PERSUADE

BE CONVINCING

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This is Chapter 10

Be convincing

Persuasion is the art of convincing someone to see something as you do, and in a way that makes them want to take action.

In business, persuasion is a valuable skill that helps advance ideas and get things done. The notion that "great ideas sell themselves" is wishful thinking. Great ideas need persuasive expression.

As with any effective message, persuasive communication requires planning. In Chapter 3 we introduced the **PASS** acronym for planning your message:

▸ Define your **purpose**
▸ Analyze your **audience**
▸ Decide on a **strategy**
▸ Build a strong **structure**

In this chapter, we'll revisit each of these steps in the context of persuasion, focusing mostly on strategy.

"Don't raise your voice. *Improve your argument.*"

Desmond Tutu
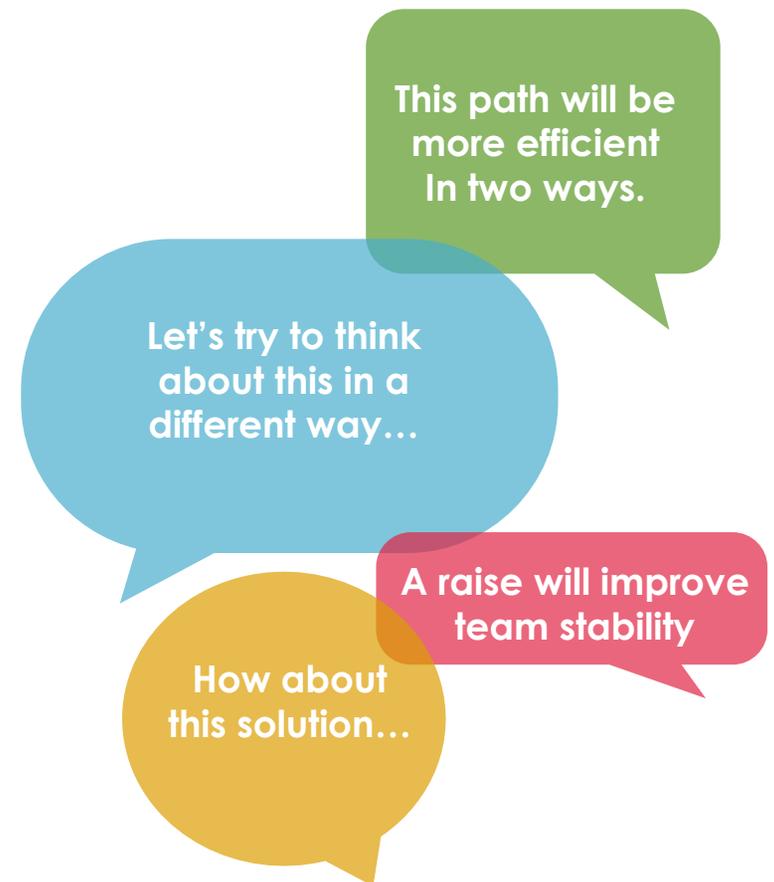*South African social rights activist and retired Anglican bishop*

PERSUADE WITH PURPOSE

Make sure you clarify exactly what you want from your audience. In current business slang, this means deciding "What's your ask?" What are you trying to convince your listener or reader to believe, feel, and do?

Before composing a persuasive message, write a simple, one-sentence purpose statement. The first two columns of Figure 10.1 provide some examples of audiences and purpose statements for common situations that require persuasion.

Complaining is not persuading.
If you have a complaint, think of a specific solution before you craft your pitch.

This path will be more efficient In two ways.

Let's try to think about this in a different way…

A raise will improve team stability

How about this solution…

AUDIENCE	YOUR ASK	PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED
Your manager	A 7.5% increase in base salary for Sarah, the top-performing member of your technical team, to put her at the median for programmers with her education and experience	Your manager needs effective and stable teams. If Sarah is not compensated fairly, the company may lose her and cripple the team during this high-visibility project.
A potential client	A contract to complete Phase 1 of your proposed social media analytics project at a cost of $88,000	The client needs to hire a respected analytics firm. She'd like to settle the contract quickly because she has got to solve a major supply-chain issue.
A potential investor	$2 million in funding to create a fully functional prototype of your construction management software	The investor wants to increase his bottom line and be a good mentor. Last year, he backed a big project that failed because of poor market research. Now he needs an innovative product from a reliable team—that knows their market very well.
Craig, an underperforming employee	Acceptance of termination of his employment with full understanding of the reasons and without any ill will, if possible	The employee is unhappy in his job, but he doesn't want to lose it—or any self-respect. His colleagues are long-time friends, and his wife wants to move to Texas.

Scale Your Ask Scaling down your "ask" may make it more successful. If you try to sell your complete project at the outset, your audience is more likely to say no. Narrow your purpose to focus on the next immediate step.

FIGURE 10.1

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Each of the four purpose statements you just read in Figure 10.1 is targeted to a specific audience—a specific *person*, actually. Knowing your audience will help you craft your solution when penning a persuasive message. Presenting your idea as the solution to a problem can be highly effective. Solutions are much more persuasive than suggestions.

The third column of Figure 10.1 identifies current problems for each audience. Knowing the context in which your audience is making decisions will help you craft appropriate solutions.

If your purpose is to keep a top performer—and your boss needs to retain top performers—great. But if your boss is under intense pressure to cut costs, you'll need to create a solution that addresses cost issues, too.

Solutions are much more persuasive than suggestions.

THE UNKNOWN AUDIENCE

When you don't know your audience, use the approach that is easiest for a general audience to digest: **facts and figures**. People like to think of themselves as logical. **Stories** or **analogies** are also memorable and useful with an unknown audience.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Remember Aristotle's ethos, logos, and pathos? We'll explore these rhetorical approaches at length in the strategy section of this chapter. Here, let's apply them to audience analysis. Look at the first situation in Figure 10.1, getting a salary increase for a key member of your team.

Is your boss most likely to...

A. Defer to the opinions of experts and trusted figures? If so, invoke an authority **(ethos)**:

    "Our CEO has said that we can't afford to pay below-market salaries. Doing so would undermine our employment brand."

B. Know and quote a lot of facts and statistics? Emphasize data and logical reasoning **(logos)**:

    "Recent surveys show that employees whose salaries are below the market average are 10 times more likely to quit."

C. Take action when experiencing emotions such as affection, loyalty, or guilt? Make sure to include an emotional appeal **(pathos)**:

    "Everyone likes to feel appreciated. It's one of the top motivators. I know Sarah has been feeling underappreciated lately."

CHOOSE A STRATEGY

After determining your purpose and analyzing your audience, you need to craft your strategy. To start, we'll revisit Aristotle.

ETHOS is easy to define but difficult to establish. Ethos persuades with trustworthy information. Using (and citing) credible sources not only makes the argument more powerful, but it also makes you more believable. To establish the expertise of others, be sure to **state the expert's credentials**, like this: *"Research by Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman and the Gallup organization has consistently shown that salary is a significant factor in employees' decisions to quit."*

If you put in the time to gather data from solid sources, your audience will tend to trust your conclusions more readily. A little bit of research goes a long way toward establishing your ethos.

PATHOS Rhetorical **ETHOS** Strategies **LOGOS**

emotion, values   credibility, trust   logic, reason, proof

PATHOS

Pathos influences through **sentiment** and **emotion**. Current research in behavioral economics shows that although we like to think we are making decisions rationally, we often make them instinctively and emotionally, before consciously processing the alternatives. So look for ways to make your audience feel something about your proposal, even if you are simply making them feel good about being logical.

As Aristotle defined it, pathos is sentiment of any sort, although sentiments that produce sympathetic emotional reactions are most common. Pictures of starving children get people to donate to food relief. Such visual images play on pity for the child and guilt about the donor's financial security.

Children International, a prominent charity, uses the tagline, *"For the cost of one cup of coffee per day."* This is classic pathos— guilt in this case. The tagline invites us to give up a small personal indulgence and see the good we can do.

Pathos also includes persuasion that plays on happiness. Medical practices often rely on pathos because medical issues can be scary. For example, hospital ads that show contented parents staring lovingly at their new baby are using pathos; the hospital wants your business.

Some of the other emotions you can call up in your persuasive messages are jealousy, admiration, pity, desire, fear, and relief. Back to our example of seeking a raise for Sarah, your top performer:

"Sarah is the kind of employee who goes the extra mile but never seeks the spotlight. A salary increase would be perfect for her: measurable, yet private." (Admiration and empathy)

Or

"Losing Sarah would jeopardize our ability to meet our deadline -- and this is a high-visibility project." (Fear)

Look for ways to make your audience

FEEL SOMETHING

about your proposal

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LOGOS

Logos influences through logic, reasoning, and evidence. The first step to applying logos is to avoid misapplying it. Read carefully this list of common logical fallacies: 👁Information is Beautiful | Rhetological Fallacies. Ask yourself, "Which ones am I guilty of using?" These fallacies appear everywhere: in the business press, in the speeches of world leaders, in conversations in the lunchroom. Inoculate your own messages from such faulty thinking or risk losing credibility with well-educated audiences.

Internal Logic Another aspect of logos has to do with the sequence of your argument. This is called internal logic. Are you able to skillfully string together a series of causes and effects, antecedents and consequences, or pieces of accumulating evidence to build to your conclusion? Or do your arguments zig and zag randomly through a jumble of ideas? Regularly read examples of strong arguments to teach yourself to craft them.

Finally, almost every logical argument relies on facts and figures for support. Research and documentation bolster your credibility and make you more persuasive. Support your proposals with facts, statistics, and data. Never assume, guess, or invoke anonymous authority. Prove.

Activity 10.1

Choose at least three fallacies from the Rhetological Fallacies infographic and illustrate them with examples you've seen in public media.

Activity 10.2

Put the following ideas in a sequence that creates a well-constructed argument:
- Sarah has consistently outperformed others on the team.
- We need to offer Sarah a salary increase to bring her up to the median market rate.
- I can't risk losing a key member of my team at this stage of the project.
- Sarah never asks for special recognition or attention.
- Salaries for programmers in our area have increased 9.7% in the past year.
- Sarah's best friend just took a job with Qualcomm (our biggest competitor).
- Sarah brings to the team a depth of technical knowledge that no one else offers.

CURRENT PERSUASION RESEARCH

The ancient Greeks do not have the last word when it comes to persuasion. Research in social psychology reveals a variety of techniques that are specific to our culture and time. Some of the best work has been done by Robert Cialdini, Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University. Cialdini's basic point is that people are persuaded when messages connect with their motivations, and his conclusions are supported by decades of careful psychological experiments. His best-selling book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, presents these six ideas:

COMMITMENT
RECIPROCITY
SOCIAL PROOF
AUTHORITY
LIKING
SCARCITY

1. **COMMITMENT**
People will be more inclined to do something if they pre-commit to do it. In a 1987 experiment by social scientist Anthony Greenwald, potential voters were contacted and pre-committed to vote the following day at the election. Of that pool, 86.7% did vote, whereas only 61.5% of the general population (not contacted or pre-committed) turned out. Something as simple as scheduling a meeting can **gain your audience's pre-commitment**.

"I'm glad you see the need to do something for Sarah. Are you okay if we schedule a time to meet with the compensation team this Friday?"

2. **RECIPROCITY**
Think of this as quid pro quo: you **give something to get something**. Seasoned consultant Ernie Nielson calls this "the favor bank." Human beings tend to keep a mental ledger of who owes them what. If you deposit favors into the bank, you're more likely to be able to withdraw the cooperation you need.

"Our team has never turned down additional projects. We do whatever it takes to get the last-minute work done—and Sarah has been our most dependable programmer when we're facing an all-nighter."

3. **SOCIAL PROOF**
Everyone wants to fit in. As a consequence, people will generally do what they perceive their peers to be doing. In a famous experiment, Cialdini and his research team tried different techniques to convince hotel guests to reuse their towels. Of all the strategies, telling a hotel guest that most guests in the same hotel reuse their towels was the most successful. **Give people social proof of your suggestion**.

"I hear from a lot of my friends at other companies that they are locking in their top performers with special compensation and benefits packages."

COMMITMENT

RECIPROCITY

SOCIAL PROOF

AUTHORITY

LIKING

SCARCITY

4. **AUTHORITY**

This is closely aligned with Aristotle's ethos concept. A person whose **authority your audience trusts** becomes the most persuasive advocate for a course of action. Celebrity, medical, and academic endorsements use this technique.

"Laszlo Bock, Google's top HR executive, is a huge proponent of rewarding top talent."

5. **LIKING**

Similar to social proof and authority, liking **relies on the relationship** between the audience and the influencer. Some charities leverage this tactic at a neighborhood level: They find a sympathetic donor, then ask that person to send personalized donation requests to her closest friends and neighbors. The result? A 56% response rate, compared to about 30% from impersonal requests.

Note: The liking strategy does not lend itself to quick, in-the-moment application in the case of securing a raise for Sarah. The principle would be to build a relationship with your boss: go to lunch together, offer sincere compliments regularly, and get to know him or her. Then when you ask for the raise, your boss will be influenced by the positive feelings he or she has toward you.

6. **SCARCITY**

Marketers use this one all the time: *Last chance! Only two seats left! Limited quantities available!* In fact, scarcity is one of the most heavily researched and best documented persuasive tactics in applied psychology. The current name for the fear of scarcity is **FOMO** (Fear Of Missing Out). Foment some FOMO in your audience by pointing out what they could lose by not acting.

"I've hired a lot of programmers over the years. I know what a gem Sarah is. Talent like hers comes along once in every 50 hires or so. We definitely want to keep her happy."

Whether you use Aristotle's three classics or Cialdini's contemporary six—or a mixture of them—take the time to develop a persuasive strategy. You'll dramatically increase your odds of success.

DETERMINE A STRUCTURE

How should you structure a persuasive message? Should you be direct or indirect? How do you close?

DIRECT If you have an easy persuasive task and substantial agreement with your audience, dive right in. A direct approach delivers the bottom line first and provides the reasoning afterward. In business, the direct approach is highly valued and should be your default.

INDIRECT An indirect approach presents your reasoning first, leading eventually to your final conclusion. If your persuasive task is difficult or complex, or you need to persuade an audience that is predisposed to disagree, use an indirect approach. Start with context and background and build methodically to your final, persuasive conclusion. In an indirect message, internal logic is critical; the way you structure your proof can make the final conclusion seem the best possible idea.

Direct   Indirect
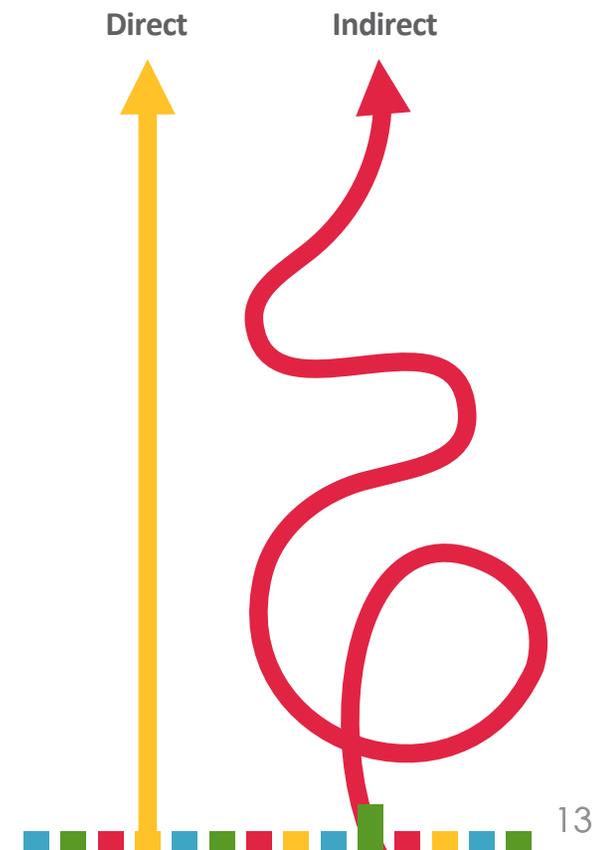
CALL TO ACTION

Remember to **close purposefully**. Don't just let your message fizzle out. You've worked hard to plan and deliver your message, so remember to deliver your call to action.

The key to a great call to action is to **make it easy** for your audience **to take the next step**—the one that brings you closer to your goal. Be helpful and anticipate needs: add a link to the document you'd like them to sign, create and link to a decision/approval chart, provide the phone number for a contact, or bold an important deadline. Figure 10.2 shows a call to action for each example.

AUDIENCE	YOUR ASK	CALL TO ACTION
Your manager	A 7.5% increase in base salary for Sarah	*If you agree that Sarah deserves this raise, just sign this form by Thursday and I'll take it over to Jake in HR so it takes effect in time for payroll on Friday.*
A potential client	A contract to complete Phase 1 of your proposed social media analytics project	*I know your time is better spent on those supply-chain fixes. Let us do this work and we'll have actionable recommendations to you by October 21. Here's a copy of the contract you've reviewed. If you sign it today, we can get to work on Monday.*
A potential investor	$2 million in funding to create a fully functional prototype of your construction management software	*We've signed and attached your profit-sharing forms. We'd love to work with you, and we need an answer before March 13.*
Craig, an underperforming employee	Acceptance of the termination of his employment with full understanding of the reasons and without any ill will, if possible	*Craig, this is a tough time. Let's walk over to HR together and talk about your options going forward.*

FIGURE 10.2

Draft both a direct and an indirect email explaining to a friend why you won't let him/her borrow your $3,000 mountain bike. In what ways are the different messages effective and not?
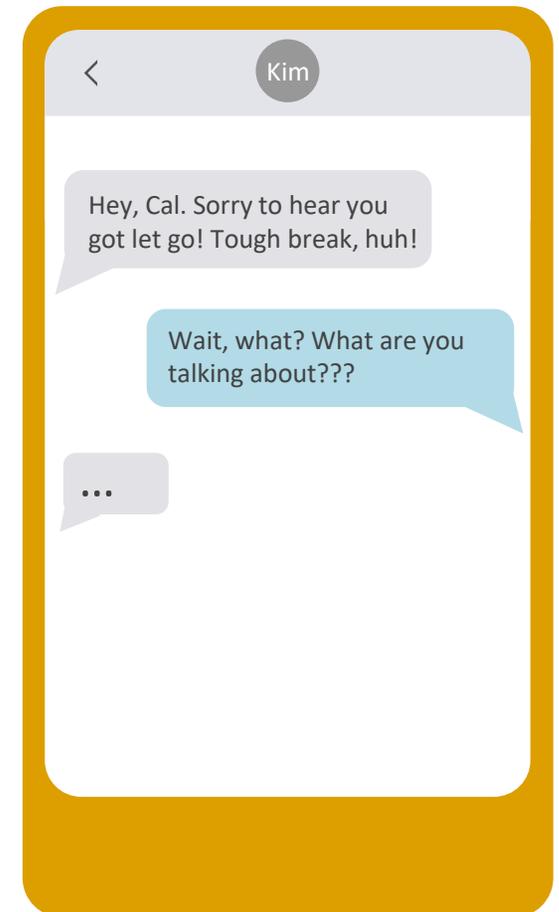
Activity 10.3

DELIVER BAD NEWS EFFECTIVELY

Conveying bad news is a crucial and often delicate persuasive task. You generally want to deliver the news while still keeping your audience's good will. A skilled communicator gives bad news in a way that persuades the audience to accept it without becoming overly defensive—not an easy feat.

While delivering bad news is never pleasant, doing so is essential to business. To manage effectively, you must be able to say no, cut budgets, fire people, and deny requests. But you can learn to do these things calmly, with integrity and compassion. By using both head and heart approaches to support your message, you can dampen its negative impact.

Kim

Hey, Cal. Sorry to hear you got let go! Tough break, huh!

Wait, what? What are you talking about???

...

BOND, BRIDGE, BAD NEWS, BUILD

When planning a bad news delivery (and you must plan it, not just wing it), try using 4B's as your basic structure or outline: Bond, Bridge, Bad News, Build.

Casey:

Thank you for asking me to write your letter of recommendation. I'm flattered that you value my opinion enough to ask me. **(Bond)** Because you and I have worked together for a long time, I want to explain my decision to you. **(Bridge)**

You're a great colleague and a good friend. When we both worked in OEM, you were the most ambitious member of the team. In the last couple of years, however, you seem to have lost your drive. In fact, I'm guessing you need this letter of recommendation because you're searching for other jobs, which shows how much your dedication has lagged. That's why I can't write your letter of recommendation right now. **(Bad News)**

If you up your game for a few months and can reassure me that the company you're applying to isn't a competitor, I'd be happy to write the letter you need. At your best, you're an asset to any company and I'd be happy to put that in writing. Let's set up a time to chat in person. I'd love to get the full story of how you're feeling about your job and the company and see if I can help in any way. **(Build)**

Amina

Notice that the second paragraph in the letter is indirect. You can rewrite it to be direct just by changing the order (internal logic):

You're a great colleague and a good friend, but I can't write your letter of recommendation right now. **(Bad News)** When we both worked in OEM, you were the most ambitious member of the team. In the last couple of years, however, you seem to have lost your drive. In fact, I'm guessing you need this letter of recommendation because you're searching for other jobs, which shows how much your dedication has lagged.

Delivering bad news is not easy for anybody involved, but doing so with **honesty, kindness,** and **clarity** will make the task less onerous.

Think of some bad news you have to deliver. Draft an email using Bond, Bridge, Bad News, Build. Try to avoid making your audience angry or defensive.

Activity 10.4

Need to fire someone? Now that's bad news.

Watch Brad Pitt do it professionally in this clip from _Moneyball_.

IN CONCLUSION

Persuasion is not manipulation—the dark art of carefully choosing which facts to show and hide so that your audience is misled. You don't want to fool or force people into doing something that they wouldn't choose if they knew more facts.

Persuasion is showing all the facts, but in a way that helps people see things as you do . . . and say YES.

LEARN MORE

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(Bold citations are referenced in the chapter text.)