

Understanding How Your Audience Thinks

Great persuaders instinctively sense and know what other people are thinking and feeling. Imagine if you could get inside your audience's mind. How do they really feel about you? Wouldn't it help immensely if you knew the questions and concerns brewing in their minds? What if you knew their key motivators, their true feelings? Are they telling the truth? Are they lying to you?

This "sixth sense" takes time to develop. Even the most seasoned persuader needs to take a second look at this skill. Why? We've found that less than 8 percent of persuaders have mastered, use, or even understand its importance. They tend to guess and assume what everyone needs and wants. They might be right part the time, but of course that means they are wrong most the time.

Understanding human nature is essential to maximizing your greatest persuasion potential. Have you ever wondered how the mind works? Why do we do what we do? Why do many people do the opposite of what is best for them? Great persuaders can find patterns in human nature and customize their ability to persuade accordingly. Human behavior can be predictable; there are certain triggers or knee-jerk reactions we all have. Great persuaders understand both the decision-making process and consumer psychology. When you go to buy shampoo, there are so many options that you have to develop shortcuts in your decision-making process. Do you decide based on color, smell, recommendation, price, or even ingredients? Typically, you follow your instincts instead of weighing all options. When you ask someone why they bought something, I can guarantee that their answer and the real reason will usually be two different things.

Most persuasion operates below the level of conscious thought. Therefore, understanding persuasion involves understanding the human psyche. Such knowledge empowers you to improve your persuasive abilities. A great persuader can help someone see the inconsistency of his present state and what he needs to do to get to his desired state. This magnifies your effectiveness in relationships, improves your parenting skills,

enhances your leadership ability, and helps you sell yourself and your ideas. In short, it maximizes your influence.

Be patient with yourself as you work to implement the principles and techniques I outline in this chapter. Remember, it is not about getting a few more quick-fix gimmicks under your belt. I want you to master these skills to such a degree that they become a natural part of you. I want you to own them. Master these skills and people will feel comfortable around you and you will become more persuasive. You will be able to read them and understand their needs and concerns in a natural, non-threatening way. People won't even sense that you're trying to persuade them. They'll feel like they're just having a natural conversation with someone who is their advocate.

It sounds too easy, doesn't it? How is it possible that great persuaders can bypass all the scrutiny, skepticism, cynicism, and distrust that people have today? And how can they do so in a non-aggressive, compassionate manner? This is the secret: There are two paths to persuasion—the conscious and the subconscious. Both paths can persuade others to your way of thinking, but each path uses very different means of processing information. With the conscious path, your audience makes a conscious and active effort to understand, define, and process an argument. This type of person is an intellectual decision-maker. She just wants the facts, and she doesn't need the "warm fuzzies." It is best to be direct and not resist this person's desire to cut to the chase. If you try to dress it up, you will annoy, frustrate, and ultimately lose your persuasiveness with her.

With the subconscious path, on the other hand, the listener spends little or no time processing the information. These people respond more to gut instincts, intuition, and other emotionally based triggers. They just want to feel right about things. They are emotional decision-makers. The key to great persuasion is understanding how to balance the use of both logic and emotion.