

The Brain Science of Persuasion

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The Brain Science of Persuasion:

7 Automatic Triggers

By Mark Herbert

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People make two major mistakes when trying to persuade:
others.

1. Using the argument that would work best on themselves
2. Overestimating the power of logic and rationality

Instead of researching what makes people buy or make decisions, they ask themselves, "What would motivate *me* to participate in this program or buy this product?"

The fact is, persuasion can be defined, learned and successfully incorporated into anyone's communication abilities. It doesn't matter if you work in sales, marketing or another field directly related to persuasion. Every leader or manager depends on getting things done through others.

Getting Things Done Through Others

Your boss may give you specific powers, but execution and results come from successfully influencing others.

So, what does brain science tell us about the natural processes of decision-making and being influenced?

- With the recent advent of real-time brain-imaging technology, we can now look at what happens inside the brain as we process information, make decisions and respond to others.

Feelings First, Logic Later

Most of us try to persuade by using our best arguments, best data, logical flow charts and rationality to generate the thinking, decisions and actions we seek. Business leaders still believe everyone relies heavily on logic and reason to make decisions. We've traditionally believed that emotion wreaks havoc on rationality, especially in business.

As science evolves, we're starting to realize that emotions come first. Not only do they guide our decisions and actions, but we're incapable of making decisions without them.

We use the emotional parts of our brain to make rational decisions. Emotional context helps us make the best choices, often in a split second, long before the rational centers of the brain are even activated.

The Brain Science of Persuasive Powers

We respond to persuasive attempts either analytically or automatically.

Those who respond analytically use a reasoned evaluative approach to come to a decision, but this requires enormous energy. The brain uses up reserves of glucose and calories whenever it evaluates. And because it's human nature to conserve energy, most of us won't respond with the extra effort required to be analytical. In fact, most people slip into automatic-response mode whenever possible.

This doesn't mean you can skip logical arguments, but it does place less emphasis on reason and more on emotion. When you understand that people want to make rapid, automatic and accelerated decisions, you can make it easier on those you're trying to influence.

How do we generate automatic influence? With triggers. Everybody has them. A trigger is any stimulus that will help us make a non-thinking decision or action. A trigger

activates a person's immediate compliance with an attempt to influence. It's simply a shortcut to avoid the pain and effort of mental activity.

Let's examine the seven triggers that automatically influence others.

1. The Friendship Trigger

We are more easily influenced by people we like, and liking is a prerequisite for the other triggers. Friendship generates trust, and trust activates a strong internal trigger. Find connections and common interests, and listen to the people you wish to influence.

2. The Authority Trigger

We respond with unthinking, automatic compliance to those we believe have authority, credibility and power. Managers and leaders may think they have authority by virtue of their position, but without the likeability factor, this trigger is weakened. The authority trigger works because we assume the person in position of authority has done the evaluation work for us.

3. The Consistency Trigger

Our internal guidance system compels us to be consistent in the way we see ourselves and the peers we admire. We are slaves to consistency and conformity; in fact, these drives are hard-wired into our brain. When it's time to make a decision, we call up an emotional memory that's similar to the

situation at hand, and we're guided in the same direction.

4. The Reciprocity Trigger

Reciprocity is the well-documented psychological desire to give back to someone who has given us a gift. It's another automatic response hard-wired into our brains. Marketers have been using bonus gifts and free samples for years.

5. The Contrast Trigger

Framing a proposition so it appears more desirable than an alternative is a proven automatic compliance technique. Always present the most onerous approach first, followed by what you really want.

6. The Reason Why Trigger

When you present a valid reason to accept a proposition, you achieve compliance.

7. The Hope Trigger

We are easily persuaded by those who understand our hopes, wishes and dreams. Once we perceive an opportunity to satisfy them, we seldom rely on cognitive thought or logic before we act.

Six Steps to a Persuasive Presentation

Here's a proposed outline for framing a successful presentation that persuades others to act in the direction you desire:

1. Write down your persuasion goal, what you hope to accomplish, what you expect others to do and the ideal time frame.
2. List the questions you'll ask your audience to determine their perceptions on the issue.
3. List each of the seven internal triggers. Under each one, list every possible item that could apply. Select and prioritize the three or four triggers best suited to the situation.
4. Frame your presentation with the beginning and ending that have the highest impact. The friendship trigger, coupled with the reciprocity trigger, is a great start. You'll also want early application of the authority trigger.
5. The body of the proposal, including the logic and data, will follow the other trigger information. Minimal application of logic and data will reinforce a positive decision.
6. Finally, frame your closure by defining precisely what you want your audience to do, and determine how you will ask for this action.

Recommended Reading:

Cialdini, Robert B., *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Collins Business Essentials, 2007.

Cialdini, Robert B., Goldstein, N., Martin, S.J., *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive*, Free Press, 2008.

Granger, Russell H. *The 7 Triggers to Yes*, McGraw-Hill, 2008.