

POWERS OF PERSUASION

What's the secret to speaking so that other people listen and act on what you do? Dr Mike Clayton explains

Back in the Classical era and through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, lawyers, doctors and financiers would have learned the skills of influence and persuasion as a fundamental part of their professional education.

And the skills that your predecessors learned will work just as well for you, today. It all starts with the observation by the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, that a persuasive argument requires three elements. These are:

◆ **Ethos:** character, authority, trustworthiness. People want to know that you are someone whose opinion is worth listening to.

◆ **Logos:** reason, logic, argument. This is what most of us trained for – the ability to evaluate the evidence and put together a well-reasoned case.

◆ **Pathos:** emotion, values, caring. Most of the time, the decisions we make are based on the way we feel, not on what we think. We then use rational argument to justify ourselves.

Ethos

If you want to be as influential as the most senior professionals, look the part. Dress smartly and use good-quality accessories such as your pen and notebook. Make your argument clearly – jargon and complex language leave listeners doubting your credibility and truthfulness.

When meeting someone for the first time, establish your credibility with a business card and a short description of your professional expertise.

Finally, to establish your ethos, you have to persuade me that you understand my issues and concerns.

Logos

Spend time honing your ability to explain the complex in simple ways. This is not

about oversimplifying, but about showing that you understand your argument well enough to present it in a compelling way.

Here is an example of a structured response framework that you can use:

◆ **Hook:** establish the pressure, the need or the compelling reason for me to pay attention: *“The level of risk to our portfolio has risen beyond the levels we set as acceptable in our last strategy review.”*

◆ **Line:** set out a solution or compelling offer: *“If we were to diversify our property holdings across a broader spread of countries, we would rebalance our risk profile.”*

◆ **Sinker:** offer a convincer that demonstrates the soundness or desirability of your recommendation: *“The level of activity in the property markets that is creating the volatility I am concerned about also makes it a good time to divest and reinvest.”*

Pathos

Three factors play very well to pathos in the corporate world: fear, desire and duty. Fear is the strongest motivator for decisions, especially where we fear a loss. In this case, we will often take risks that we would never otherwise have countenanced. But if you need me to act on a legitimate threat, then spelling out the consequences, the signs that it is real and imminent, and the likelihood of it happening, is the strongest way to enhance your argument.

Desire is the second of these emotional motivators. If you can start my emotional movement with a little kick of fear, it will often be desire for the positive consequences that will sustain my motivation.

Finally, we have duty. Emphasise how your recommendation is consistent with something I have already said, endorsed or even committed myself to. Or link your request to a favour you did for me, or a concession you granted me some time ago. This way, I will feel a duty to reciprocate.

FOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL TRICKS TO HELP YOU PERSUADE OTHERS

◆ The 'black and white' effect:

we evaluate an offer or an idea in the context of others that are available for comparison. Offer two or three options, where your recommendation is clearly the strongest.

◆ The 'eight out of 10 cat owners' principle:

we often default to making a safe decision – one that the people around us have already made. Show case studies and testimonials to support your argument.

◆ The 'narrower is deeper' effect:

we find narrow expertise more credible than general competence, so emphasise your depth of knowledge, and do not offer opinions outside your core area of expertise.

◆ The 'I'm gorgeous, fly me'

principle: we are more easily influenced by people we like – so make yourself likeable by getting to know me, sharing my interests and presenting yourself well.



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