PERSUASION | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | PRESENTATION

Persuasion – How to Speak So People Listen

You can't please all the people all the time, but you can hold their attention long enough to get your point across if you master the basics!

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Why are there some speakers that can command the attention of everyone in the room, while others struggle to compete with the mumblings of a disinterested and easily distracted audience? Can it be they have more charisma? Is it the dulcet tones of their hypnotic voices? Or is their topic so riveting nobody can tear themselves away?

Similarly, this applies to casual situations when you are chatting with friends or trying to be heard in an office meeting. Do you have to be loud to be heard? Why do some people effortlessly grab all the attention while others can stand on their heads whistling Dixie and still be invisible?

Don't despair.

While there may be naturally spellbinding people in the world, the majority have learned their craft and so can you.

Communication skills can be learned by anybody.

Here are **16 tips** to help you attract and keep your audience's attention. These will work whether you are speaking officially to a large room of people or just casually to one person:

To be truly persuasive, you must be sincere. If you don't fully believe what you are saying and trying to convince others of, then don't say it because it will show. You must look and sound sincere, believable and enthusiastic if you want others to buy-in.

Practice makes perfect. Any sign you are not 100% familiar with your subject or 100% confident in the delivery of your talk will be evident. If you don't want to practice in front of your family and friends, do it in front of your mirror.

Enhance your skills by using every opportunity you have to perfect your speaking voice: how do you answer the phone, how do you sound on your answering machine, how do strangers respond to you when you first meet? Every time you open your mouth and speak, think of it as homework. Pay attention to how others respond to you and learn from your mistakes.

Use people's names, it makes you memorable because you remembered them! People like to be acknowledged and remembered. You will earn their respect *and* their attention.

Be interested, not interesting. People love to talk about themselves and being a good listener is all part of being a good communicator. So take interest in others, ask questions and make sure the conversation is balanced.

Slow down. Don't talk too fast.

> **People's brains evaluate information at different speeds but the one speed everyone can understand and take in is a slow, steady pace.**

Not so slow that you send everyone to sleep, but your audience needs pauses so we can contemplate what we've just heard before being bombarded with the next thought. People who talk too much or too fast make it difficult for everybody to follow and understand.

Know your audience. You wouldn't deliver a speech on early childhood education to a group of university leaders, right?

> **Make sure you match the topic of your talk with your audience if you want their undivided attention. The same rule applies to general conversation. Keep in mind what your ultimate goal is and maintain the focus on that.**

If you have made arrangements to discuss your business with somebody new, don't get sidetracked because you may not get a second opportunity with this person.

Use stories, anecdotes and examples to liven up your conversation. Avoid jokes unless you know exactly what you are doing and are confident of how your audience will receive it. Keep in mind it is very easy to offend people and unless you know how to deliver the joke successfully, you won't get any laughs.

If delivering a presentation, **consider visual aids** to add interest. The aids should not take all the attention away from you it should merely enhance your presentation and work to keep the audience attention on what you are saying.

Watch your body language. Your words might be saying one thing but your eyes, hands and posture might be saying something else. Try to appear natural and confident. Never cross your arms and don't put your hands in your pockets. Look at yourself in a mirror to see what others are seeing. You want to come across as warm, friendly, trustworthy and believable.

It is suggested that you **establish eye contact** with those you speak with. This applies whether you are speaking to one person or a room full of people. If speaking to a group of people, take turns selecting one member at a time to focus on. Look them in the eye and when you have their attention, focus for a few seconds so they also realize you just shared eye contact before looking away. Each time you are moving across a stage or looking around a room, choose a different person to share eye contact with. This will make all of them feel included.

Spice up your vocals. A monotone speaker will send your audience to sleep. Sound excited when appropriate, slow down when you want to stress something important or serious, use different volumes and speeds and inflections in your voice. Note: if you overdo this in casual conversation you risk appearing insincere and trying too hard. The key is to sound enthusiastic, but natural!

Whatever the occasion, if you want to attract and keep attention, **dress appropriately.** You don't want attention on your outfit, you want it on you. You can never go wrong if you dress professionally. Keep distracting accessories, like flashy ties and jewelry, to a minimum.

In casual conversations or in meetings, **don't come across as a know it all or overly critical.**

> **Don't force your personal opinions on others. Ask if they are interested to hear your opinion, especially if what you are about to say might be sensitive.**

In heated debates or outright arguments, **look for common ground**, any point, no matter how minor, that you can agree on. Keep your own voice calm and quiet. Remain respectful. You can win the other person over by letting him know you are listening, respecting his different point of view and by remaining calm.

Avoid slang and jargon, especially in presentations. Leave the "ums and ahs" and words such as "like" to the teenagers. Try to match your manner of speech with your audience, although, you will find that adults have no place using teenage terminology even when they are talking to teenagers.

Made a mistake? Don't beat yourself up. Realize that some people respond better when you get straight to the point, while others need that longer story-telling phase. Then, there are those who turn off if you talk too fast because they can't keep up, and others who tune out because you are speaking too slow and boring them.

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Terri Levine "The Business Growth Guru" is a coach and consultant who mentors entrepreneurs world wide to make more money while working less. Her techniques are proven effective, simple to implement and low cost. She is also the best selling author of many books including her latest "Sell Without Selling: Lessons From The Jungle for Sales Success". Levine is a professional keynote speaker and offers workshops and seminars as well. More about the author: www.TerriLevine.com