

Episode 46



Dave Lakhani

Dave Lakhani is an in demand speaker, author and trainer, whose ideas have been applied by some of the biggest companies in the United States. He is the author of Persuasion – The Art of Getting What You Want. Dave has owned more than 10 successful businesses in the past 20 years and has deeply studied the marketing and sales leaders of our time.

Voiceover

This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are bringing innovation to their industries, like today's guest Dave Lakhani.

Dave

Really nobody is horrible at persuasion. Some people are just less refined than others, and it is a skill that anybody can develop. Developing charisma, developing persuasive ability and a charismatic personality that supports it is very easy and predictable, and anybody can do it.

Voiceover

This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

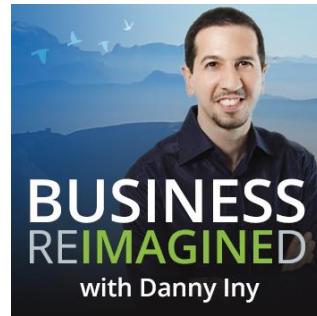


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Danny

Dave Lakhani is the New York Times bestselling author of seven books, including "Persuasion: The Art of Getting What You Want", and an entrepreneur twenty times over. He spends his time teaching people how to be persuasive in selling, marketing, negotiating, and everyday life. You'll probably be shocked though to hear what sparked this lifelong pursuit.

Dave

I wanted to be a cowboy, a police officer, and a soldier. Five years old, that was my track. By the time I was twenty-seven years old I'd done all of those things, but there was a big deviation in that path along the way. From the time I was six until I was sixteen, my mom raised us in a religious cult.

Danny

You heard right. Dave was raised in an outlier religious cult with extreme teachings where education was strongly discouraged. In fact, that was the first point of contention between Dave and the cult elders. He had a brilliant tactic to keep them off his back, for a while at least.

Dave

Every time they would say, "It's time to leave school," I would simply say, "Okay, I've got to go back to school and get my stuff. Oh, and I need to tell the administrator why I'm leaving." Well, cults obviously don't want people to scrutinize them too closely, so they would sort of play along with my game, betting that eventually I was going to say, "I've had enough of school, I'll just leave." That never happened for me, so by the time I was sixteen they began putting a tremendous amount of pressure on my family since they couldn't pressure me enough, and I realized I had to make the decision to leave, so I did.

I went to church one last time, they laid their hands on me, prayed to God that he would turn my soul over to Satan for the destruction of my flesh so that I would be

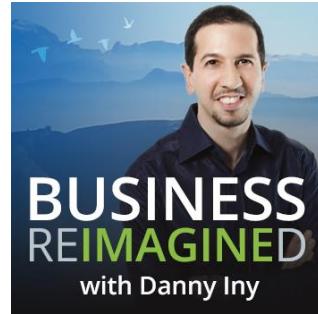


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killed for my transgressions, and then they kicked me out of the church and of my home. I wasn't allowed to speak with my family or them with me. I wasn't allowed to speak with any of the people that had been my social network for the last ten years, basically in all the formative years of my life, and I packed everything I owned in the back half of a seat of a 1970 Ford Falcon that I had just recently purchased from the forest service and left. My first stop was the one place that I'd found a lot of my salvation personally throughout the years; it was the Carnegie Public Library in Caldwell, Idaho. I began studying persuasion, influence, manipulation, the psychology of belief, the heuristics of decision making, sales, marketing, anything that I could get my hands on that would help me understand why my mom had made this crazy decision to raise us in this way.

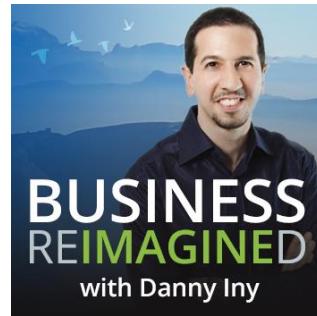


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Danny

Dave's career began as a search for understanding of the powerful force that was the cult's doctrine. Being denied education as a child only increased his drive and hunger for knowledge, and in his own words, he became a lifelong learner. It wasn't long before he caught the eye of someone you've probably heard of, who became his first mentor.

Dave

Years ago Zig Zeigler gave me an opportunity to speak on one of his stages, actually when I was in the Army, and then he sort of mentored me for a while. That got me in this place where I thought, "Okay, I need some kind of a platform." Then I looked and I stumbled across ... I looked at persuasion and I said, "I wonder what would happen if I did a persuasive selling course?" I looked at that and I looked at that market. There were three people in that market that were at the top, and I looked at all three of them and said, "I think I can absolutely crush those people, so that's going to be my market." That's what I did. I picked this market, I went after it, and within twelve months I was the dominant player in that persuasion market.

Danny

You're probably wondering why in the world a person who suffered from intense manipulation as a child went on to become a master of persuasion. Would he turn around and do that to other people? What's it like to meet Dave Lakhani in person?

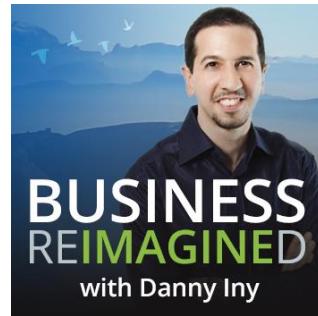


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Dave

For a lot of people when they first meet me there is that sort of ... It's funny, because it's that, I call it "laughing nervousness", where people ask the joke but they really mean it. They'll say, "Are you going to persuade me? Are you going to hypnotize me? Are you going to do ...?" They'll get their fear out right up front, but they try and do it in a funny way. Then usually what I'll do is I'll come right over the top and I'll say, "Well, did you want me to? What would you like me to persuade you of? We could start now." That sort of makes them laugh back, and then it eases up. Then I talk to them about how everybody's persuaded all the time usually, and that there's really no attempts where people aren't trying to persuade you from the minute you're born.

They get that and then they back off about being as worried, so I can usually build rapport with them very quickly, but there are people who are very, very wary, particularly people who have left organizations like I have, and they've become super zealots or true believers of everything opposite of that. They see any attempt at changing people's mind all the way from, "Would you like fries with that?" To more sophisticated selling processes that happen online as being incredibly negative, and they try and cut themselves off. Even running into a person like me can just set them off.

Generally, people find it very interesting. I probably shouldn't share this, but I'll share it anyway. When I was single, it was the greatest way to meet girls, because they would come up and they would always have that same question, "Are you going to try and persuade me?" I would always have the same answer, "What do you want me to persuade you of? Could we start already?" Usually that led to a great conversation, a funny interaction, and a lot of great dates. It's not all bad.

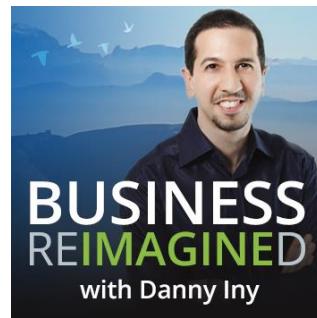


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Danny

We've been dancing around the subject of, what is persuasion? When somebody hears you're this master of persuasion, they almost have an image that you've learned to blink at this certain hypnotizing frequency, then you snap your fingers and people just obey. Is that how it works?

Dave

Yeah, unfortunately it's not quite that simple, and in other ways it's much simpler than that. I'm going to give you my definition of persuasion first, then I'm going to go a little bit deeper. My definition of persuasion is simply this: It's helping people come to their own most logical conclusion, which happens to be one you share. The way you get people to come to that logical conclusion is the actual persuasion pieces, the tactics, the strategies, all of those kinds of things that might help people come more easily to that conclusion that you share over the conclusion that somebody else might share or something else that somebody else might want to get them to do.

At the end of the day what we're really doing is we're trying to make it as easy as possible to communicate with us. We're trying to take advantage of those subconscious and biological reactions that exist in all of us that cause us to do a certain set of things. If I know, for example, if I can trigger something that triggers adrenaline in your body or triggers dopamine or something else, you can't control that. No matter what happens, once that process starts in your body, it starts, it continues until it's finished, and it has some residual effect. At the very highest level,

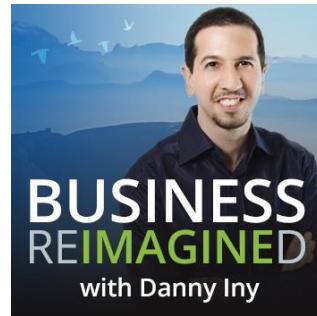


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persuasion is really looking at, "How do we manipulate the chemicals of your body?" At a lower level, what we're really saying is, people have these heuristics. A heuristic is just a simple way of thinking about something that makes the world make sense.

It's a rule of thumb.

Danny

A rule of thumb. Right, exactly. People have these rules of thumb that they live by. If we can present to those heuristics or those rules of thumbs, then ultimately people will probably come to these conclusions. Let's take something very simple that's not really a heuristic, but it is a very realistic thing, and this happens in business all of the time. There's much, much research to back this up. people make a decision about you within about a thirtieth of a second. From the moment, before you've had a chance to open your mouth, before you've had a chance to do anything, people have already made a decision about you. They've made a decision about, are you safe? Do you remind them of their Uncle Bob? Are you a person that they could possibly do business with? Should you be wary of them because of any of these things? They've made this decision under a thirtieth of a second.

If we know that, that people are going to make these decisions within a thirtieth of a second, we know that if they don't make the right decision about us, that everything we do after that is working backwards out of that hole. We're trying to dig ourselves

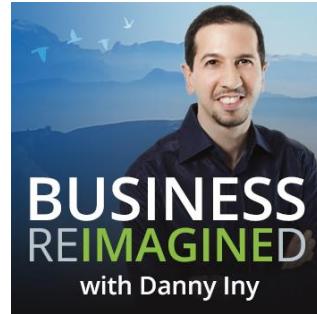


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out of this hole that we dug without even knowing that we did it necessarily, or certainly oftentimes without consciously thinking about it.

If we think about business owners, they often do that. If people come into a store and they can't tell clearly who the owner of the store is or who the associates in the store is, then they automatically begin making assumptions about the store and what it's like, and all of these things. If the store is dirty or if the store has music that's on too loud or any of those kinds of things, people, they're making these internal decisions. They're not conscious decisions, by the way. You don't go through this list of things in your mind in under a thirtieth of a second. Although that does happen, it happens outside of your conscious. It happens in your subconscious.

When we look at something simple like just saying, "Okay, we're going to have a persona for the people who work in our business. We're going to have something like a uniform that makes them instantly and easily identifiable. We're going to make sure that we present in a certain way when people answer the phone so that we have the highest likelihood of connecting those dots for them the moment they can." Then you take that even further and you say, "When I look at my brand, does my brand match this?" So that people in that brief instant, when they're evaluating you, are you digging a hole and falling in, or are you making a connection and pulling people into your community? That's what we're really looking at in persuasion when we come back to this is, if our goal is to get people to come to their own most logical conclusion, which happens to be one you share, how can we most simply and easily do that, and how can we make them feel safe, comfortable, in rapport, and feel like they've found their salvation at the end, by finding us?

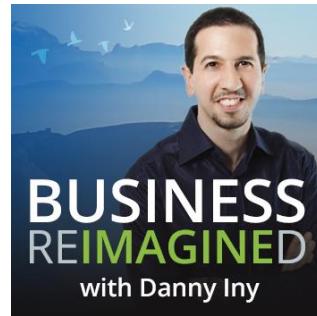


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Danny

I feel like people imagine persuasion existing on a spectrum. On one end you stink at it, you don't present well, your articulation is not articulate, it's not clear, and you couldn't persuade anyone out of a paper bag they hated being inside of. From that edge of the spectrum, developing a skill, getting better at it, is considered to be good, important. People are learning to present better and have a better presence in the world, be more clear, et cetera. As they move, there's a tipping point where if you keep on getting good it's like you're getting too good. It's like now you haven't just developed a reasonable competence, but it's like you're cheating. You've gone over to the dark side. What do you think of that? Why is that?

Dave

Well you know, some people do go to the dark side. The dark side of persuasion is manipulation. For people who understand this and they think, "I'm just going to get what I want regardless of the outcome for other people. It doesn't matter if they get hurt, doesn't matter if they feel horrible after this interaction." That exists, and persuasion only makes that more predictable. The problem with manipulation is it's always discovered, and it always leads to some negative outcome for someone. I think what happens a lot of times is that people do go through this spectrum.

Think about when you were learning to ride a bike when you were a kid. At first you were wobbly and you thought, "I'm not very good at it," then you got a little bit better. Then at some point along the way you decided that you were amazing at it, so "Let's set up jumps in the front yard and let's go do all these things, and I'm going to ride down this really big hill, and I'm going to do all that stuff." Maybe you were



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really good at it. At the other side of that, if you do that enough eventually you end up in the X Games or you end up doing something really amazing, you're a professional athlete. What really happens is most of the time somebody crashes really hard. They go down that hill or they come off the jump and they're like, "Okay, that wasn't exactly what I was looking for. I really just want this much of the experience." Then they level out that way. They say, "Okay, I'm comfortable here. This is where I'm going to stay."

For most people, that's great. They're slightly better than most of the people they know, they're not as good as the best people in the world, and they're very comfortable with that. It's really, really simple to get there. The great thing about persuasion is, nobody is a bad persuader. If you think about it, from the minute a child is born they're persuading you, right? They want food, they cry. They want your attention; they hang onto you. They have very rudimentary ways of persuading, but everybody is persuading other people all the time, whether it's to get another glass of water or cup of coffee when you're at the restaurant. Even if that's only somebody's job, you may want them to do it more frequently for you or better for you, or whatever else.

We're constantly persuading people. If you've ever gone on a date, you've persuaded someone. If you've ever talked to a teacher about a bad grade and got your grade changed, you persuaded someone. Nobody is horrible at persuasion. Some people are just less refined than others, and it is a skill that anybody can develop. Developing

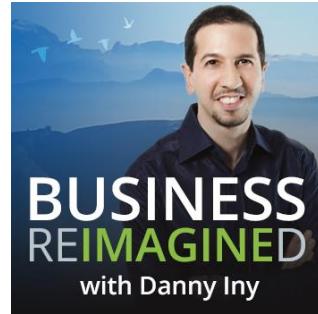


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charisma, developing persuasive ability and a charismatic personality that supports it is very easy and predictable, and anybody can do it.

Danny

I have now a two sided question. The one side, which is I guess the easy side is, how do you develop, how do you get better at persuasion in a way that is ethical and non-manipulative? The other side to that is, it's not just about how do you do it, but how do you feel okay with doing it? I'll explain the question a little bit. One of my favorite books, not directly but they tie into the topic, "Mistakes Were Made" is the title, and then in brackets, "But Not By Me". It's about this idea of commitment and consistency, and the slippery slope where good people can be brought to do really terrible things if it happens in little increments. I feel like in the area of, "Let me learn to get better at persuasion," people are afraid that because so much of this is subconscious there's going to be an inertia or a momentum that gets built, that they're suddenly going to find themselves a year, two years down the road, being someone that they never intended to be. How do they handle that?

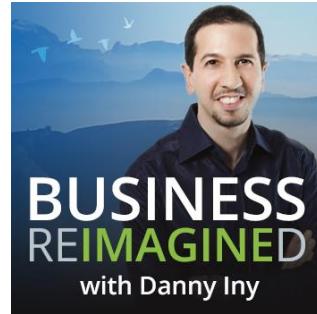


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Dave

The great thing about persuasion is that it's kind of like that guy jumping off the ramp that I was just talking about. You go over some sweet jumps like Napoleon Dynamite on your bike on the sidewalk, then all the sudden you say, "I'm going to build a six-foot ramp and jump over a car." People start telling you not to do it, and people tell you, "Hey, you need to be careful," then you jump and you run into the car and you break the windows and there's trouble, and there's all those things. That same thing happens with persuasion. You run into these places where you do something and people catch you, or if you're doing something that you're really testing on.

I've been caught plenty of times, because I do a lot of social testing to see, "Does this really work? How does it work?" That kind of thing. I'm perfectly willing, and I have a better out than most people do, but I'm perfectly willing to be wrong about it, or I'm perfectly willing to understand that people may recognize what was happening and want to understand why I'm doing it. For most people, they get to this place where they feel fairly comfortable, but there is always that worry I think that, "If I can do all of these things and I could get everything I wanted all the time," which, by the way, is not possible, specifically with persuasion, "Then will I become a bad person?"

The question you ask kind of presumes that persuasion is bad or that people imagine that persuasion is bad and that doing it wouldn't be a good thing, because what might happen is they could turn into a monster. The question that I would ask is, I would say, "What experience do you have about yourself," and I'm not talking about

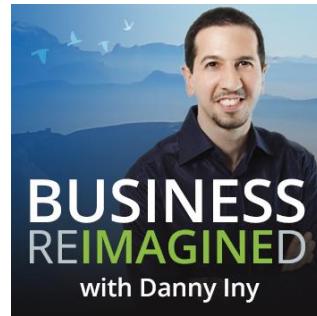


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you specifically, I'm talking about the bigger "you" of all of the people. I would say, "What experiences have you had where you've become a monster by learning something that was potentially dangerous? Because you know how to set gas on fire, but you're not an arsonist." When you take a look at that and you say, "What is the underlying reason that I have this feeling that I could become a monster?" People can unwind that fairly quickly and then they set limits for themselves and they tend to stay within those kinds of limits.

If people have a really megalomaniacal personality or they really are this giant narcissist or they have a sociopathic personality, persuasion can get them to places that they do end up either feeling or looking like a monster. Most people just simply back off sooner than that. They have a couple of embarrassing moments or they have some experiences where they realize, "I don't fully understand what I'm doing, I need to relax. Maybe I need to study some more, I need to do some of these kinds of things," then they find their way generally. I would say in the ninetieth percentile that's where people end up, and it's in the one or two percentile where you find the monsters and the crazy people and the Hitler's of the world, whatever it is.

Even looking at politics in the United States today, if you take a look at what's going on here we have some people who are using some actually really powerful persuasion tactics in the media and in their persona right now, but people over time begin to realize what's happening. They realize that something's askew and not going right here, because they've been hit over the head with a blunt instrument too

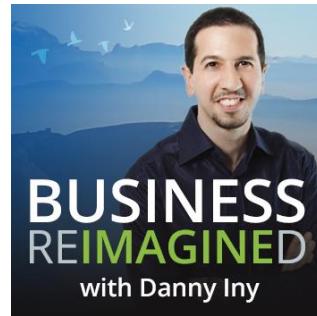


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long, and then they begin to question. The moment they begin to question, the persuader either has to shift or the audience goes away.

How do you get better at it?

Danny

Dave

Great question. The way to get better at it is to study. There are some really seminal books about persuasion that will help you understand the fundamentals of persuasion and understand how to use them. Then you practice. You simply practice. Practice can be as simple as, if you take a simple idea like the law of exclusivity. The law of exclusivity is a persuasion law. We call it a law because it's been tested over and over and over again, and we say, "Okay, people like you more, and they like whatever it is more, the event, the product, whatever, if it's exclusive, if there's a limited supply, if only a few people can afford them, if ... " Any of these things that cause exclusivity.

If we take this idea and we test it and we say, "The next time I have a sale, I'm only going to have this sale for a certain segment of my customers, and I'm going to let them know, "This is only for you." I'm going to make it obvious to everybody else that they couldn't get in on this thing because they weren't marketed out in this particular way." It's going to make them want to level up so that they can get invited next time. That kind of an idea, you can test and you can say, "What is that like?"

Practically, you've probably seen it happen in your social circles. There's this group that gets together all the time, you know all of the people, but you don't get invited

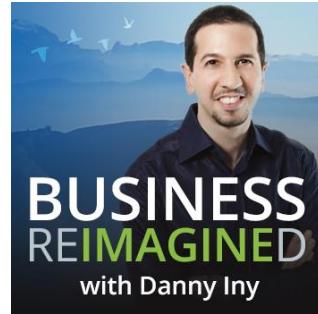


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and then you feel like, "How did I get cut out of that?" That's exclusivity. You want to see, "What can I do to get in that group?" Unless you totally go the opposite direction. Some people will, but most people will be like, "Oh." You feel a little hurt, like, "Why didn't I get invited?"

Study, test. Test an idea like the law of reciprocity which says, "If I give you something, you're more likely to give me something in return." If you do that, then people feel really great. They feel like, "That guy gave me something, I'll give them something back." You can test the idea; you can test with something as simple as a compliment. "What happens when I give somebody a compliment?" If I say, "I really love your jacket," you probably are going to look for something to say. You're going to say, "Thanks, I appreciate it," then you're going to be a little self-deprecating, but you're constantly, while you're doing that, buying time to figure out something to compliment me back on.

Then test it again, move it up, like what happens when you actually give somebody, on a hot summer's day, a cold bottle of water when they walk into your store? Those people are more inclined to like you. They're more inclined to buy something from you. This is such a powerful idea, in fact, that the federal government doesn't allow buyers to even go to lunch with sellers anymore, because that simple act of a seller buying lunch for someone can kick off this process of reciprocity that makes people make bad decisions in terms of who they're going to hire or following the rules specifically and all of that.



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That's how you do it. You study, and you learn. Some seminal books on persuasion that, if people wanted to get a couple of them. I don't want to promote myself too much here, but grab my book "Persuasion: The Art of Getting What You Want", grab Cialdini's book called "Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion". Grab Robert Green's book, "The 48 Laws of Power", and there's a couple of other really good ones, one that is called "Split Second Persuasion", an exceptional primer for people who are just getting started in the field.

Danny

Where does motivation come into the picture, both in terms of what it is and in terms of people's inference of it? If you say something nice to me, that triggers a response. I think well of you and I've built a relationship, et cetera, but if you say something nice about me or to me and in my head it's like, "He's just trying to get me to like him," it has the reverse effect. How do you maneuver that, especially as you are explicitly learning how to be more persuasive?

Dave

The interesting thing is, a lot of time if people are trying to be liked, oftentimes people try to do things that they think would make people like them. "I'll be over the top, let me be too much of something." The simplest way to get people to like you is to be interested in the other person. I spend eighty or ninety percent of my time learning about that other person, which makes them like me more, because everybody loves talking about themselves. They love connecting, and feel like they do. Ultimately they're like, "Wow, I know nothing about you. Tell me a little bit about you." Then that gives you that freedom and flexibility to come back.

At the end of the day, really it comes down to saying, "What about me is likable? How can I make people like me more?" To not try too hard to take an idea, like likability

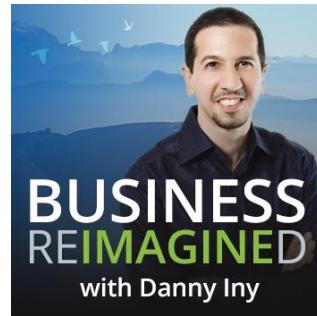


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for example, too far and then have it impact your own ego. When you talk about motivation for example, motivation is simply self-persuasion. "How do I set up a set of conditions that cause me to be more likely to ultimately be successful in this thing that I want, and what kind of rewards am I going to give myself along the way that reinforce the idea that these steps that I took were proper, and the goal that I'm trying to achieve is accurate?" If I can accomplish those things from a psychological standpoint, that's more intrinsic motivation. I'm motivated inside, internally, versus an extrinsic motivation, which would be something like, "I'm really motivated to go jump off of this cliff because if I do I'll get fifty thousand dollars."

The idea here again is, when we look at what is our motivation for connecting with a person? What is our motivation for selling a thing? What is our motivation for buying a thing? Then we look back at, how do we connect with the people or the processes? We tie those things together; motivation becomes more likely or less likely. If you realize that someone is manipulating you, you're very motivated to do something, but it's not something with them, it's to get away from them. We begin to look at this whole process and say to ourselves, "What are the ways that we can create this linking likability, rapport, and that we can set up a set of conditions that motivate us to do the kinds of things that we need to do in order to get people to do the kinds of things that we would hope that they would do by overlaying our persuasion and motivation strategies on them and on our brand, on our business, on our processes?" All of those things.

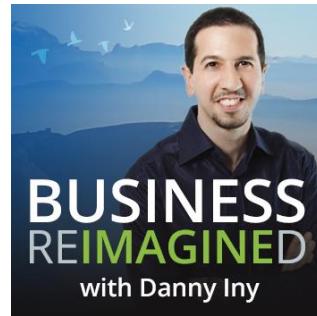


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Episode 46

Danny

To summarize and kind of crystallize what I'm hearing, tell me if I've got it right, it sounds like there's almost a martial arts analog where when you go to a dojo to start learning a martial art it's very much about the specific technique that you are learning each time, whereas once you learn a level of competence it's not about this technique, that technique, it's just about your spontaneous way of being in the moment. It sounds like in much the same way with persuasion, maybe as you begin to study it, you're paying attention to the law of reciprocity, the law of exclusivity, et cetera, but as you get better at it it's much less about "persuasion tricks" and more about just being in alignment with having the way you act and what you say and what you're projecting into the world be aligned with what you're actually trying to accomplish. Is that a fair summary?

Dave

That's exactly right. When you think about it in the dojo, when you're a white belt you're in there, you're learning these things, you're learning the movements, you're moving through the process. Two or three years later you're pretty accomplished, you can function in most environments, and by the time you're a fifth or sixth degree black belt, you don't walk around telling everybody you're a fifth or sixth degree black belt, you just are who you are. It's become such a big part of your life that you do the things that you do, and if you engage with people in the dojo, the fifth or sixth degree black belt engages with people the way he does. In business, we engage with people the way we do as marketers or salespeople or whatever, based on our level of skills. If we're unskilled, we'll try these things and we have to learn, but everybody has to learn. Everybody has to be a white belt; everybody will eventually be a black belt if they stick with it.

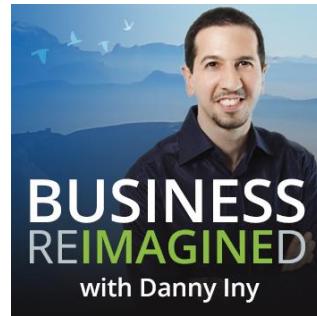


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Episode 46

Voiceover

That was persuasion black belt Dave Lakhani reminding you to keep your own persuasion efforts ethical. Remember, what you're really doing is helping someone else come to their own conclusion, and persuasion well done creates a situation where both parties benefit. If you'd like to learn more about Dave, go to boldapproach.com

This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk with Jay Baer.

Jay

If you answer even one customer complaint in social, it increases that customer's advocacy, their propensity to promote you, by twenty-five percent. It doesn't just keep that existing customer; it causes that existing customer to be twenty-five percent more likely to tell everybody how awesome you are. Now, play that out at scale, and what happens is, at some level, I'm not saying you don't need marketing, that is stupid; I'm a marketing consultant. At some level, your need for marketing goes down, because your clients and your customers are doing your marketing for you.

Voiceover

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