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How To Use the Six Laws of Persuasion during a Negotiation

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Introduction

To get what you want in life, in work, and in play, requires constant negotiation with a variety of people. This involves basic communication skills, such as active listening and attention to non-verbal cues, and a clear understanding of your goals, as well as the objectives of your negotiating partner(s). To be truly effective, however, you need to know more. You should be able to communicate persuasively during the process of negotiation.

Many situations you'll face as IT managers and employees will require you to effectively negotiate to a mutually beneficial (win-win) solution, including:

1. Responding to staff members' requests for promotions, salary increases, and other employment perks (as well as negotiating your own)
2. Negotiating with vendors for their best possible products, services, and prices
3. Convincing your team to do what you would like them to do
4. Working with external and internal clients on contracts (such as Service Level Agreements) that provide the quality services and equipment they need but in a manner that allows you to use your resources optimally
5. Persuading supervisors to buy additional equipment, accept your budget proposals, try a new idea, etc.

In order to be successful in these instances, you must master the persuasion process, which will enable you to deliberately create the attitude change and subsequent actions necessary for persuading others to your way of thinking. In other words, you have to be able to "sell" your ideas in order to make changes in your favor and, in a win-win situation, provide the other side with a fair deal. This entails a process that can appeal to the intellect using logical and objective criteria, as well as a methodology that positively engages the emotions of the negotiators. The result of a successful negotiation is that all parties should believe they got a good deal.

The Six Laws of Persuasion: an Overview

Persuasion is the ability to influence people's thoughts and actions through specific strategies. To become adept at this skill, you must first understand some basic principles, called the Laws of Persuasion. These six laws by themselves are neither good nor bad, but describe how most people respond to certain circumstances. Psychologist Robert Cialdini wrote the seminal book on the Laws of Persuasion, titled *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, in which he discusses the prevalent methods of marketing. Even though you may not wish to believe it, a great deal of psychological research indicates that human beings are quite predictable in terms of behavior in response to certain stimuli, such as ads. This is why marketing and advertising are highly successful enterprises—by and large, consumers respond to most ads and commercials by buying the products and services they promote. By understanding persuasion laws, you can control how much others unduly influence you, as well as how to use them to your benefit during negotiations.

The laws work because they provide shortcuts to making the countless decisions people face every day as they look for information to reduce the complexity of life. If you can apply these laws in specific situations to your benefit, then your influence over others increases significantly. Some of the best masters of the art of persuasion in negotiation are highly successful salespeople who do their best not only to make the sale, but also to meet the needs of their buyers.

Here are Cialdini's Six Laws of Persuasion:

Law of Reciprocity

Human beings, in general, try to repay in kind what another person has provided to them. If someone gives you something you want (or perhaps didn't "realize" you wanted), then you will wish to reciprocate because you now feel obligated. Examples of this Law include the address labels you receive in the mail from various non-profits requesting charitable contributions. Even though they are a minor, unsolicited "gift," sending them has increased contributions for non-profits many-fold, because people feel compelled to "return the favor."

Giving free samples to potential customers is another way in which this Law is used by successful salespeople.

Law of Commitment and Consistency

People like to be (or at least appear to be) consistent in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Once they have made a stand, they tend to stick to it and behave in ways that justify their earlier decisions, even if they are erroneous. If you make a commitment to a cause or product, however small, it then becomes easier to be convinced to increase it. This is especially true if the commitment changes your view of yourself in a favorable way. This is why salespersons attempt to get customers to agree with them multiple times. After saying "yes" so often, it is almost impossible to say "no" when it comes time for the close or direct request for the sale.

Law of Liking

When you like someone, or believe that they are "just like you," you are more inclined to want to please them and, therefore, purchase whatever they are selling. This is how successful salespeople operate; they establish rapport by demonstrating how similar they are to their potential buyers. For example, they note that they are from a comparable background as you, or even better, they are people you know—your friends. As for those in-home sales parties, the kicker comes when your neighbors provide the testimonials for the product. You don't want to disappoint them by not purchasing, do you?

Law of Scarcity

If you are not sure you want to buy something, the minute it becomes "the last one available" you tend to have second thoughts. After all, this must indicate that others are purchasing it, and you might not be able to get another one quickly, or at all, if you decide you want it later. So you take the bait to buy a popular item that others won't be able to get. At least that's what you think.

Law of Authority

This is the law that uses celebrity endorsements or "expert" testimonials. When people you admire promote a product or service, if it's good enough for them, then it's good enough for you. And if you use it, then you might even develop similar characteristics to your heroes, such as good looks, wealth, or fame. That's what the advertisers are counting on.

Law of Social Proof

Why have TV sitcoms used canned laugh tracks for years? Producers wouldn't employ them unless they actually are successful in eliciting audience laughter and, subsequently, higher ratings. Part of the reason you laugh along anyway in spite of your annoyance lies in how you decide what is socially "correct" behavior. If you don't know exactly what to do, you rely on others around you (or the virtual TV audience) to help you find the way to properly react. You think if others are engaging in a specific behavior, it must be the proper thing to do. Hence, you laugh in spite of yourself, or if you're told that "everyone is buying this product or service," even without evidence, you may think you're missing out if you don't comply or conform and get it for yourself.

Using the Laws of Persuasion

As mentioned, in any negotiation, all parties should arrive at a conclusion that makes them feel like they got a good deal, especially if an on-going relationship is involved. (Note: a "good deal" is not always the same for everyone; negotiators often have different criteria by which they judge the success of their bargaining outcomes.) Often when dealing with "tough" or "hard" negotiators, you encounter manipulative tactics that use the preceding Laws of Persuasion. So how do you successfully negotiate around these ploys?

First, you can discuss the rules of the game. When you recognize that the other side is using one or more of the Laws of Persuasion, you can either directly note it, or simply steer the conversation to a more objective solution. And for the ultimate in law prevention, you can set preconditions ahead of time that will preclude such strategies by using only logical principles as a standard process in the negotiation.

Negotiation strategies using the Six Laws of Persuasion include the following:

Law of Reciprocity

Limited disclosure/confession of the real reason for a negotiation stance, such as "this is all the money we have," can provoke a concession from the other party. (This is often seen in salary/promotion negotiations.) Concessions in general follow this "tit-for-tat" rule (the lower the "value" of the concession on your part, of course, the better).

You can also use this law to appeal to fairness. For example, if the other party manipulates the physical environment by requiring that your team sits facing the sun, at the next meeting they should reciprocate.

Law of Commitment and Consistency

An example of this tactic would be using a series of questions to conduct the step-by-step close. Dale Carnegie, in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, called this, "Get the other person saying 'yes, yes' immediately." This occurs when one party asks the other side to make a number of "small" decisions that lead to only one obvious conclusion: to accept the general concession. You could employ this principle by asking a potential client if she values quality in your product or service. Of course the only answer would be "yes." Then you could follow with a question that begs the obvious: "We'd love to provide you with this product/service, but if we don't get the resources we need from you (i. e. sufficient money) and quality suffers as a result, would you still want it?" How can the prospect say "yes" to poor quality? This tactic makes it easier for you to ask for additional funds.

You might also see an example of this ploy when lowballing (intentional last-minute additions to what was originally a low price) occurs. Unscrupulous vendors might attempt to make you psychologically “invest” in a product that you initially believe costs less.

Law of Liking

This law is often seen in the strategy of “good cop, bad cop,” where one person in the other negotiating party is clearly opposed to your objectives, but it appears that another of their team members is “on your side.” This causes you to identify with and trust the “good” team member, so you may find yourself agreeing to the other team’s concessions and goals instead of your own. You can see this in situations where a salesperson “battles” their supervisor to get you a “better” deal (of course this was the result they wanted in the first place).

You might also apply this law to establish rapport up front when you are negotiating with your own superiors or teams.

Law of Scarcity

The more time you spend with a salesperson, the more commitment he or she has to make the deal. If you are under no time pressure and the other side is, you have the upper hand.

Law of Authority

Vendors often quote vague authorities to sell their wares, “Experts say our product is the best.” But who are these experts? What are their qualifications to make these claims? Do they have a vested interest in selling the company’s products or services? In addition, use this Law to establish your own credentials/credibility early in the negotiation.

Law of Social Proof

This law works when you draw on testimonials from satisfied customers or clients (unscripted ones are best) to encourage new prospects to buy your services and products.

The law also can be used to convince your supervisors or staff that their counterparts in other divisions or companies are following similar suggestions to yours. People want to feel like they are part of an established community that already knows where it is going.

Ethical Issues

Persuasion can be used for good or ill. In an environment that seeks to follow ethical rules, it should only be used to make lives better. Manipulation occurs when you exploit or deceive others solely for your own gain. This does not result in a win-win situation.

Summary

Being adept at persuasion is often the missing key to success in the workplace and your personal life. If you give people what they want via the Six Laws of Persuasion, they’ll most likely return the favor. And when you recognize that you are being manipulated, you can call the other side on their tactics and counter with an appropriate strategy. This will lead to a more effective way of achieving the goals of all negotiating parties.

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