

Psychological Power: The Mind Game

Psychological Power is the ability to disguise what people really want from you when they are attempting to persuade or influence you. Psychological Power is based on the ability to alter an individual's perception of reality. This power (like most power) can obviously be used dishonestly. However, it is important to understand the various psychological tactics involved in persuasion so you will have a greater ability to detect people who are being dishonest or devious with you. Armed with such knowledge, you will be able to tell the difference between the Psychological Power of the salesman and the Legitimate Power of the Master Persuader.

Time Pressure

People are typically slow to make decisions because they're afraid of making mistakes. The longer someone waits, however, the more likely it becomes that they won't follow through. Procrastination, in other words, is persuasion's foe. Hence, the faster you can persuade and influence a person to make a decision, the more likely you will achieve your influential goals with him or her. Time pressure is where we get promotions like "one-day sale," and "this offer won't last long" (The Law of Scarcity). On the flip side, be sure that time constraints don't ever pressure you into an impulse decision you'll later regret. I remember once negotiating a contract for the marketing department of a big corporation. I knew the Laws of Persuasion and I knew what I wanted. I had a million other things to get done, so I felt rushed to hammer out the details of the contract that morning. The person I was negotiating with, on the other hand, was in no hurry and had nowhere to go. We bantered back and forth for six hours and still had not reached a resolution on a contract we were both happy with. In that particular case, my urgency to leave affected the terms I was finally able to get.

When we're in a hurry, we'll usually pay more to get what we need. When we need something right now, and someone has it, we will pay or do anything to get it. Think of all the convenient services that cost more. For example, the all-night convenience store charges twice as much for a gallon of milk as the grocery store down the street. Likewise, the 24-hour copy mart charges more than the traditional print service. Think about how

much you paid for that book or magazine at the airport before you rushed to catch your plane. Being in a hurry definitely costs money.

Boldness

Acting with boldness will not only emit the perception of confidence to others, but it will actually help you feel more confident. What's more, you'll come across as brave and bold, and people will rally behind you. Their lack of esteem or confidence will naturally attract them to someone like you who is bold and assertive. Boldness can lead to the accomplishment of unimaginable things. Assertive and bold behavior creates self-confidence and hides our deficiencies from our audience. When you assert yourself, people automatically assume that you know what you are doing. Boldness and assertiveness create not only authority but also often fear. This self-assuredness sends a clear message to others on how they should treat us. What's more, assertiveness creates power and enables persuasion. Shy, timid, weak people cannot persuade or change the minds of others, but bold, assertive, strong-willed people can.

A great example of what boldness and assertiveness can accomplish happened in 1925 in Paris, France. At that time, the French scrap metal owners were summoned together and taken to the nicest hotel in Paris. There, they were wined and dined and told an incredible story about the Eiffel Tower. Over the course of the meeting, the scrap metal workers found out that the tower was considered an eyesore and that the cost of maintaining it was astounding. Originally, the tower had only been intended as a temporary fixture and Paris now wanted it removed. As a result, for the next three days, city council would be taking bids for the scrap metal. A bold and assertive salesman then flashed a badge at security and took the metal owners for a tour. He was so bold and convincing that one company paid over one million U.S. dollars for the tower. Obviously, it was a scam, but they managed to repeat it when they "resold" the tower to someone else six months later.

Unpredictability

Be unpredictable. Nothing confuses a target more than unpredictability. Tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes are probably the most frightening events we as humans live

through because of their sheer unpredictability. These phenomena don't fit comfortably into our daily routines and so they are unnerving to us. Humans are creatures of habit; we love the familiar and predictable. We love a set routine and a predictable outcome. As a result, when you, as a persuader, are predictable, your prospects feel a sense of control over you. Unpredictable and inconsistent behavior, on the other hand, keeps them off balance and guessing. We have all had a boss or parent who was unpredictable. At any given moment, we did not know if this person was going to yell at us, reward us or thank us for what we were doing. S/he spent calculated time trying to understand our next moves. This type of unpredictable power is very intimidating. What's more, it's uncontrollable.

Surprise/Distraction

People who are taken off guard or who are surprised by a request become unsure. Thanks to their lack of confidence, they will often comply with the request. You can use the surprise strategy to your persuasive advantage, because the resulting insecurity and imbalance makes your prospects more persuadable. A study by Milgram and Sabini demonstrated that people riding the New York subway were twice as likely to give up their seats to people who surprised them with the request, "May I have your seat?" as opposed to when they were told ahead of time that the person intended to ask for their seat. Fifty-six percent of surprised passengers gave up their seats compared to 28 percent of those who had been warned in advance.

Distraction is also a form of Psychological Power. When you use distraction, your prospects' minds are elsewhere, so you give them something to think about aside from your request. This type of Psychological Power is an unethical form of power play that you need to be aware of. Sometimes this tactic can end up putting you on the defensive, sidetracking you or getting you angry. Distraction can come in the form of dropping something, screaming, throwing insults at you to get you off track or distracting you from the real intended purpose.

Pity

Every year, Jerry Lewis hosts the muscular dystrophy telethon. Critics hate how he uses pity to raise funds, calling it demeaning and stigmatizing. Others argue, however, that the financial results far outweigh anything that could possibly be bad about it: Reaching more than 100 million viewers through 200 different channels, the telethon raises over one hundred million dollars each year.

As another example, there is a crosswalk in my town where no one likes to stop for pedestrians. I'm always intrigued by what makes people stop at a crosswalk. I've noticed at this particular crosswalk that people normally just drive right through, without even noticing the pedestrians waiting to cross. One day, I suddenly noticed all of the cars stopping. I wondered what was happening until I saw an attractive college student with crutches waiting to cross the street. The power of pity pulled at the heartstrings of the usually stoic drivers and influenced them to act in her favor.

Absence

Absence really does make the heart grow fonder. Research proves that too much exposure to a product actually makes the perceived price go down. In other words, the more a product is seen, the more common it appears in the eyes of its viewers. As a result, it is rendered less valuable to the consumer. Likewise, in a social setting, the more you are seen and heard, the more common you appear.

Absence also creates value through scarcity. A real key to using the principle of absence lies in knowing when to enter and when to leave. A strong presence will draw power and attention to you, but a point is eventually reached when presence creates the opposite effect. In other words, the more you are seen and heard, the more your value decreases.

Napoleon once said, "If I am at the theater often, people will cease to notice me." Increase the value of your presence by knowing when to stay away and when to be seen. Make yourself less accessible and you will increase the value of your presence.

Space Invasion

There is a science called proxemics that studies the use of space. Each culture has unwritten rules about the use of space. If you break the rules, you make people uncomfortable, so doing so can be used to create Psychological Power. How much space people need depends upon the region(s) of the world in which they were raised. In the United States, for example, people typically stand about twenty inches apart. In South America and the Caribbean, the comfortable distance is fifteen inches for a normal conversation. In some parts of the Middle East, personal space is so inconsequential that you can feel the other person's breath as you converse with her/him.

Being close to a person can give you more control over her/him. Think about football coaches. They get right up in their players' faces to let them know what they think. The exact same message wouldn't come across quite as strong if the coaches yelled it from even a short yard away.

When you know you have a negotiation or meeting to spearhead, see if it can take place on your home turf. If you're in your own office or some environment you're familiar with, you'll feel more in control of the situation and more collected. It's like a sports team's "home field advantage." If the meeting has to take place elsewhere, see if you can spend some time there in advance to familiarize yourself with the area ahead of time.