

Participation: Power of Mental Engagement

You can create involvement through increased participation. The more we take an active role and get involved, the more open to persuasion we become. When we take an active part in something, we feel more connected to and have stronger feelings for the issue at hand. We have a personal stake in what we are doing.

One of the keys to successful participation is making your problem their problem. This technique creates ownership and a willingness to help on the part of your prospects. Obviously, asking for help is much milder than telling someone what to do or think. You will have more success involving your prospects in the solution if you give them the option of participating. Feeling that it was their choice and their solution, your prospects will take ownership – they have persuaded themselves. It becomes their own problem and their own solution. By nature, people will support what they help create.

Role-Playing

One tactic to get your audience more involved is to use role-playing. This technique has proven to be effective in getting people to actually convince themselves of something. Role-playing is the single most powerful way to induce attitude change through vicarious experience. In essence, you are getting people to make up arguments against their own beliefs. Do you want to know just how powerful role-playing is? One experiment used role-playing to convince people to stop smoking. The subjects role-played cigarette smokers having x-rays, receiving news of lung cancer, and coughing with emphysema. When compared with a control group of smokers, those who role-played this situation were more likely to have quit than those who passively learned about lung cancer.

In another study, students were tested to see what types of persuasion techniques were most effective in delivering an anti-smoking message. One group was assigned to write, stage, and put on the presentation, while the other group was simply required to watch the presentation. As you might imagine, the group that was more involved in the presentation held more negative feelings about smoking than did the group who had just passively listened.

During World War II, the United States government had to ration traditional meats such as beef, chicken, and pork. However, Americans tend to be very picky about the meats they eat and often do not accept meat substitutes. The Committee on Food Habits was charged with overcoming the shortages of popular foods. How could they overcome the aversion to eating other meats? Psychologist Kurt Lewin devised a program to persuade Americans to eat intestinal meats. Yes, your favorite—intestinal meats. He set up an experiment with two groups of housewives. In one group, the housewives were lectured on the benefits of eating intestinal meats. Members of the committee emphasized to them how making the switch would help the war effort. The housewives also heard fervent testimonials and received recipes. The second group of housewives was led in a group discussion about how they could persuade other housewives to eat intestinal meat. This group covered the same main topics as the other group. Of the group that was more involved in "role-playing" and discussing the question of "how they would persuade and

convince others to eat intestinal meats," 32% of the housewives went on to serve their families intestinal meats. This was compared to 3% of the first group.

Participation

Another way to get people to participate with you is to ask their opinions or advice. Simple phrases such as, "I need your help." "What is your opinion?" "What do you think about...?" "How could I do this?" "How would you do this?" "Do you think I am doing it right?" and "Do you have any ideas?" can immediately spark the interest of your listener. Watch how another person brightens up when you ask for his or her advice. For example, if you ask your neighbor, "Frank, how about helping me fix my fence?" he will probably tell you he is busy and has plans for the next twelve weekends. But if you said, "Frank, I have a challenge with this fence that I can't solve. I don't know what I am doing wrong and can't seem to get anywhere. I am not sure if I am doing it right or what to do next. Do you have ideas about how I could mend this fence? Could you come take a look?" You will see a marked difference in response between the first request and the second. People have an innate desire to feel wanted and needed. When you fulfill this need, you open the door to persuasion and action, a fact which has been proved beyond a doubt by records kept on industrial workers. Workers who have no voice whatsoever in management, who cannot make suggestions, or who are not allowed to express their ideas simply do not do as much work as workers who are encouraged to contribute. The same is true in families. Dr. Ruth Barbee said, "It is surprising how willingly a child will accept the final authority of the father, even if the decision goes against him, provided he has had a chance to voice his opinions, and make his suggestions, before the final decision is reached."

Our opinions play an enormous role in changing our minds about issues. For action to occur, the change must be internalized. Consider this example: Suppose you surveyed people's opinions on some topic, let's say capital punishment, then divided them into two groups. Both groups are to write an essay on capital punishment that is against their true views. One group is "required" to write the essay, while the other group is asked to "volunteer" to write the essay. Both groups are then surveyed again for their opinions on capital punishment. What do you think the results would be? When this experiment was actually tried, the individuals required to write the essay showed almost no change at all in their opinions. Those volunteering to do so showed changes in opinion when tested later, even though their essays were written from a standpoint in conflict with their true views. From this, we learn two things: First, there was greater compliance from those who were given the choice and not forced to participate; second, as discussed in an earlier chapter, when people feel conflict or dissonance internally, they will often adapt or even change their position.

Visualization

Another participation technique is to use visualization. No one can follow through on an act or message without first thinking or seeing in his or her mind that it is possible to accomplish it. You can mentally achieve participation by helping your audience visualize and see in their mind how your product or service will help them. Real estate agents

attempt to help their clients visualize living with their family in a certain home. When showing the home, the agent wants the people to envision it as their own. A group of researchers went door-to-door selling cable TV subscriptions. When they included the phrase "imagine how cable TV will provide you with broader entertainment," they immediately achieved more success. Forty-seven percent of those who were told to imagine cable TV bought a subscription while only 20% of the control group did. The mind is activated when you help your prospect visualize your product or service.

In many persuasive situations, your audience may not be interested in your message, service, or product at all. How do you pull in passer-by? Many times when we see a persuasive situation, we like to remain anonymous. We don't want to feel any pressure so we watch from a distance. If someone at the clothing store asks for help we say "no." We avoid the involvement because deep down we know that becoming involved will decrease our resistance. I remember spending some time on Key West in the Florida Keys. Every night before dusk, everyone would gather at Sunset Pier to watch the sunset and enjoy the view. It is a great time of the day to unwind and enjoy nature's beauty. It is also the perfect opportunity for vendors and street performers to hawk their wares. We saw jugglers, sword swallows, magic tricks, the works. One night, as I watched people walk by, many of them wanted to watch but felt timid unless a crowd had already gathered around the performers. The performers knew if they did not get a crowd, they would not make any money. When someone remains anonymous, they feel little pressure to donate. I saw someone who was doing a magic act call over to someone who was trying to remain anonymous. Soon, the performer got the man involved in his act. This attracted more people to watch and also got a donation from the gentleman, who no longer was anonymous.

If you see someone around you or in your audience who is avoiding or rejecting your message, try to get him or her involved. You can get a volunteer from your audience and by getting him to willingly participate, you will completely change his perspective. Pet store owners are famous for this. They see children come in just to look around. The parents don't want to have a dog in the house, but their son or daughter still wants to look. The owner waits patiently to see the child's eyes light up and instantly fall in love with a new puppy. The child holds and hugs the puppy and the dad knows he is in for a struggle. The owner is wise and does not want to fight the father. He just says, "It looks like she has fallen in love with this puppy. I understand your apprehension about having a new puppy –who will be in charge of it? Tell you what –just take the puppy home for the weekend and if it doesn't work out, bring him back." Of course, you know that the rest is history. Who can't fall in love with a puppy after a weekend? The owner has successfully pulled a reluctant customer to get involved.

One of the most influential salesmen for the U.S. Army was Major General Walter S. Sweeney. In one city where he and his troops were staying, there was a strong feeling of hostility toward the troops. The Major General wisely invited one of the civic clubs to lunch. There, club members were served by army members –while they listened to the army band play– and heard different speeches. The meeting was successful, and others followed. It was not long before the hostility was forgotten. The Major General knew

that the only way he would gain support was if he could involve and get to know the civilians.

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