

Selling yourself magically: Persuasion strategies for personal and organisational change

By Philip E Atkinson.

"Imagine the confidence this will give you to take charge, present proposals and ideas and how it can change the way you transact and build business and your career, create positive and lasting relationships and be secure in yourself and radiate an inner warmth and self assurance in your ability to master influence in your life in any context."

Fundamentally, our ability to successfully manage change and 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 persuaders selling concepts, ideas, and even ourselves. Perhaps we think we do not have these gifts, lacking the eloquence, the quick wit and rapid fire repartee, associated with the traditional silver tongued sales stars. Those traits anyway are associated with the short-term quick win-lose mentality. Be confident in knowing that influencing skills associated with the 'consultative model' – developing 'win-win' solutions can be learned and developed very quickly, and applied in a variety of contexts.

Interpersonal competence – valued emotional intelligence

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 matters not whether we work in finance, marketing, consulting, training, IT, HR, manufacturing or any other specialist role such as quality, risk, audit or governance, 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.

It is obvious that most of us in business achieve results through interacting with others. Applying our social skills enables us to win others over to our viewpoint. 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 and this is equally applicable to a variety of contexts, from coaching to consulting.

Building a repertoire of persuasion strategies is vital

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 influencing 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 conversational 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 range of 'persuasion or

influence strategies' enables one to better read the audience and anticipate their reactions. By understanding the typical objections that arise, it is possible to shape presentations 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 services and oneself.

The beliefs and behaviours of effective persuaders

I will refer later to a five stage persuasion process which encapsulates effective and ethical influence. Before that, it is imperative to review the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are the foundation of great influencers and persuaders.

1. Respect your client's model of the world

Our client, customer, business partner or associate has their own unique model of the world, which may not be the same view of the world as ours. We all have our own unique ID and make-up of who we are, and what is important to us. With this in mind we use and apply various 'behavioural models' to understand what makes other people tick.

Rapport building

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

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then relatively easy to work together enabling them to develop, implement and sustain various changes in their business. 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.

2. Develop your linguistic flexibility

If your client appears to be inflexible, take a good look in the mirror. Are we tending to attract the behaviour from others. 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 model of the world, looking at things from their perspective? Could you reframe things for them to appeal more to this perspective?

You the specialist, the change maker, the salesperson, the master persuader, must consider 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 second step in our five step persuasion process which will be discussed later.

3. Be at cause not at 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, the reader, are not the 'cause' of all things that go wrong for you, 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 looking for new ways to resolve problems instead of blaming others.

Conversely, if you are, at 'effect' you may appear powerless to act. Your attitude will be very different. You may not consider that things have transpired to put you in that position and easily blame others. You may even consider yourself a victim and those things are not in your favour. To illustrate, let's say you did not get what you wanted, the promotion, the agreement to progress a key project with your boss, the contract or whatever with your client. If you are at 'effect' you may focus on excuses rather than reasons. You may think – "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 inexperienced... too old... too expensive... etc. Stay in the emotional state

of 'effect' and you will give yourself tons of 'excuses' rather than real 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.

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 persuasion strategies don't always go to plan. Don't confuse excuses with reasons! It is easy to find 'excuses' for not getting your own way and winning your projects. It is easy to list a set of conditions that reinforce your belief that you have no control over circumstances

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 that we can all do something to make things better. 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'. And further, consider this, 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.

5. Hypnotic language patterns

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

Communicate to people what you want them to receive – precisely

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 level. For instance, "I am not going to suggest that you will be totally pleased with our 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 the provision of influencing and persuasion packages."

Just suppose your people could learn these techniques – how effective would they be in influencing others 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.

Currently I am working on language patterns developing an interactive software e-learning process entitled 'Persuasion & Negotiation Coach' to equip people in



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business with the strategies and technologies which they can use to measurably improve their persuasiveness. This is based on our research (www.influencingstrategies.com) and practical solutions which enable people from any business background, and in any context, to learn the structure, the key processes, and core language skills of advanced persuasiveness, negotiation and influence.

The five stage persuasion process

Stage 1: Preparation

This requires doing a significant amount of research into the world of those with whom we will work. It requires seeing things from the perspective of others, valuing this perspective, exploring potential objections to your proposals, defining and exploring real benefits that your client will accrue and generally rehearsing your approach and practising until you have the confidence and belief to make your approach. (For in-depth information please see previous articles in the *IMS Journal* that deal with these issues)

Starting with a positive attitude for all parties is the foundation for effective persuasion, influence and selling ideas and products. I believe that, fundamental to the persuasion and influence process, is the ability to discuss options and alternatives and to listen intently. Great persuaders are great listeners who listen for opportunities before speaking.

Stage 2: Building a relationship and rapport building

This process is secured completely on building and maintaining rapport throughout the relationship. It is a process that generates win-win solutions and

lifetime value for the client. 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 ‘facilitator’ needs to understand the personality dynamics behind potential prospects, clients or associates. Many influencers, facilitators and 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.

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.

Rapport building

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 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 facilitator becomes practised in how this can be used to create a climate of comfort and progress in meeting 'win-win' outcomes.

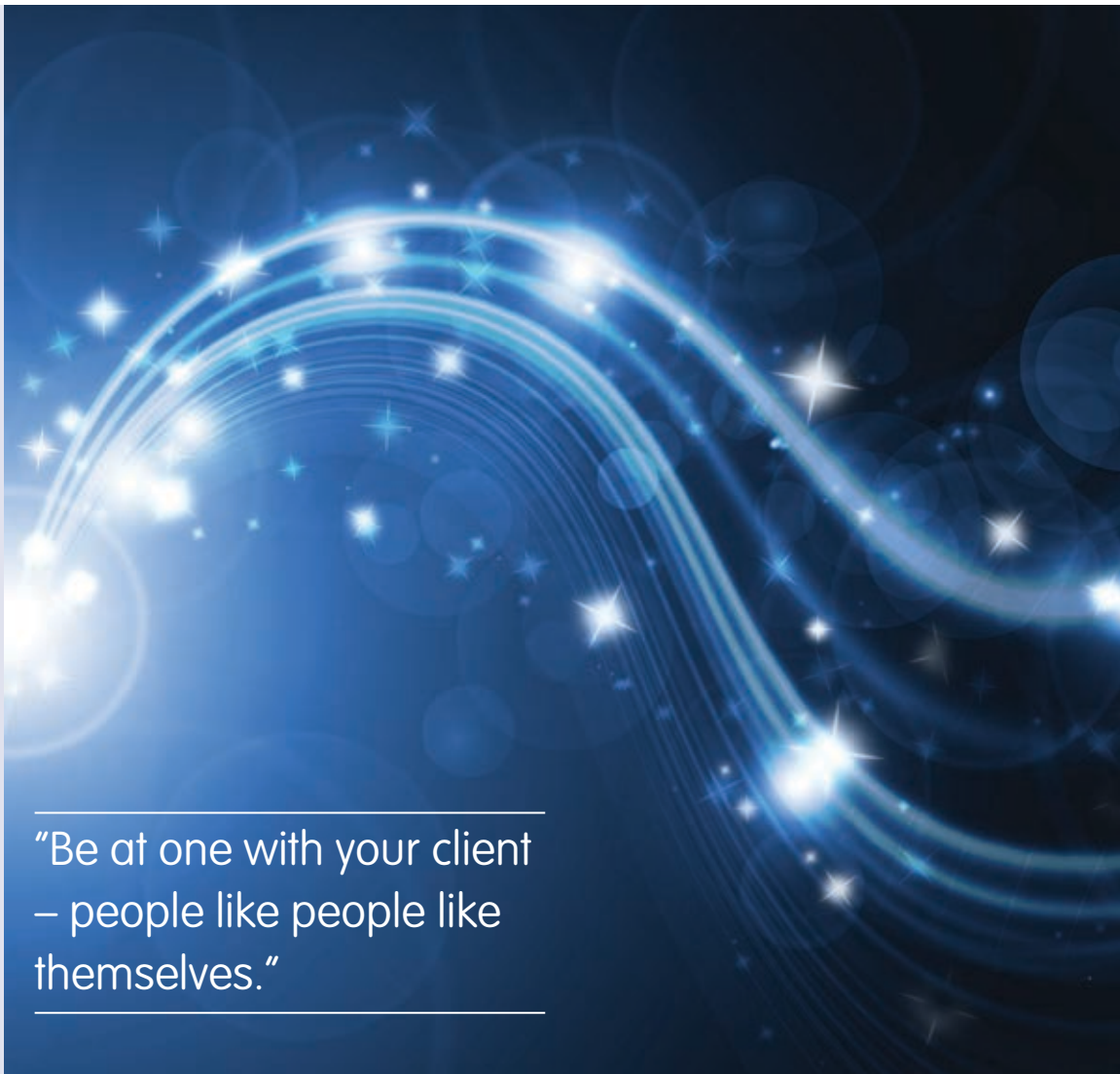
Stage 3: Identifying needs

Here, the traditional approach to influencing is strongly countered by our consultative approach to persuasion and influence. This activity is about the needs and wants of the clients – 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 you have 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 asking 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 stage 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. 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.

At this stage, it's also important to examine key preferences in how the



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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.

Stage 4: Exploring options

Much of this influence and persuasion process is based on conversational questioning and is not scripted. This means the facilitator, consultant, sales person; persuader etc has to be extremely flexible. As consultant, facilitator, persuader or sales person, you have to establish value for your client before you can progress and reach agreement.

You have to establish higher value to assist them to

understand how you establish value. Once you have done this they will be comfortable. You have to establish value to get their problem to disappear.

Stage 5: Enabling agreement – 'win-win' – and closure

If you have committed 50% of your energies to preparation, establishing rapport and asking questions in stages 1, 2 and 3 and an additional 45% to establishing value and linking to your services in stage 4, then the final 5% is about finalising the agreement in stage 5. Coming to a 'win-win' agreement should be a natural conclusion to consultative influencing, but you still have to close the agreement. It is surprising how few people or persuaders

actually make that close and finalise things.

Review and summary

This article is the third in a series focusing on the persuasion paradigm and the persuasion process. You can see that the process can work in variety of contexts and in a range of industries. We personally have used the process for consulting assignments, developing learning strategies in difficult situations, training a variety of staff in change skills, coaching, customer management, negotiating and consulting, selling professional services and products. The major learning about this approach is that it is based on a flexible interpersonal model that creates a climate of consultation leading to deep

rapport which is founded on research in the applied behavioural sciences, neuro linguistics and psychometrics as tools for creating rapport and managing the process towards 'win-win' solutions.

Personal integrity as an influencer: identity, boundaries and self confidence

Finally, whether you are a professional or management services adviser, consultant, trainer, educationalist, customer services manager, coach, business owner, team manager or leader in any context, you have an important role to influence and persuade. You will know that your ability will reflect on you as a person and your identity in your role.

Selling and persuasion are probably quite challenging, as you may find. It is easier

if you will be looking for feedback to see how your own skills are progressing. As you are creating your persuasion, influence or selling identity, you know what is important to you. As a 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. Defend your boundaries, maintain your integrity. Decide who you are and how you will do business. Your flexibility is to help your client, not to bend to unreasonable wishes. 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 agreement in which you are uncomfortable – walk away. Be confident that other business will follow on your own terms.

Some will want to negotiate with you to break your boundaries. Stick with what you believe is right. 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 influencing style will typify. 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.

About the author

Philip Atkinson is a consultant specialising in strategic, behavioural and cultural change. He is a member of various training consortia and has recently focused on creating innovative business simulations through Learning Strategies Ltd. He consults in the UK, Europe and US, has written seven business books and published many articles, speaks at conferences and runs workshop sessions for leading companies. Philip can be contacted on +44 (0) 0131 346 1276 or visit www.philipatkinson.com



U.K. Methods-Time Measurement Association (2000) Ltd.

The UK MTM Association advises all interested parties that the next distance learning course for MTM-UAS will commence late January 2013. The course will be conducted in the West Midlands at Tamworth. A total of ten persons are currently scheduled to attend and achieve the next phase of their PMTS education.

There is currently a considerable demand for contract personnel qualified in UAS, both in the UK and throughout Europe. If you are interested in joining this group please contact the UK-MTM Association by email, ukmtma@googlemail.com, and we will contact you with the details of the next set of training courses. These will be held during 2013 depending on the interest shown, with a minimum of five persons the cost will be £ 450 each.

During 2012 the Association has delivered MTM-1, MTM-2, and UAS training to a new group of five instructors and a further 25 persons in MTM-UAS and MTM-2. This shows that there is still a strong demand to cover the statement 'IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW LONG IT TAKES, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH IT COSTS'.