

Planning to Present 7 – Where there is a need for hidden persuasion

There are often situations when we have to persuade audiences to accept ideas and proposals that will encounter reluctance, maybe resentment or even deep-rooted resistance. These would be those situations that typically involve significant change of ways or attitude or simply occasions where our personal authority is un-established. What is certain in these situations is that if we do all the talking and rely on overt persuasion, then we will very likely fail.

Here are some techniques to consider that use a much more covert form of persuasion to secure agreement. They each in some way allow people to experience for themselves the issues and recognize the need for change and through this to “own” the required outcomes.

Socratic Persuasion – Socrates the Greek philosopher won agreement to his views by skillfully posing questions rather than by making statements. The key to success with this approach is careful pre-planning of the opening questions that will allow us to:

1. Lead the audience easily into the opportunity area.
2. Develop the responses until they are adequately covered
3. Develop and confirm agreement of the need to change.
4. Lead into the area of probable solutions
5. Qualify and agree on the desired solutions.

As we carefully lead audience thinking through our “sign posting” questions, we need to probe, qualify and isolate responses so that we ultimately converge at our own intended outcome. Summarizing and paraphrasing of responses is other half of this technique that makes this happen as we subtly meld our words into theirs.

This style is not confined to small groups with real time interaction. We can apply it to large audiences using: interactive technology; Q & A or break-out sessions, Video Vox Pops, or even rhetorical questioning where the speaker poses both questions and probable answers in advocating style,

For this technique to be effective our role must be seen as facilitator but at the same time we are navigator and we have to have a very clear “route map” setting out the target outcome and the specific agreements we need to secure en route.

Stories – Stories are a powerful way to gain audience acceptance of your message. They can be told directly as simple examples or case studies to illustrate your message. They can also be told indirectly in the form of an analogy or traditional parable. Stories allow audiences to experience and therefore feel the meaning of a message. They allow the audience to adapt the “generic” message and parallel it to their own circumstance. This is particularly the case when communicating “difficult” issues by way of analogies.

Because the “hidden” meaning is discovered by self-analysis its relevance and conclusions are more likely to be accepted. Stories also engage our “right-brain” where greater imagination and a sense of the bigger picture can be found. They distract from the critical conscious thinking which is more inclined to question an idea rather than accept it. Well told stories also embed

themselves in the memory and as we all know from the likes of Aesop's Fable, they will influence perceptions, values and actions for life!

To create a compelling story, incorporate these features:

- Opening "hook" that instills curiosity
- Vivid images, sounds and feelings in the description that will add experience and feeling and reinforce it in the memory
- Metaphors and analogies to enhance understanding meaning and originality
- Time reference to add realism and context
- Central character(s) with features that the audience can relate with
- Challenges & difficulties encountered. This is really the plot!
- Solutions/Outcomes
- Twist/Something unexpected. The bit that makes the story memorable. For best impact this should link back with the opening "Hook" and explain that.
- The moral or lessons learnt.

Copyright © Bob Howard-Spink

Bob Howard-Spink is a partner in "*Persuadability*." For more tips and information on how we can help you improve your persuadability visit www.persuadability.co.uk