead to more sustainable solutions.
3. **Think the secret of persuasion lies in presenting great arguments.** Your credibility-as well as your ability to create a mutually beneficial framework, connect on the right emotional level and communicate through vivid language that makes arguments come alive-are equally important.
4. **Assume persuasion is a one-shot effort.** Persuasion is a process, not an event. It's rarely possible to arrive at a shared solution on the first try.

Resources

Conger, J.A. (1998) *Winning 'Em Over: A New Model for Management in the Age of Persuasion*. Simon & Schuster. New York NY.

Getting People On Board. (2005) The Results-Driven Manager Series. Harvard Business School Press. Boston MA.

Power, Influence, and Persuasion: Sell Your Ideas and Make Things Happen. (2005) Harvard Business Essentials. Harvard Business School Press. Boston MA.

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