**Persuasion: The art of influencing people**


Abstract

The book offers essential building blocks, based on sincerity and empathy, for developing the capacity for influencing others. Practical guidance includes how to be a good listener, how to make words work for you, how to acquire telephone telepathy and memory skills.

We all rely heavily on our persuasive powers every day. Whether it is trying to get people to agree with you, influencing others to make a decision, asking for something, or attempting to bring about a change of behaviour or attitude in others, your success will depend on how persuasive you can be. This book's claim is that, by applying its psychology-based principles to your working life, you can learn to be more powerfully persuasive.

Whether it is in your professional life or your personal life, says James Borg, much of your success is due to a combination of self-assessment and situational assessment - being aware of what is going on inside you and being aware of what is happening outside you. He offers a set of 'golden rules' that he says will improve your persuasive powers and achieve a positive result much more often.

Borg is a work psychologist and management consultant. He says that the power of persuasion is perhaps the ultimate source of advantage in life and work and is the critical factor that separates the successful from the rest. Persuasiveness can, however, be learned and mastered. Borg's interest in persuasion began very early in life when he became fascinated by the psychology of magic and he subsequently developed his ideas for the business world. He defines the power of persuasion as 'any message that attempts to influence people's opinions, attitudes or actions'. He emphasises that his approach to persuasion is entirely positive - it works both for your benefit and for that of the people you are dealing with.

**The power of persuasion.**

Empathy and sincerity, Borg tells us, are the fundamental building blocks for successful persuasion. Empathy is the bedrock of communication - the ability to identify and understand the other person's feelings, ideas and situation. Sincerity is essential for generating trust. Borg warns that no amount of learning about communication skills without the core virtues of empathy and sincerity will succeed in the longer term.

**Being a good listener.**

Of all aspects of communication, listening is the most crucial. Powerful persuasion begins with the ability to hear what others are saying. To listen productively you have to remove all distractions from your mind so you can concentrate on the speaker - which is easier said than done, of course. Listening is not merely saying...
nothing while the other person is talking; it involves deriving meaning from what is said. If you listen empathetically, you are giving out the signal that you are interested in everything the other person is saying and are eager to understand their point of view. So don't interrupt or finish the other person's sentences. Don't talk over the other person or offer advice too soon - a quick response might block further lines of enquiry. Paraphrasing what the other person has said is a powerful technique as it lets the speaker see the ideas and feelings they have conveyed from the other person's point of view and reassures the speaker that you are trying to understand the basis of their thoughts and feelings.

**Attention please.**

We want people to listen to our message so we have to keep our audience's full attention. If we can't do that, no communication takes place and that means we will not achieve a result. The problem is that most people only have short attention spans and their attention is only held when interest is rising. When presenting an idea or a request or making a sales pitch, it is usually crucial to get your point across at the first attempt as the initial discussion usually shapes the eventual outcome. You also have to know when you have lost your listeners' attention. The author recommends visualising audience attention as a curve with intermittent waves whereby attention is gained, falls away and is then built up again. You can mentally use the curve in any meeting to visualise the peaks and troughs in your dialogue and to evaluate lapses of attention.

You must also be aware of the different types of distraction that can cause loss of concentration and how to deal with them. For example, in our increasingly pressurised workplaces, conversations and meetings are frequently interrupted. If that happens, the best thing to do is give the other person a summary of what you said before the interruption. Research shows that people only take in 40% of what they hear (and that's without interruptions) so by recapping you are increasing your chances of making your point stick. You can win more attention by changing the seating (get the other person out from behind their desk) and avoiding breaks so you sustain attention on the upward curve. The author reiterates the classic advice about making presentations: Tell them what you are going to say. Say it. And finish by telling them what you said.

**Mind your body language.**

Only half of the meaning in a conversation comes from the words. The other half comes from the speaker's non-verbal communication. Non-verbal clues are the best indicators of a person's true feelings. The author gives advice about how to read signals from others and how to send out the right ones. You have to understand, he says, whether your body language is working for you or against you. We tend to be much more influenced by people whose facial expressions match the words that come out of their mouth. Good eye contact is one of the most important non-verbal means of promoting good interpersonal communication. It doesn't matter what a particular gesture means to you, it is how the other person perceives it that is important. If you are trying to influence somebody to agree to a course of action, open hand and body gestures have been shown to be most effective. Many body signals can be misinterpreted, so the author recommends that you look for 'clusters' of gestures rather than one in isolation. Remember the mind and body are one: you cannot not communicate.
Memory magic.

Having a good memory with strong recall is a very effective tool for being persuasive in your dealings with people. A lot of people have average memories and many people have bad ones, but if you can break out of this mould, you are in a very powerful position. In business and personal life, the confidence that comes from a good power of recall is invaluable. The author provides a range of suggestions for improving your memory. For instance, he points out that short-term memory is limited in the amount of information it can store and how long it can store it for. Recall usually relies on repetition and rehearsal, otherwise the information can disappear very quickly. Long-term memory, on the other hand, has no known limits. Information here does not become lost if it is not retrieved or rehearsed. The author shows how to ‘rehearse’ information in your short-term memory until it eventually becomes stored in your long-term memory. He also shows how to link information to the ‘self’ by giving it some personal meaning to make it more memorable and how to form associations for rapid recall. Much ‘forgetting’, he says, is actually an ‘interest’ problem - the information was never picked up in the first place. Remembering names is a powerful relationship builder and is very persuasive - the author recommends the use of mnemonics to remember names and other information. Good use of memory helps you to control other people's attention in meetings as it means there is less loss of eye-contact and breaks in the dialogue while you are trying to remember information.

Make words work for you.

Success can depend on saying the right thing at the right time as shown by psycholinguistics, a branch of psychology that studies verbal behaviour and how certain words affect our minds and emotions. Humans sense, interpret and then feel, so we are able to change how we feel by changing our interpretations. We interpret words in a certain way so a change of word in a certain instance leads to a different interpretation and therefore a different feeling. It is important therefore to give a moment’s thought to how a word or phrase may be interpreted by another person. As the author points out, the wrong choice of word has precipitated many wars, divorces, arguments, and business bust-ups. The way we phrase questions to draw out information from other people is crucial. The author warns, for example, of the need to be careful with the words ‘you’ and ‘why’ in conversations - they are, he says, communication and persuasion ‘killers’ which encourage defensiveness and antagonism (although he thinks the ‘good old indispensables’ - what?, when?, how? and where? - are good problem-solving tools). And don't make life worse than it is by prefacing statements with negative things like ‘I'm afraid' or 'I regret to tell you'. Eliminate the negative and be upbeat.

Telephone telepathy.

Many things in life start with a telephone call so the importance of telephone communication skills cannot be overestimated. Many people undergo a personality change, he says, when talking on the telephone; they become brusque, stilted or nervous. With the absence of facial expressions and body language, choice of words and tone of voice is all important. Be aware of what is happening on the other end of the line - remember that whenever you telephone somebody, you are bound to be interrupting them doing something. Timing is also crucial - calls may be terminated or shortened artificially because the other person is busy or has
somebody with them; and that is the end of your proposition. When and when not to speak are crucial decisions, as they shape the eventual outcome into either a positive or a negative one.

**Negotiating for mutual benefit.**

The author helps us to understand the psychology involved in negotiation so we can achieve the best possible result. Just because another person's position is opposed to yours, it does not mean that goals are opposed. To negotiate in good faith, you need to build a reputation for trustworthiness and honesty. Win-lose negotiations are usually concerned with relationships that are transient in nature but in long-term relationships, the win-win scenario is the one to aim for. The keys to good negotiation are listening skills and indicating clearly what you want. Negotiating is essentially a trading of concessions that results in amicable compromise - the win-win is subjective.

**The personality spectrum.**

The author looks at how to identify and deal with different personality 'types'. The key factors are whether an individual is extrovert or introvert and how far they use sensing versus intuition and thinking versus feeling. (Readers who know the Myers-Briggs model will find this fairly familiar territory.) Success in influencing people depends on the measure of rapport we achieve with them and knowing whether you are dealing with an 'E' (extrovert) or an 'I' (introvert) person is invaluable. The golden rule is to listen to the other person's language and observe their behaviour. Although there is diversity between personalities, the author says, there is consistency within personalities. Introversion and extraversion are opposites but most people possess both traits, with one attitude dominant over the other. The dominant one represents conscious behaviour, the subordinate one represents unconscious behaviour.

The author suggests that in everyday life we are drawn to people with a dominant personality style that is similar to our own. With other people, we adapt our interaction with them based on the traits that they exhibit. When trying to ascertain an individual's type, it is important that we make an assessment only after observing behaviour in context, rather than making snap judgements.

**Persuasive power in action**

The final chapter of the book presents two scenarios in which we follow the fortunes of a sales representative as he tries to arrange and conduct a business meeting. The first scenario illustrates how not to do it and the second one shows a more successful approach using the seven crucial communication skills for being persuasive:

- Good listening skills.
- How to hold attention.
- Appreciation of body language.
- Memory skills.
- Knowledge of the impact of words.
- Telephone skills.
- Negotiating skills.
This is probably one of the more useful books currently available on how to develop influencing skills. It is easy to read, with plenty of examples (and cartoons) and each chapter ends with a test on its content to help the reader memorise the ideas. The author has certainly received a powerful endorsement - in the foreword, 'Britain's best-known and admired businessman', Sir John Harvey-Jones, recommends: 'This book should be on every individual's bookshelf'.