The Persuasion Paradigm: Selling Magically

By Phil Atkinson

Fundamentally, our ability to achieve results in business is dependent upon our ability to influence people. We can all benefit from learning to influence, persuade, negotiate, train and sell to others in a variety of contexts from direct selling to clients to coaching, team building, appraising, motivating and leading. It is also true to say that many of us in business do not see ourselves as natural sales people. Perhaps we do not have these gifts, think we lack the eloquence, the quick wit and rapid fire repartee associated with the traditional "silver tongue" sales stars. Never fear. Who wants to display those traits anyway? That is the old sales profile. Be confident in knowing that influencing skills associated with the 'consultative model' can be learned and developed very quickly.

This short article will highlight some of these key issues to enable communication with passion, precision, power, and help you forge new alliances and 'win-win' solutions.

Interpersonal Magic

Most of us would not achieve what we do without applying these skills. Persuading others is a core competence for everyone who works in business. It does not matter whether we work in Finance, Marketing, Consulting, Training, IT, HR, Manufacturing or any other specialist role, what we all have in common is the need to persuade and influence others. Even those who occupy a purely technical role have to emerge at some stage and win over the hearts and minds of their colleagues, their team and those to whom they report. Being able to influence others is a part of emotional intelligence that is coming to be valued highly in most organisations.

- Mastering Persuasion
- "Selje" - the Attitude of Selling
- The Beliefs & Behaviours of Effective Persuaders
- Respect Your Client's Model of the World
- Develop your Linguistic Flexibility
- Be at CAUSE not EFFECT
- No Failure, only Feedback - Excuses vs. Reasons
- Hypnotic Language Patterns
- The Four step sales process
- Establish Rapport
- Ask Questions
- Identify Need and Establish Value and link to your Service
- Agree 'win-win' – finalise agreement

It is obvious that in business most of us in business achieve results through interacting with others. Applying our social skills enables us to win them over to our viewpoint, so if we want to become more effective in whatever we do, we can learn a great deal by looking at the art and science of persuasion. We will focus here on the 'persuasion paradigm' and the strategies underpinning interpersonal influence. Much of the content is applicable to a sales role and is equally applicable to a variety of contexts from Coaching to Consulting.

continued...

Mastering Persuasion

As a Consultant, I see my role as principally influencing others whether they be the project sponsors and clients with whom I work, or those who will be the target for the implementing and sustaining change in their organisation. Our key ability as a team Consultants is to implement change. Our chief tool is discourse and debate, negotiation, training and influencing through the art and science of influence and persuasion. A high degree of interpersonal competence is fundamental in bringing about change and it's also central to winning new sales and clients – without which there would be no business.

Building a repertoire of Persuasion strategies is Critical

The development of our ability to influence others is a core competence for us all and many of us share the common ambition of improving our interpersonal skills. When exposed to superior 'persuasion paradigms' and selling skills, we value them and see the benefits that accrue to our personal effectiveness and we experience the benefits that evolve from exposure to new tools and techniques:

- Controlling the flow of conversation and constantly reviewing the focus and the potential outcomes through 'conserva-tional change techniques.
- Identifying and dealing with objections prior to, and during, negotiations, before they arise.
- 'Inoculate' our proposals from criticism and safeguard our position by foreseeing potential objections and counter arguments from others.
- Build and support 'win-win' solutions when all parties share in the success of the partnership in achieving the positive outcome.
- When presenting to large or small group reviewing the 'persuasion or influence strategies' open to you enables you to better read the audience and anticipate their reactions. By understanding the typical objections that arise, it is possible to shape your presentation to appeal to all parties.
- Anticipate 'counter arguments' to any presentation whether it be 'one on one' or to a team, you should always be prepared to deal with dissent as much as support of your case
- Shaping delicate discussions and develop creative options for all parties.
- Having confidence to sell products, services and oneself

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"Selje" - the Attitude of Selling

Not everyone is keen on applying these tools. There are many who are hostile to the idea of applying persuasion, influence and negotiation and see their practise as unethical. Some even think that the process of selling is counter to developing honest and open relationships. Thankfully, this view is not universally held. This is the old paradigm and idea of selling in which the average salesperson was seen as slick, fast-talking, razzle-dazzle, tough negotiator, an over-talking, hard 'closer' who would make a quick sale and then hit the road.

Consultative selling, listening to others, and serving their interests is a core belief and behaviour for me and the work I do. I prefer to think of the sales process as ecological and focused entirely on win-win solutions rather than getting 'one over' or 'conning people'. I would refer readers to the word 'Sales' which evolved from the Norwegian term "Selje" and it means to serve.

Serving others is my total focus when I am in debate, discussion or working with others enabling a 'win-win' solution. I have no time for the old school of 'conning others' for a quick win. You know yourself if someone is trying to sell you something there is more in their interest than yours – they cannot help but 'leak' their insincerity. You pick it up either consciously or unconsciously, usually in their non-verbal language.

My strong belief is that, by serving others first, the natural consequence is the achievement of my own goals and objectives. With this 'serving attitude' at the forefront of our mind any person with whom you are working will consciously and unconsciously hone in on your positive intent. They will witness, experience and feel the consistency with what and how you say things. That is the only way to work to enable solutions and build a series of long-term relationships.

Lifetime Value of Customers

Most, we want to establish life-time value with our customers and partners in our business and social transactions. I would like to think that these relationships are getting stronger daily. Achieving this is the natural route to Networking.

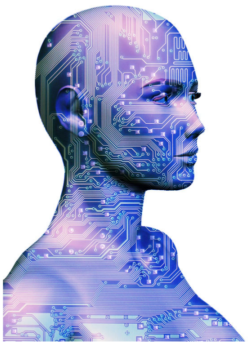
The Beliefs & Behaviours of Effective Persuaders

Later we will be talking about a Four Stage process which encapsulates effective persuasion. Before that, it is imperative to review the attitude, beliefs and behaviours that are the foundation of great influencers and persuaders.

Over time, I have been able to synthesise many of the ideas of the personality models to better read colleagues and clients. Ultimately, this has enabled me to serve their interests in a 'win-win' partnership.

Building Rapport

Over the last few years, various strategies and techniques have been perfected to aid the reading of others' preferences. Principally, we have focused on how they make decisions. Using these models helps gain rapport with clients, and it's then relatively easy to work together enabling them to develop, implement and sustain various changes in their business.



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1. Respect Your Client's Model of the World

Your client, customer or business partner, associate or client has his own unique model of the world, which may not be the same view of the world as ours. We all have our own unique make-up of who we are and what is important to us. With this in mind I use and apply various 'behavioural models' to understand what makes other people tick. Being involved in Consulting work for many years, and before this being a Business School lecturer, I have researched and become qualified to use most psychometric instruments and found this an invaluable tool enabling me to being better able to 'serving others'.

Because I work in partnership with clients, we can address any objections, inoculate our proposals before presentation – even to a hostile audience – thus ensuring that resistance to change is at a minimum.

Some of the best contracts I have won were when I went back to the prospect and reviewed 'their model of the world' and built my strategies around that model, and sold to them the way they preferred to be sold.

Not surprisingly, 'respecting' the model of the world of others is central in establishing rapport and developing the relationship along positive 'win-win' outcomes.

2. Develop your Linguistic Flexibility

There are no inflexible clients – just inflexible salespeople. If your client appears to be inflexible, take a good look in the mirror. We all tend to attract the behaviour from others we deserve. Ask yourself, why does the other person not find your proposals or suggestions appealing? Why is there a disparity in perceptions? Have you devoted sufficient time addressing the client's or associate's model of the world, looking at things from their perspective? Could you reframe things to appeal more to this perspective?

Preparation is essential to prevent errors in understanding between two people arising. Consider the hot buttons of the other people. What excites them? How can you appeal to this excitement? What nauseates them? What are their 'cold buttons?' What can you do to avoid these at all costs? If the person you are working with or selling to, prefers to perceive the world and its ideas in small sequential chunks, then deliver it that way….the way they like it! Do not try to sell the big picture neglecting the detail. You are rejecting what they value as important. If you fail to do this - you will get resistance. Likewise, a big picture guy will be bored senseless if you go into detail linking A, to B, to C……………..Z ad nauseum.

Flexibility is the best style

This tells us that you the salesperson, the master persuader, must reconsider the personality 'make-up' and the typical objections the other person will have to your ideas prior to making your pitch.

Resistance is a sign of lack of rapport with your client. Building Rapport is the first step in our four step Sales Process which we will discuss later.

3. Be at CAUSE not EFFECT

We all have the choice to either be at the 'cause' or the 'effect' of a problem. It is far more empowering to be at 'cause', which means that we take responsibility in our mind for everything that has happened – even if it was not our fault! Consider. I know you are not the 'cause' of all things that go wrong, but just suppose for a second that this is true, there are benefits to being at 'cause'.

It means you will have a different and curious mindset, which creates an empowering belief that aids you to look for new ways to resolve problems.

Conversely, if you are, at 'effect' you may appear powerless to act. Your attitude will be different. You may consider that things have transpired to put you in that position. You may even consider yourself a victim or that the tables are not in your favour. To illustrate, let's say you did not get the sale, the deal, the contract or whatever with your client. If you are at 'effect' you may say focus on excuses rather than reasons. You may say – " I did not get the work because someone else was pencilled in for the project'. Or you may think 'My face did not fit' or 'I am too in-experienced, ….too old……too expensive…..etc. Stay in 'effect' and you will give yourself loads of 'excuses' rather than reasons why things did not happen in your favour. Choose to be at 'cause' and you will find new ways to get 'back up' and adopt new strategies.

On a personal note, some of the best long-standing commercial contracts on culture change I have won were when I fell at the first hurdle and my initial proposal was rejected. It would have been easy forget the project. It would be easy to be at 'effect' and have found a plethora of excuses for not getting the work, and blaming forces outside my control – but would that have been helpful in winning the business? No, not at all! Getting up emotionally every time you do not get what is expected is coming from a position of power.

Sometimes months after clients have gone with competitors I have approached them with a new proposal to address the competitor's lacklustre performance and won the business back.

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Personal Power & Congruence

You cannot get that personal power coming from 'effect', rather it must come from the empowering belief that "I will cause things to happen – I will turn this around".

4. No Failure only Feedback

It really is important to inoculate yourself against being negative – especially if your sales and persuasion strategies don't always go to plan. Don't confuse excuses with reasons! It is easy to find 'excuses' for not getting a sale. It is easy to list a set of conditions that reinforce your belief that you have no control over circumstances. I have noted this recently with a variety of people whom I have met in the arena of sales. One example follows………..

I was talking with a local Sales Manager of a car dealership. I was picking my son's car up after its annual service and MOT. Being curious, I asked him how business was going. He told me that sales were down. I asked why this was the case. He said…… "it is the war in Iraq." I told him I did not know he exported to Iraq – he said he did not. So why are sales so poor? He said, "When the war is over the demand for cars may go back to normal". I found his retort strange because one of my long-term clients is the Financial services arm of Volkswagen and they tell me business has never been better. Cars are flying off their forecourts. So how does that equate with this Sales manager's model of the World?

The major point here is that when things are not going well we often dream up excuses to shut us out from the harsh reality of life. Catch yourself when you do it. Ask, is this a valid reason or an excuse that I am using? Reframe things around you to being at 'cause'. If you have teams who support you in your work, take a careful look at their 'beliefs' and limiting decisions' about what is going on in their World. And, even more important is the view you have about your own self-worth. *Remember, no one will pay you or reward you more than you believe you are worth at a deep level within yourself.*

5. Hypnotic Language Patterns

Communication is what is received, not what is sent. Be careful with your language and your proposals. Say things the way you want them to be received.

This is an interesting example. You might want to think of others. I was driving down the Motorway last week and the sign on the overhead gantry said "Don't take drugs and drive." What flashed into my head? Taking drugs and driving! 'Not doing so' only triggered in my mind later. You see these signs all around us – 'Don't drop litter' – 'Don't drink and drive' - 'Don't slip' – 'Don't look down'. When you hear or read these things what do you immediately think about? – Usually the one thing you should not be doing!

The reason for this is that the unconscious mind cannot process a negative. If I say 'don't think of a blue tree' – what do you have to think about first, before not thinking about it? Correct! You have to visualise or think of what a blue tree looks like before you can negate that thought.

Tell people what you want them to receive - precisely

So stop telling people what you 'do not' want them to do or think. "I don't think you should experience any problems with our IT solutions". "Don't worry, we'll always put our customers first." I am thinking "I was not worrying until you mentioned it".

Communication is a very important tool operating at both the conscious and other than conscious levels. We can train people to use communication at these levels to increase the achievement of 'win-win solutions'. You can even use the negative phrase to reinforce a message at the unconscious levels. For instance, "I am not going to suggest that ***you will be totally pleased with our consultancy services all the time***". …………. "Further, I cannot promise 100% that ***all our training will deliver performance improvement to every member of staff."*** ***"***Needless to say I would not want to give you the impression that ***we are the leaders in influencing and persuasion techniques."***

Just for a moment, think how powerful these messages are in helping achieve your outcomes. Just suppose your people could learn these techniques – how effective would they be in closing sales and cementing cast iron relationships?

The techniques are referred to as 'hypnotic language, and are founded on the science of Neuro Linguistics, using language patterns at the conversational level, which will enable you to understand more about what motivates your clients and associates, and enables you to build win-win solutions.

The Four Step Sales Process

Starting with a positive attitude for all parties is the foundation for effective persuasion and selling. Remember, we are attempting to build long-term relationships rather than doing a short-term deal with winners and losers. I believe that, fundamental to the selling process, is the ability to discuss options and alternatives and to listen very intently. Great persuaders are great listeners who listen for opportunities before speaking.

This process is secured completely on 'rapport building' and maintaining this rapport throughout the relationship. It is a process that generates win-win solutions and lifetime value for the client. The old sales model is based on literally hundreds of ways to 'close the client' to agree to the salesperson's wishes. Closing or 'closing techniques' seemed to govern the 'old school' approach to selling – hence sales having such a poor reputation.

Step 1: Establish Rapport

Any worthwhile agreement having high value for the client, associate or colleague, is secured on partnering together to add value. Those occupying positions where they are in persuasive or selling roles really need to consider the best approach for mastering some of the skills and strategies that support 'establishing rapport'.

People like people like themselves

Be at one with your client – People like people like themselves. This is particularly true in relationships that require some form of barter, give or take or commercial gain. For this reason, the 'persuader' or 'sales person' needs to understand the personality dynamics behind potential prospect, client or associate. Many sales people spend a lot of time 'objection handling' with technical issues related to their product or service – thoroughly neglecting the personality of their prospect. I suggest that this is a critical flaw needing to be addressed. We need to invest more time identifying with our client.

This means getting to grips with the personality dynamics of the prospect or purchaser, client or colleague. Having worked with psychometrics, we have developed our own models based on Jungian Psychology which we can use conversationally with clients and associates. This enables us to understand the key elements of the model of the world which our client inhabits. We have used various models from Myers Briggs and other tailored applications from OPQ and Firo B and others that have helped us work closer in change management, consultancy, training, sales and customer management situations and to implement tight and effective solutions.

It's all about getting to grips with the personality dynamics of the prospect or purchaser, client or colleague.

Rapport Building

Matching & mirroring client's behaviour and preferences is an outcome, but only in as much as walking a mile in his or her shoes to better understand the land, which they populate. It is so rude, not to mention patronising, to mimic behaviour. Sophisticated development and training can be practised in understanding behaviour dynamics, developing psychometric tools to be used conversationally together with the use of Hypnotic language patterns.

At this stage, we focus on Words – predicates, keywords and phrases, common experiences and associations, beliefs and values. A person's value system will tell you what they value and you can assess conversationally how to elicit their value system and assess how they prioritise. By doing this, you aid and enable your colleague or client to come to a solution which best fits his values and support his or her beliefs.

Body Language is also a major element of communication, and as such is a key element of sales training. The persuader or sales person becomes practised in how this can be used to create a climate of comfort and progress in meeting 'win-win' outcomes. Understanding a person's emotional needs and ensuring they are comfortable with the selling or persuasion process is fundamental. This is a "do with" rather than a "do to" process.

Step 2: Ask Questions

Here, the traditional approach to selling is strongly countered by our consultative approach to sales and influence. The ego of the persuader or salesperson must remain out of sight. This activity is not about the sales person's needs and wants but those of the customers. As a good friend in Marketing told me – "Good ideas and needs come along very quietly – so keep quiet, and focus all your attention on the client".

Persuading is about listening and refining differences – listening to concerns and objections and then dealing realistically with them. If the sales person has done a good job in building rapport, then this stage of questioning is a natural follow on.

One of the things I do with my clients is ask many questions. If you fail to do this, you will not be able to link need and Value to the service that you provide in Step 4. You have to become a great questioner and probe to find your client's key concerns and wants. You will all the time be assessing these against his or her values and the things that make them tick, and when objections start to surface.

The Four Key Objections

There are four key objection areas to proposals.

- Not enough TIME– or it's not the right time
- Not enough MONEY – I cannot afford it
- I do not BELIEVE it will work for me
- I don't believe you – it will NOT WORK

To ensure that you deal with the objections you have to create a strong questioning technique to effectively assess your client's thoughts on the process. This is the typical narrative I would use to gain permission and depth of response from a client………………

"I know that service and receiving value is important to you. Is that right?"

When I get a "Yes"……….. I respond along these lines……….

"During the sales meeting…….. I will ask you lots of questions. Some you have never been asked before…..and from time to time, you may say to yourself and think that…………. Philip is asking lots of questions…………… and I've never been asked that before……..the only reason I asked you those questions is that it is important that you answered them honestly and it's the only way that I know of to ensure we get the same level of service and value to both of us. Is that okay…………?"

I can only emphasis the importance of questioning and probing, and use a combination of Precision questions and Evidence questions to aid accuracy of response. It is impossible to provide a solution and serve the client if we have failed to get to the key issues. Traditional salespeople would lose interest here. Our approach to consultative selling used in consulting and the provision of professional services, is critical in enabling us to tailor a solution for the client.

Precision Questions

What do you want?

What is your outcome?

For what purpose?

What will that do for you?

What will that accomplish?

What will that allow you to do?

What do you want from a…………..?

What are you looking for in a……..?

Evidence Questions

What will have to happen for you to……..?

What will you see, hear and feel when you have……….?

How will you know when……….?

Step 3: Identify Need and Establish Value and link to your Service

Much of this sales process is based on conversational questioning and is not scripted. This means the consultant, sales person; persuader etc has to be extremely flexible.

As persuader or sales person, you have to Establish Value for your client before you can quote a fee for the services. How could you possibly be able to calculate a fee without assessing in detail what is required and how you could meet that need?

You have to establish higher value to have their outcome satisfied than you are going to charge, to assist them to understand how you establish value. Once you have done this they cannot object about price. You have to establish value to get their problem to disappear.

Step 3 is driven by a series of questions………..

"Just suppose the problem you

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Introvert – Extrovert?

Sensing – Intuition?

Thinking – Feeling?

Judging – Perceiving?

At this stage its also important to examine key preferences in how the client or colleague structures and views the model of their world. This helps build a 'motivational map' to see whether people are predisposed 'towards' a particular value or are 'away from' orientated. These values expressed in how they live and what is important to them is based on Jungian psychology – expressed in the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. Obviously, we can use the 'conversational variant' of this that we designed some years ago focused on the following characteristics.

- **Introvert – Extrovert**
- **Sensing – Intuition**
- **Thinking – Feeling**
- **Judging – Perceiving**

mentioned was solved – what would that be worth to you?"

"Just suppose you have that outcome, what value would you put on that?"

By using questions, you can then reach an agreement as to the value you are adding to the client. There are multitudes of techniques that seamlessly take us from here to Step 4.

Step 4: Agree 'win-win' – finalise agreement

If you have committed 50% of your energies to establishing rapport and asking questions in Step 1 & 2 and an additional 45% to establishing value and linking to your services in Step 3, then the final 5% is about closing the deal or finalising the agreement in Step 4. 'Closing' should be a natural conclusion to consultative selling, but the sales person still has to close the agreement. It is surprising how few sale people or persuaders actually make that close and finalise things.

Perceivers & Judgers

Some believe that if their client does not say no, they may say yes!

False beliefs about closing a sale lead to the situation where some sales people feel embarrassed about asking for the order. These people in Jungian terms are what we call Perceivers as opposed to Judgers. Myers Briggs uses this dimension within their profiling system. Judgers and Perceivers inhabit the same planet but have different views on things. Judgers like finalising things, they like closure and once something is agreed, it is a firm

Perceiver or Judge?

commitment. They do not like changing things after they have made up their mind and made a decision. They like to chart and plan things and get edgy if there is too much leeway on projects. They like to be in charge and predict how things will evolve. It would appear that Judgers naturally employ the sales or the persuasion process.

Perceivers are very different in that they like change and keeping their options open. They do not like closure until every option has been exhausted so consequently if you are in a sales or persuasion role there may be a strong tendency to keep things flexible and spontaneous. If that is the case, you probably do not like being 'closed' on things yourself so you will not do it to others.

Perceivers don't like boundaries and rules and will do anything to avoid being tied down to commitments unless and until they have explored every avenue.

Of course, the two examples quoted are at opposite ends of the same continuum in their lifestyle choice and how the way they live but you can see how one's personal preferences can seriously influence a sales or a persuasion role to close or finalise an agreement.

Review

This article is the first in a series focusing on the persuasion paradigm and the process of selling. You can see that the process can work in variety of contexts and in a range of industries.

We have used the process for sales of consulting assignments, selling learning strategies, training sales or marketing staff, coaching, customer management, negotiating and consulting, selling professional services and products.

The major learning about this approach is that is based on a flexible interpersonal model that creates a climate of consultation leading to deep rapport.

There is a great dependency on the Applied Behavioural Science, Neuro Linguistics and Psychometrics as tools for creating rapport, reading the client and managing the process towards 'win-win' solutions.

This approach rejects the sharp practise of 'Selling', which was seen as a scripted route to selfishly achieving your own needs at the expense of others. Rather, we have highlighted is the key point referred to as *Selje* – in which persuading or selling to others means "to serve" the client.

Identity, Boundaries and Self Confidence

Finally, whether you are salesperson, consultant, trainer customer services manager, coach, business owner, team manager or leader in a variety of businesses, you have an important role to influence and persuade. You will know that your ability will reflect on you and your identity in your role and you as a person.

Selling and persuasion are probably quite challenging as you may find. All the time you will be looking for feedback to see how your own skills are progressing. You are creating your persuasion, influence or selling identity, which is important to you. As a sales person of considerable influence, you will have formulated values that work for you. These values, standards and rules depict who you are and for what you stand, and should never be compromised. They are your personal boundaries that say who you are – and how you do business – never deny them for quick or cheap deal. Defend your boundaries, maintain your integrity. Decide who you are and how you will do business. Your flexibility is to help your client. If you pursue rapport and establish Value for them your boundaries will not be compromised. If you are forced to drop your standards for a compromised deal – walk away. Be confident that other business will follow on your own terms.

Some will want to negotiate you to break your boundaries. Stick with what you believe is right. You may lose a sale or two but others will come to you.

Maintaining realistic boundaries only adds to your confidence and your clients will see that as they transact business with you. So stay loyal and decide what profile your persuasion or selling style will typify.

You have to stick to your guns. Who you are and what you are about means that your own personal position gets stronger and you build your own brand becoming a master persuader confident that your expertise rests on an inner core of integrity in how you transact business.

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