

# PERSUASION 101

## Simple Tools of Persuasion For A Complex World - "For the Non-Salesperson!"

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### The Art of the Weasel, and Selling of Ideas By: Nick Kemp

As a trainer, periodically, I get some unusual requests. One of the most interesting in recent times was the invitation to work with an entire group of science teachers to improve communication and persuasion skills in the classroom.

In this article I have laid out some of the exercises and areas which we covered during the time we spent together. Of course, what we explored can be applied to many other situations, as any kind of communication is essentially some form of persuasion.

#### ARE YOU LISTENING?

I always like to start a seminar by asking the delegates what they would find most useful from the day. This allows me to gauge better how much differentiation there is within the group, as well as individual expectations and their personal beliefs as to what they believe to be possible.

Each delegate paired up and relayed to each other their expectations and then fed back to the room. It immediately became apparent that some of the assembled had seriously underdeveloped abilities in listening! Interestingly those with historically the poorest classroom control were the main offenders in this area. Some present were quite shocked to see that they previously had not really paid full attention to what their students asked them and began to suspect that this was a significant element in their struggle to maintain good rapport with those particular students.

#### GETTING ATTENTION AND SELLING IDEAS.

When addressing any group of people, first impressions are crucial. This is especially true in teaching situations, where it's vital that the teacher has sufficient skills and awareness to engage and influence the classroom.

It's all too easy to blame a class for not being interested, when in many instances the teacher has failed to make it interesting!

Rather than selling products, these guys are selling ideas and visions of what is possible for each student. Great persuaders do exactly the same; they engage our imaginations with their use of language and how they conduct themselves, because a large part of communication is non verbal. In verbal communication it's important to ensure that the teacher is "speaking the same language as the students". A good way to achieve this is by using stories and creating those associations that will be familiar to them. By consciously doing this they create better rapport and potential to direct those in front of them. This technique is of course a key element in all forms of sales and persuasion.

Every piece of information delivered has the potential to affect the other person in some manner. This is why language and how questions and statements are phrased can create so many different outcomes. I am reminded of a phrase by Frank Farrelly, the creator of Provocative Therapy and a master communicator

"Run it up the flaG pole and see if they salute it"

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## THE ART OF THE WEASEL

When developing persuasion skills, awareness of language is a key factor. A few years ago I discovered the following phrases (known in some quarters as "weasel phrases" - boy I love that term!) which are invaluable resources in developing persuasion by capturing the imagination of whoever is in front of us. I use these extensively in customer support, sales and management training, but this was the first time I had applied them directly to the field of education!

Each phrase is designed to maintain the listener's attention and have been referred to as "suggestive predicates"

Examples of weasel phrases are:

*And the more you (X)...the more you (Y)*

*And as you...*

*Are you curious about...*

*Are you aware that...*

*Has it ever occurred to you that...*

*Have you noticed that...*

*Have you ever wondered..*

*Have you...*

*Have you ever...*

*How would you feel if...*

*How do you know that...*

*I wonder if...*

*I don't know how soon...*

*I wonder could you...*

*I'm wondering...*

I instructed each teacher to create a simple 3-minute introduction to the start of each lesson by combining these phrases.

For example:

*"I don't know how interested you are going to be in what we will be doing today, but I know that the more you pay attention to what we will cover, the more interesting you will find this subject."*

By practicing these patterns it was easy to see that the results were quite extraordinary, as each person began to realise how powerful language can be in improving their persuasion capability in the classroom. The teachers were absolutely intrigued by how easy it was to use these patterns to directly influence a class's ability to pay attention! Later I found out that many of the previously inattentive students became far more interested as the teachers used this "weasely approach" Other exercises later in the day dealt with rhythm and tonality, ensuring that the vocal delivery had a variation, again essential in maintaining the student's attention.

## THE RESULTS

The head of science gave me the following feedback after the initial sessions!

*"Nick has given us an entirely new perspective on raising achievement within our team of 17 science teachers. He has worked to identify what we really need, structured a training and consultancy programme to implement key ideas... The point is - these ideas have worked. and we have the results to prove their effectiveness!"*

Mick Statham

Head of Science

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## THE ELEMENT OF RESPECT IN PERSUASION By: Carolyn Furrow

EDUCATION-WISE, I am a works-in-progress; so much of this article is based on experience and history; both personal and job related. It seems to be very true that we are often our “own worst enemies”. Our behavior and/or thought processes are often faulty and keep us from being the best we can be when it comes to personal growth and/or mental health. Getting well usually means change, and that is not always easy.

PEOPLE in the “people-helping professions” are constantly faced with the challenge of persuading someone that they need to change in order to reach their goal, improve their relationships, or improve their mental health, etc. Behavior, when repeated over a long period of time, becomes rooted in our perception of self. Approaching this in a negative or derogatory manner will only serve to put up a wall of resistance and defense.

IN MY OWN personal experience, I have found that the only way anyone is going to persuade me to change my beliefs is if they - show respect for me as a person and respect for my beliefs, - even though those beliefs may be wrong!

I WORKED as a secretary in a social services agency for twenty-three years. I was the person the clients saw first before seeing a social worker. Even though the client may be someone whose lifestyle was not one that I could approve of, I found that if I treated them with the respect, of one human being to another, then their interaction with the social worker often was more positive!

NOWHERE did this seem to be more obvious than in the area of child welfare. Many times the client entered our office in such an emotionally charged state that it could very easily become “explosive”. By treating them respectfully, I was often able to persuade them to cooperate with the worker in order to achieve a positive outcome.

RESPECT IS, IN MY OPINION, A VERY IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN PERSUASION!

*Carolyn Furrow [carolynfurrow@sbcglobal.net](mailto:carolynfurrow@sbcglobal.net) is a retired secretary from the Department of Human Services where she worked for 23 years. She is currently attending college – and is only a “few hours away” from getting her bachelor's degree in psychology!*

***“It is never too late to educate yourself!”***

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