

Reducing it to the Ridiculous: Create Perspective

This technique involves paring down your request to something that seems manageable to your prospect. Let's say you are trying to convince someone to purchase a life insurance policy. They want a \$250,000 policy and you feel that is not high enough for their needs. To adequately take care of their family, you suggest a \$500,000 policy. Your client feels that the monthly payment for a \$500,000 policy is too high. So you break it down for him, telling him that for an extra 50 cents a day, or the cost of a can of soda, he can insure himself and adequately take care of his family if something were to happen to him. With this contrast, your client can see that the extra 50 cents is worth it to have the extra \$250,000 in coverage. You have reduced your request into simple terms where your prospect can see it fitting into his way of life.

Shifting Focus

Sometimes it is a good idea to simply give your prospect a different frame of reference, or to merely shift their focus slightly. This is kind of the "glass is half full" idea. Levin and Gaeth conducted a study where they gave samples of ground beef burgers to two groups of tasters. The burgers were exactly the same, except one slight difference in advertising strategy was employed: One group was told the burgers were 75% lean, and the other group was told the burgers were 25% fat. The group that was told the burgers were 75% lean rated them significantly leaner, of higher quality, and better tasting than the 25% fat group who rated the burgers as fatty, greasy, and of low quality. In the following example, notice the two different ways the doctors present the patient with the diagnosis:

Doctor One: I hate to tell you this, but the tests confirmed that you have extremely high blood pressure. You are most likely going to face some serious complications, and it could turn into a life-threatening situation. You've got to make some dramatic changes in your lifestyle immediately. You need to change your work situation, your sleep patterns, how you eat, and your exercise program.

Doctor Two: Well, overall, you're in pretty good shape except your blood pressure is a little higher than we want it. I'm really glad you came in so we can work together on some preventative measures. Actually, there are millions of Americans who have high blood pressure too, so we know of some steps you can take to bring it back under control. If you follow the steps I outline, you will quickly see and feel an improvement in your health overall.

Both of the doctors were talking about the same thing, but their presentations were very different. Doctor Two made sure his delivery was positive and did not overload the patient with all the negative details all at once. The patient will need to understand the reality of the situation and all its implications, but an initial positive and general discussion will better prepare the patient emotionally and psychologically to properly deal with the issue.

A university in Colorado was having trouble getting their grass to grow on campus because the students kept walking on it. They tried placing signs on it that read, "Don't

walk on the grass,” but the students ignored the requests and walked on the grass anyway. The university subsequently took a different approach. They put up another sign that said, “Give Earth a Chance.” Like magic, the students stopped walking on the grass. The university simply changed the perspective of its students by making the issue an environmental one.

One last example of shifting the frame of reference comes from an experimental questionnaire administered to physicians: A group of physicians were posed with the following scenario: Imagine the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the programs’ consequences are as follows: If program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. If program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved. Which of the two programs would you favor?” If you notice the wording, the focus was on the “lives saved.” Seventy-two percent of the physicians chose program A over program B.

The same experiment was conducted again with a different group of physicians. This time, the focus was on how many people would die: “Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the programs’ consequences are as follows: If program A is adopted, 400 people will die. If program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that nobody will die and a two-thirds probability that 600 people will die. Which of the two programs would you favor?” You can see that this scenario is exactly the same as the first, but there was a dramatic difference in the results. This time, with the shift in focus, 22% of the physicians voted for the more conservative plan, while 72% voted for the risky plan!