

## Inside the World of Objections and Concerns

If we do not change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.

—CHINESE PROVERB

When you become a great persuader, you will view objections differently than most people do. You will even welcome objections and enjoy handling them. Why? You will realize that when people voice objections, it indicates that they are both mentally interested and emotionally involved in whatever it is you are proposing, even if they are skeptical. Interested and involved—what more could a persuader want from their audience? It may be surprising, but when there are no objections during the persuasion process, the persuader's success rate actually drops dramatically. It is much better to get objections out in the open than to let them fester.

Top persuaders do not consider objections or audience concerns as opposition. Rather, they view them as part of the persuasion game. Your audience will naturally delay as long as possible the moment of decision—the moment they need to say yes or no. This stalling can be used to your benefit. Dialogue and exchange of ideas can create a long-term follower, client, or customer. Great persuaders may even solve objections before they are voiced. No matter how good you get, objections will be raised, and the truth is that well-handled objections help you persuade.

Your persuasiveness depends a lot on how you handle objections and concerns, and you can handle them best if you know what the most common objections are. There are thousands of excuses. You'll hear them all, too. But the reality is, there are only seven true obstacles.

### Obstacles

All excuses and objections can be boiled down one or more of these seven potential objections:

1. *Fear of failure*—"Can I do this?" (They don't have confidence in their abilities, fear what others will think if they do not succeed, etc.)

2. *Lack of support*—Spouse, parents, or friends are unsupportive or condescending. (They hear: You can't do it, it's a scam, it won't work.)
3. *Can't make the commitment*—They don't have time/have conflicts with existing obligations (e.g., childcare concerns/want more information).
4. *Motivation*—The discomfort of the prospect's current situation is not great enough to inspire change (e.g., lose weight later; fix it tomorrow).
5. *Functional concerns*—"Will this really work? Will this solve my problem? Is there something better? Will it fulfill my needs?" (e.g., Is there a better product out there? Will it solve my problem?)
6. *Psychological trigger*—"It just doesn't feel right. Can I trust this person? My intuition tells me to run." (The persuader did or said something wrong.)
7. *Financial concerns*—They fear that they can't afford it or will be extremely economically stretched by trying to do so. "Is it worth the investment?" (Is the risk greater than the reward?)

Once you understand that all objections stem from one or more of these seven key areas, you will have a much easier time identifying the root of your audience's discomfort. You will then be able to address their objections in a professional, caring, and non-threatening way. Many persuaders (without realizing it) show tension, uneasiness, or irritation when someone brings up an objection. Usually this unrealized conduct occurs because objection stirs up the persuader's own insecurities (often fear of failure or fear of rejection). The persuader thinks to him or herself, "Didn't I go over that already? I'm

doing a good job explaining things! Why is this person still not convinced? Why am I bombing this persuasive encounter? Do I sound like an idiot?" As understandable as this reaction is, it will only makes things worse. Your audience will sense your uneasiness and feel even more uncomfortable. Don't set off more alarm bells than are already ringing!

A calm, natural demeanor opens the door to persuasion and will keep it open in the face of objections. Remember: your audience cannot feel at ease if you don't. They cannot feel relaxed if you aren't. They won't be enthusiastic if you aren't showing enthusiasm yourself. In a very real way, you must create what you want them to feel.

Now we know where objections stem from, let's talk about the optimal time to handle them. You can curb a lot of negative energy when you know your audience is "well-qualified". What do I mean by this? Qualifying your audience is when you define at the outset exactly how you are going to spend your time together and what you want to accomplish. You delineate very clearly what you hope to get out of the meeting. In essence, you are "qualifying" your time together and how it will be spent. Great persuaders are great qualifiers. They don't waste time. Qualification is an excellent approach because it disarms your audience. You've told them exactly what to expect, so they can relax. They won't be caught off guard when you begin to ask questions because they'll understand why you're asking them.

The better you become at handling objections, the more persuasive you will be. The key to great persuasion is anticipating all objections, problems, or concerns before you hear them. Great persuaders are always able to accomplish three critical objectives during the objection process:

1. They can distinguish between a real objection and a knee-jerk reaction. Our studies show that most objections should not be taken at face value, because there are other issues involved.

2. They listen intently to the entire objection before attempting to solve it. They stay calm. Tests have proven that calmly stated facts are more effective in getting people to change their minds than becoming emotional.

3. Great persuaders are never arrogant or condescending. They give their audience room to save face. People will often change their minds and agree with you later, if they have the room to do so.

Another great way to handle objections is to address each of the seven main areas during your presentation, before they become big issues in the mind of your audience. That way, you've stopped any potential resistance before it happens. As a result, there aren't any main objections left for them to bring up. Studies demonstrate that persuaders were four times more successful when they handled objections during the persuasion process, instead of waiting until the end.<sup>6</sup> Also, nothing de-energizes persuasive efforts more than lingering doubts and concerns that remain unresolved in your audience's mind.

What about any concerns your audience voices after your presentation? There are three challenges at work in this scenario. First of all, if you find yourself in this situation, you probably did not "qualify" them sufficiently—your audience was not properly prepared for how their time with you would be spent. Secondly, you probably did not gather enough information from them to accurately anticipate their concerns at the earliest stage. Great persuaders address concerns while they are still seeds, and they will never grow to be rooted plants in your audience's mind. Thirdly, if your audience begins questioning you extensively, you are at risk of being put on the defensive. Such defending of your position flips your roles and weakens your persuasive stance. Worse, if you do project even a hint of defensiveness, it can breed more doubt in your audience's mind than the original concern ever did.

### **The Man, the Boy, and the Donkey: A Fable**

A man and his son were once going with their donkey to the city. As they were walking along by the animal's side, a farmer passed them and said, "You fools, what is a donkey for but to ride on?"

So the man put the boy on the donkey and they went on their way. But soon, they passed a group of men. One said, "See that lazy boy; he lets his father walk while he rides the donkey."

So the man told his boy to get off, and then he got on himself. But they hadn't gone far when they passed three women. One said to the other, "Shame on that lazy man to let his poor little son walk."

Well, the man wasn't sure what to do, but both he and his son began to ride the donkey together. By this time, they had come to the town, and the people began to holler and point at them. The man stopped and asked what they were yelling at. The men said, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself for overloading that poor donkey?"

The man and boy got off the pack animal and tried to think what to do. They thought and they thought. They cut down a pole, tied the donkey's feet to it, and raised both the pole and the donkey to their shoulders. They then walked along in the middle of the laughter of all who met them. Finally, they came to a bridge. That's when the donkey, getting one of his feet loose, kicked and caused the boy to drop his end of the pole. In the struggle, the donkey accidentally fell over the bridge, and because his feet were tied together, the donkey drowned.

*Meaning:* Try to please everyone and you will please no one. Learn to understand what people mean, not what they say.