
LEADERSHIP FOR LAWYERS_{LLC}

Raising Your Persuasion Quotient

Litigators got it. So do experienced sales people. My nine-year-old daughter definitely has it. How about you? What's your Persuasion Quotient (PQ)? How skilled are you at persuasion? How can you improve your persuasion skills?

My heart broke for my client. The executive director of a mid-sized law firm had weary eyes. Discouragement was written across her forehead. "How can I make my attorneys understand the importance of spending money on marketing and business development? We need a new web site. We need to survey our top clients. How can I convince them to invest in marketing?" She almost cried.

We've all been there. Since the dawn of legal marketing, professionals have asked the question, "How can I convince my attorneys to....."

Granted, persuading attorneys is a challenge. Research comparing attorneys to the general population, illustrates that attorneys tend to be significantly more skeptical, autonomous, urgent, concrete, risk-averse and less resilient than most people. Open to new ideas? Not likely.

Why Persuasion?

Persuasion is the ability to personally effect others actions, decisions, opinions or thinking. Persuasion is a critical skill for leaders in complex, matrix organizations. C-level leaders with persuasion skills earn a seat at the table and are more successful in getting their ideas accepted and implemented.

There are three possible outcomes from persuasion:

1. Resistance – minimal response and zero or delayed effort
2. Compliance – moderate response with minimal effort
3. Commitment – enthusiastic response with a high level of effort and support.

Think about a time when someone tried to persuade you. What was your reaction? Resistance, compliance or commitment? Did your fight or flight reaction kick in? Were you attracted to a feature, benefit or vision of the future?

When you gain commitment, you get more sustained, creative and focused effort from attorneys. Less time is needed to monitor progress (nagging). When attorneys and staff are committed, it is often more fun to work together.

A Neuroleadership Approach

Minimizing threats and maximizing rewards drive social behavior, says neuroscientist, David Rock Ph.D. Behavioral reactions to persuasion call on the same primitive neural networks as those that control survival skills. We're hard-wired to run or fight in response to danger and are

attracted to visions of the future that offer personal benefits. These benefits fall in five domains: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness. Rock's SCARF model provides a roadmap for persuasion – minimize risk and increase reward in these domains when trying to convince other humans to take a new path. Consider these tactics when persuading others:

Status (relative importance compared to others)

- Reduce status threats by avoiding comparisons to other people, be sensitive in giving feedback and by avoid leaving people out of the loop.
- Increase status rewards by generously giving recognition, including people in “select” or “beta testing” groups, increasing compensation and positions of responsibility or power.

Certainty (ability to predict/foresee the future)

- Reduce certainty threats by telling the truth, being transparent, establishing clear and realistic expectations, developing detailed plans and discussing possible outcomes.
- Increase certainty rewards by stating clear objectives, sticking to deadlines and communicating lots of information.

Autonomy (sense of control over events)

- Reduce autonomy threats by giving people choices, asking for feedback and making them feel like it is their idea.
- Increase autonomy rewards by creating room for creativity and customization.

Relatedness (sense of safety with others)

- Reduce relatedness threats by considering how to build community and interactions, especially with virtual teams in different offices, use web video for long distance meetings, find ways to connect people.
- Increase relatedness rewards by encouraging mentoring, coaching and creating safe environments to share information.

Fairness (perception of fair exchange between people)

- Reduce fairness threats by communicating clear and consistent ground rules and expectations, increasing transparency and showing leader sacrifice.
- Increase fairness rewards by reducing compensation inequities and sharing information.

Persuasion Tools

According to the “Influence: Gaining Commitment, Getting Results”, a guide published by the Center for Creative Leadership, there are eleven persuasion techniques most used by leaders, ranging from collaborative to coercion techniques. Of these, four tools are the most effective:

1. Rational Persuasion – use logical arguments and factual evidence to show that an idea is feasible.

2. Consultation – ask the person for their ideas to plan a project in order to gain their support.
3. Inspirational appeal – appeal to the person’s values and ideals in order to elicit a positive emotional response for the proposal.
4. Collaboration – offer to provide assistance if the other person will approve or support the idea.

Develop a Persuasion Strategy

A litigator wouldn’t go into court with a plan. Don’t enter into a persuasion campaign without a strategy.

1. Develop credibility – trust is a prerequisite for persuasion. Credibility is a function of demonstrating expertise and a strong relationship.
2. Frame for common ground – answer the question, “what’s in it for them?” Describe your proposal in terms that illuminate the advantages to them.
3. Provide evidence – use specific examples, numbers and metaphors. Build your case. Think, “Imagine if...”. Use vivid and colorful language.
4. Connect emotionally – mirror and match your tone to the other person’s state. Show emotional commitment to your proposal.

Tell a (Corporate) Story

Stories are powerful persuasion tools. The best corporate stories grab attention, elicit desire and provide reasons for action. They need not be long, detailed or boring. Stephen Denning, author of “The Springboard, How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organization”, gives this advice:

1. Find the right story – what is your change idea? What story can you tell that shows how this change idea has been successful in the past? Does the story have an authentic positive ending? Is it true, positive and actionable?
2. Assemble the story – begin with the date, place and name of protagonist. What obstacles did she face? What would happen without the change idea? What did she do to overcome the obstacles? Link the story to your change idea, “what if we did something like that?”
3. Tell a great story – Remember good eye contact, an open body stance, use gestures, pause appropriately and be present. Practice your story.

Next Steps

Expand your PQ – think about an initiative that requires attorney approval and commitment. Plan your persuasion strategy. How will you minimize risk and maximize rewards? What’s in it for them? What tools will you use? What is your change story? Practice persuasion and you will build credibility and commitment from both attorneys and staff.

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