

Ten 'Golden Rules' for Persuading Others

We all need to be persuasive to get our points of view across effectively. But are there any 'golden rules'? Here are ten, well proven. We probably knew them already – but do we always apply them?

We all have to influence and persuade others, whether at work or at home, and most of us find that coercion and manipulation rarely works well for long. There are indeed very many better ways...

1. **Build Trust**

Even some 2,300 years ago, the philosopher Aristotle recognised that logic alone may not be sufficient to persuade others. To be truly influential, he suggested it may be essential to demonstrate first a common '*ethos*', or a shared set of values. We don't have to like each other, but we do have to trust each other! (Try being persuaded by someone you *don't* trust?)

2. **Build Empathy**

Aristotle went further: he also suggested that after building on shared values, it is far easier to persuade others by employing '*pathos*', or an understanding of 'what it is like to be them'. That is why it can be so smart to hear the other side's story first, *before* we give them ours. (This is also why it can be invaluable to '*walk a thousand paces in another's moccasins*' - we do need to understand each other!)

3. **No lies – no exaggeration**

It is often tempting to gild arguments with a little 'poetic licence', but note that exaggeration, let alone falsehoods, can destroy both trust and empathy. Once even one untruth is spotted by others, the rest of our arguments may be discounted and even rejected, however valid they may be overall.

4. **Build your case from the bottom**

Especially when time is short, it may seem attractive to give others our conclusions first, before providing the reasons. Wrong! If those we seek to persuade do not like our conclusions, they won't be listening to our justification. They will be spending all their energy in finding reasons why our conclusions must be wrong. So build your case up from the bottom, so that your eventual conclusions may then appear to be the only logical outcome possible.

5. **Keep it short**

While some people hate arguments of any kind, far fewer welcome long explanations. So keep yours short, sharp and crisp. You can always amplify them later if you need to.

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6. Keep it relevant

Many arguments fail to persuade because they didn't seem relevant to those being persuaded. You need to know what may be relevant to the other side. Refer back to Golden Rule 2!

7. Use only a few good arguments at a time

Some feel it helpful to support a case by giving *all* the arguments. Not so! In most debates, a strong case needs only two or three really good supporting reasons, at least to start with. By adding more, apart from increasing the chance of confusion, we not only dilute the impact of those really good reasons we could have focused on, we also offer more hostages to fortune for incidental, nit-picking debate. You can always declare your subsidiary reasons at a later stage, as additional reinforcement if you need to.

8. Be positive and confident

If *you* don't really believe in your case, why should anyone else? Unwarranted, blind confidence is clearly crass; overwhelming confidence may suggest that the issues have not really been properly thought through. But a lack of confidence may suggest that the case being presented really is rather flimsy.

9. Watch and listen for reactions

As they say: *'Those persuaded 'gainst their will, are of the same opinion still'*! So don't take minimal reaction to your proposals as silent acceptance – they may be no more than 'dumb insolence'! Although some may express their reactions to your proposals quite verbally, some will indicate their silent reaction quite clearly by even unintended body-language, while others will need time to digest what you have proposed before you can expect any useful response. Don't miss these cues, and give people time to ponder on any difficult propositions.

10. Different folks – different strokes!

However *you* may like best to be persuaded, do not fall into the trap in thinking that all *others* will. Psychological research (by Dr Susan Brock, based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator[®]) shows that some people need 'the facts' to be persuaded, without which any proposition may seem unsupported. But others may far rather have 'the logic', a very different appeal. (For them, 'facts' may be two-a-penny, but the overall rationale may be far more convincing.) Equally, others may focus much more on the emotional content and consequences to be persuaded, whether on the impact of any conclusions on 'service' to themselves or others, or on their inherent 'vision and values' of how people should be treated, which by the way are rarely open to logical debate alone. So be ready to appeal to all possibilities.



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