

## **The Ability to Influence Other People**

Influence is the highest form of persuasion. Why? With influence, people take action because they are inspired by your overall makeup, rather than by your external actions. Persuasion is what you do or say (i.e., techniques, people skills, laws of persuasion), but influence is who you *are*. How do you gain influence? How do you develop yourself to the point that people will act simply because an idea came from you? How do you ensure that your influence continues to compel people even when you're not around? In my studies, I have found that great persuaders possess most (if not all) of seven essential characteristics of the ability to influence others:

- Charisma
- Passion
- Optimism
- Attitude
- Empathy
- Vision
- Self-esteem

### **Charisma**

Great persuaders have charisma. We can all think of charismatic people. They have a certain presence and charm about them; they are captivating. They command our attention; we hang onto every word out of their mouths. Their energy prods us, motivates us, and inspires us. We feel better for having met them, seen them, been persuaded by them, and interacted with them. So what exactly is charisma? It can be a mysterious attribute. It's not leadership, assertiveness, or enthusiasm, nor is it personality or being a "people person," although all of these things seem to be a part of the package in one way or another. Attorney Gerry Spence has perhaps summed up the concept of charisma best:

Charisma is energy from the heart zone. If the speaker has no feeling, there is nothing to transfer. Charisma occurs when the speaker's feelings are transferred in the purest form

to another. Charisma is not a diluted feeling. It is not disguised. It is a raw feeling. Charisma is the passing of our pure energy, our pure passion, to the other.

It may seem that people either have charisma or they don't. If you're not one of those people who "has charisma," can it be learned? The answer is yes. How is this possible? First, you must know the traits and attributes of charismatic leaders.

Professor Jay Conger has identified four general characteristics of charismatic leaders:

1. They have a strong and clear vision, and they know how to present it so it best fits the context of their audience's needs.
2. They know how to present their vision so that the weaknesses of the present condition are apparent and the recommended changes are seen as not only justifiable, but also desirable and necessary.
3. They have a history of success, expertise, and vision to make educated departures from old traditions that may be less effective.
4. They possess the behavior they encourage others to have. They model the results of change themselves and thus help their audience feel motivated and empowered to do likewise.

Once you know the characteristics of charismatic leaders, you must take steps to acquire these traits for yourself. Here are eight specific ways great persuaders augment their charisma:

1. *Develop confidence in yourself and in your message.* Don't show nervousness or discomfort. If you do feel these negative emotions, work through what is causing

- them so that they can be resolved. Confidence must permeate every thought, word, and deed.
2. *Show a lighter side.* Find your sense of humor and happiness and have fun. Don't take life too seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself.
  3. *Have great presence and energy.* Project the Five Cs of Trust: character, competence, confidence, credibility, and congruence.
  4. *Be knowledgeable about your subject matter* and make sure that knowledge is based on a solid foundation. Gain an understanding of where your audience stands in relation to your subject and what background, knowledge, and experience they may bring to the table.
  5. *Have a pleasant, professional appearance.* Make sure your clothes, hair, shoes, and accessories, are appropriate for the message and the setting. Dress the part.
  6. *Be sensitive to people and their needs.* Develop rapport with your audience by connecting with them and being a good listener.
  7. *Make sure your message is clear and easy to follow.* Make sure there is a good flow from one point to the next. Don't jumble the message with too much information; stick to the pertinent points and keep it concise. This way you will not only hold their attention better, but they will be much more likely to remember your message later.
  8. *Make sure you are exciting and engaging to listen to.* Tell spellbinding stories. Make sure the things you talk about are interesting.

## **Passion**

More than anything else, passion recruits the hearts and minds of your audience. Great persuaders radiate heartfelt passion. When the audience can sense your passion and genuine conviction for your cause or product, they will emotionally jump on board. We all love people who are excited and filled with believable zeal for their subject. Passion is critical to influencing others, yet less than half of all persuaders interviewed have a passion for their product or service.

When you have passion for something, you want to share it with the world. You want to convert as many people to your cause as possible, and you're not swayed by the opinions of others. When you possess passion, you have a sense of mission that drives you, stimulates your imagination, and motivates you to higher levels of achievement. Passion alone can be effective in influencing others to support your product, service, or cause.

There is a difference between charisma and passion, however. Charisma is a characteristic, while passion is an emotion. Your ability to transfer your passion about what you do, your product, or your service is a required skill if you are to excel in the world of persuasion. As I monitor great persuaders and their Persuasion IQ scores, I have noticed the essential role of passion. I can monitor two persuaders who possess roughly the same scores in persuasion knowledge and application, but their success is not identical. Passion is often the differentiating factor. Ask yourself if you have passion or if you are simply going through the motions. Are you singing the song and really feeling it, or are you just singing the words (going through the motions)? Think about it.

Enthusiasm falls under the umbrella of passion, but you can be enthusiastic without having passion. Passion, however, always includes enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is described as a strong excitement or feeling on behalf of a cause or a subject. In Greek, the word enthusiasm means "to be inspired by a god." Enthusiasm is contagious. Enthusiasm infects people so much that they tangibly feel your energy and excitement. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

People are persuaded more by the depth of your conviction than the height of your logic; more by your enthusiasm than any proof you can offer.

—DAVID A. PEOPLES

You have probably seen persuaders who radiate enthusiasm. It is in their faces—they are undeniably motivated—and it creates sparks of interest in their audience. Enthusiasm not only reduces fear, but it also creates self-acceptance, great confidence, compassion, and harmony between you and your audience. It assists in generating interest in strangers and in motivating them to want to get involved.

Great Persuaders increase their enthusiasm by gaining insight and knowledge about their product or subject. They have developed a true belief. Believe in yourself and your message, tap into your emotions, and learn how to express them. On the flip side, fake enthusiasm, unrealistic hype, and false energy:

- Lower credibility.
- Project phoniness.
- Repel people.
- Are experienced as deceit.
- Are viewed as arrogance.

In the past at my persuasion workshops, I have my students give a two-minute speech about their personal passion. Many times, their passion is contagious, and they've influenced even me. Over the years, I've had students get me excited about ice cream, get me more committed to recycling, and make me want to start rock climbing. Passion springs from a combination of belief, enthusiasm, and emotion.

What is your passion? What are you wildly enthusiastic about? Tap into the things in your life about which you are passionate, and you'll find a new driving force in your life that will keep you going until the goal is reached. Norman Vincent Peale said, "When one gets enthusiastic, the entire personality lights up. The mind becomes sharper,

more intuitive; the entire life force and creative ability are enhanced. Such a person is motivated and will certainly make an impact.” Enthusiasm can be learned. Great persuaders enhance their enthusiasm by increasing their knowledge, having a sincere interest, and tapping into their purpose

### **Optimism**

Optimistic persuaders outpersuade pessimistic persuaders every time. Not only is optimism essential to influencing others, but is also a critical for success in *life*. Optimism is more than a positive mental attitude. It is not constantly saying positive things to yourself and then hoping they will come true. Rather, true optimism is a state of mind that dictates how you look at the world. An optimistic view of life and the world around you can inspire hope and courage in others. We all want to feel inspired and encouraged. When a persuader can deliver this type of message, we want to follow that person. This tendency is how optimism helps you in influencing others.

Pessimism on the other hand is always taking the negative view. Others will consider a pessimist as irritable and always looking for the negative in every situation. Pessimists are the ones who will be the first to complain and tell everyone else that nothing goes right. As a result, they never get the success or recognition they deserve.

Countless studies have shown that optimists do better in school, persuade better, have more friends, perform better in their careers, and live longer than pessimists. Pessimists, on the other hand, frequently battle depression, have fewer friends, find it difficult to persuade, and give up faster and more easily. To illustrate this point, in one study, those who sold insurance were monitored on their optimistic or pessimistic outlook in relation to setbacks. The optimistic persuaders sold more policies and were half as likely to quit.

No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.

—HELEN KELLER

Great persuaders have what we call “influential optimism.” This means that they see the positive in all situations. Rather than focusing on disappointment, cynicism, or negative feelings, they look for ways to move forward. People want to be persuaded by individuals who have a positive view on life. As an optimist, you see the world as a series of exciting challenges. You inspire positive feelings about everything you stand for. People want to be around you because they live in a very pessimistic world. The optimistic mindset is contagious and helps to empower other people to believe in you and in themselves. As an optimist, you help others see failure or setback as temporary. You have no doubt that success will happen.

To achieve true optimism, you have to learn to control your pessimistic voice. We all have both an optimistic and a pessimistic voice inside of us. Which one do you listen to?

Work on refining your educated optimism—that is, the ability to see around corners, to anticipate challenges, and to still maintain a positive outlook, while preparing for bumps in the road.

### **Attitude**

Great persuaders know that maintaining a healthy attitude is an ongoing commitment to excellence. Most people don’t spend time thinking about their attitudes, and yet they allow their attitudes to control them throughout the day. Rather than attending to their own attitudes, most absorb the attitudes of others and react accordingly. Most of our attitude starts in neutral and is altered by what we decide to think and feel, then we are well on our way to controlling it. The moment we decide how to respond to circumstances, we then determines the degree of our success. We don’t have control over everything that’s going to happen, but we do have 100 percent control over our own attitudes. Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl said, “Everything can be taken from a man but . . . the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Once we realize that attitude is a choice, we must remind ourselves that it is a choice we must make daily—even moment by moment.

Attitude is a habit, and it arises from our expectations—what we expect of ourselves and of others. Great persuaders create, enhance, and maintain expectations with themselves and their audience. Frustration is normally just the result of an unmet expectation or a contradiction between reality and attitude. Great attitude, understanding frustration, and expectation management are part of joining top persuaders.

At the Persuasion Institute, we found that only 14.2 percent of people polled felt they had great attitudes on a daily basis. How can you consistently improve your attitude? One of the biggest factors is in how we talk to ourselves. Remember, we all have a positive voice and a negative voice inside of us. Which voice do you give more power? It is essential that you master the skill of quieting the negative voice. I have noticed with great persuaders that any time negative thoughts arise, they have a plan to disarm them and replace them with positive thoughts. Whatever goes on in your mind is exactly what will come out in performance. It is in this way that we actually have much greater control over our lives than most people realize. William James, psychologist and philosopher, said, “The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of the mind.”

Why is having a positive attitude so critical in influencing others? Our attitudes will be reflected back by those we seek to influence. If you don't feel positively about whatever position it is you're trying to advance, then how can your audience feel positively about it? Whatever attitude you want your audience to possess, you must possess it first. Only then will you be influential.

### **Attitude**

You can often tell where a person's attitude is simply by examining his words. Do you ever catch yourself saying any of the following?

- “I'll just sit this one out.”
- “It takes too much effort.”
- “That's just human nature.”
- “I'm helpless in this situation.”

- “Price is the only thing that matters.”
- “It’s the industry; it is out of my hands.”
- “They already have a supplier they are happy with.”
- “It doesn’t matter what I do; it won’t change anything.”
- “That’s how employees are. What do you expect me to do?”

Even when it is true that circumstances are not under your control, you must be very careful that you don’t adopt a defeatist attitude. Instead of brushing it off as “out of my hands,” “nothing I can do about it,” or other such dismissive and reactive attitude, seize the opportunity to focus on what you *do* have control over and let your attitude positively center around that.

### **Empathy**

The word “empathy” has both Latin and Greek roots. The two parts of the word mean “to see through” and “the eye of the other.” The ability to see through the eye of another creates long-term influence. When people know that you can see what they see, feel what they feel, and hurt the way they hurt, then they will be willing to be influenced by you. Great persuaders have mastered and understand the use of empathy.

Empathy is identifying with and understanding someone else’s situation, feelings, and concerns in a realistic way. It is having the ability to put yourself in their shoes and then genuinely appreciating where they’re at and what they’re dealing with. When people sense that you sincerely empathize with them, they will be significantly more open to your influence. In a world that is full of people who are always trying to get us to do things for their reasons, without any regard for how we may feel about it, it is refreshing to have a truly empathetic person come along.

Empathy helps you feel better, too. Contrary to the messages that we are constantly bombarded with, we actually feel happier when we put others first. As Zig Ziglar wisely said, “The best way to get what you want out of life is to help others get what they want.” Empathy has also been shown to increase productivity and personal

satisfaction, which again is just more proof that in helping others you are also helping yourself. It is interesting to note that studies show that those who are able to show and demonstrate empathy had an above-average self-esteem and felt more socially responsible.

Despite all the evidence of the importance and usefulness of empathy in persuasion, our studies show that while the majority of persuaders feel they are showing empathy toward their audience, the majority of their audience members feel their persuaders are just going through the motions. Empathy is next to impossible to fake. Even if you feel your audience has bought your empathy, think again. They just haven't called you on it.

When you can understand how your audience feels, persuasion and influence become easy. You have walked in your audience's shoes, and they know you feel what they feel. It takes talent to come across as empathic, even when you have true empathy. We live in a self-absorbed world and being empathic is contrary to almost everything you've learned from the world. We learn as children to be demanding, self-centered, and egocentric. Great persuaders forget themselves in the persuasion process, find out what their audience needs, and connect through empathy. It works, and I know this technique is one you can fine-tune. Empathy even creates a close relationship between two strangers.

Unfortunately, the rush of modern life doesn't seem to cultivate a mindset of pausing to help others. If you want to master empathy, you must look for—or even create—the opportunities yourself. If you need to find ways to develop greater empathy, ask yourself the following questions:

“How would I feel if I were that person?”

“Why is that person feeling this way?”

“How can I help?”

“How would I feel if that happened to me?”

Basically, even when assessing situations individually, you will never go wrong by always regarding the universal psychological and emotional needs of the human family: approval, attention, encouragement, and understanding. When you accept the whole person unconditionally, you create empathy. You accept his strengths and triumphs along with his weaknesses, failures, doubts, and fears.

## **Vision**

Great persuaders have and can instill a commanding view of the future with their audience. When you want to influence others, it is essential that you have a strong and clear vision. People come on board when they can see that there is a vivid, solid vision in place that they can touch, taste, feel, or see. No one wants to buy stock in a sinking ship. People want to know: What's the plan? Where are we going? What are we aiming for? In other words—what is the vision? Your job is to powerfully present how your vision is the solution to their problems. Your vision must bridge the gap between their present situation and their *desired* situation—where they are, and where they wish they could be.

A common vision pulls people together toward the same goals and objectives. Influential people have clearly defined visions that are forward looking and filled with great excitement and anticipation. Remember more than anything else in life, vision—whether it's yours or somebody else's—dictates our daily decisions.

Vision is a powerful tool in helping others see the big picture. No matter your persuasive role, whether it is as a parent, a spouse, a teacher, a coach, a friend, a sales rep, or an employee, turning your audience on to your vision is a powerful way to increase your influence.

Vision is such a powerful force because it keeps us focused on the future. Vision gives a sense of directional purpose to people, most of whom don't have a clearly articulated purpose or direction in their lives. Stephen Covey said, "To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps

you take are always in the right direction.”<sup>6</sup> All human beings yearn for direction. That’s why someone with a vision is so alluring to us. When you craft your vision, you must think big. Walt Disney advised:

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency.

True vision affects your audience, even when you’re not around, because a contagious vision influences our thoughts and imagination twenty-four hours a day.

### **Self-Esteem**

Influential persuaders have healthy self-esteem. Self-esteem is how much we like ourselves. It is how confident we are, and how satisfied we are with how we are. Great persuaders with great self-esteem are and comfortable with themselves. High self-esteem causes people to be more generous, upbeat, open-minded, and more influential. People who possess self-esteem are strong and secure, meaning they can admit when they are wrong. They are not unraveled by criticism. As you can imagine, their self-confidence permeates into all aspects of their lives: jobs, education and relationships. Great persuaders with their high self-esteem have the ability to raise the self-esteem of their audience, making them more open to your persuasion and influence.

All human beings need and want praise, recognition, and acceptance. To know and be assured of our worth is perhaps our deepest craving. We want praise and recognition so that we can feel admired and respected. If you communicate and work with individuals in a manner that enhances their self-esteem, you increase your influence with them. The proper use of esteem building and giving sincere compliments can change and enhance behavior. The individual receiving the praise now has a reputation to live up to and an opportunity to prove and fulfill the compliment’s validity.

Great persuaders do not become a threat to someone's self-esteem. They are sure that their audience feels capable of what they are asking them to do. If you are offering to help someone, and they perceive that they should know how to help themselves, it is a blow to their esteem. If receiving help sparks a negative self-message, recipients are likely to feel threatened and respond negatively. We are quicker to believe flattering descriptions of ourselves than unflattering ones.

*Low* self-esteem also affects our thinking and our actions. Here are several ways low self-esteem dictates what we say and do:

- We remember and justify our past actions in self-enhancing ways.
- We exhibit an inflated degree of confidence in our beliefs and judgments.
- We exhibit group pride (for example, we tend to see our personal group as superior, whether it be our religion, where we went to school, or the country we're from).
- We overestimate how much others support our opinions and share our shortcomings.
- We continuously compare ourselves to others.
- We feel strength and esteem based on our status or possessions.
- We tend to tear others down to enhance our own feelings about ourselves.

The studies at the Persuasion Institute indicate that most of our communication is construed as negative, regardless of the intention. Even when you say something positive, there are those people who will turn it around and take it as something negative. When you find yourself in a persuasive situation, it is essential that you seek to enhance your audience's ego in a sincere way. Too often, we present ourselves in a manner that instills feelings of threat, competition, jealousy, and mistrust in our audience. Be sure your praise is sincere and genuine.

You can't ever go wrong offering sincere praise. It's only going to make people feel better, happier, more energetic, and more productive. You've probably experienced

this yourself. When you receive sincere praise, you get a smile on your face and your spirits soar. Don't wait for a good reason or for something big to happen. Be generous with your praise. Make it a habit to give sincere praise every day and you will be well on your way to increasing your potential to positively influence others.

In a culture that grows increasingly cynical, you may worry about whether or not your praise will be taken as sincere. Consider the following three points to help ensure that your praise is accepted:

1. Find something positive to praise.
2. Praise the specific act, not the person.
3. Be sincere and genuine.

People will be much more open to your input and suggestions when you help them feel good about themselves, their work, and their accomplishments. This only works if you have a high self-esteem yourself. Top persuaders know that there is a direct correlation between their self-esteem and their ability to raise their audience's self-esteem. When you make your audience feel that their contributions are essential, it will not be long before they become your willing supporters.

### **Influential Presence**

A bit of fragrance clings to the hand that gives flowers.

—CHINESE PROVERB

Influence is the cruise control on your car of success. Once established or set, you don't need facts and figures to persuade someone. You can influence them because of who you are. It will take seconds instead of hours to influence. Great persuaders know how to develop both short-term and long-term influence. Development of your influential presence will enable you to build, motivate, and empower others to take action. When you master and utilize all of the essential elements of influence—charisma, passion, optimism, attitude, empathy, vision, and self-esteem—you will be giving yourself the energy and presence you need to get results.

### **The Blue Jay and the Peacock: A Fable**

A blue jay ventured into a meadow where peacocks lived. There, he found a number of feathers that had fallen from the peacocks when they were molting. He tied the feathers to his tail and strutted down toward the peacocks. As he neared, they discovered his deceit and began to peck at his head and pluck away at his borrowed feathers. So, the blue jay had to go back to the other blue jays, who had watched his behavior from a distance. They, however, were equally upset and annoyed with him.

*Meaning:* Not only will deception and deceit fail to influence your enemies but it will also destroy your friendships.

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