Eight Steps to Persuade

One of the most challenging tasks for a speaker is the persuasive presentation – where you want to have audience change their thinking or act in a way you ask. Every persuasive presentation can be addressed by following these eight steps.

1. Establish Your Credibility

People are overloaded with information and relentlessly assaulted by attempts to entice them; so, you need to give them a reason to pay attention to you. This might be your own experience, research you have conducted or established authorities that you draw from.

1. Show Your Awareness

As well as being credible on a particular subject, you also need to show your understanding of the situation today.

Establishing these first two points could be done in one sentence. For example, “I have seen thousands of students progress through this institution over the past ten years and never have I seen such demands on their time.”

1. Describe the Problem

Explain what you believe the problem is. Make it relevant to the audience with graphic descriptions of problematic situations. Keep these descriptions pertinent with introductory phrases like, “This affects you by…” or “What this means for you is…”. People are very enticed by the status quo, coddled inside their comfort zone. You need to create an incentive strong enough to move them beyond this. The problem might just be that they could miss out on an opportunity that you are aware of.

1. Explain the Solution

While you should be brutally honest and suitably vivid about the problems; you should not dwell on them. Move quickly to describing your solution.

1. Define the Cost

There is always a cost. It might be financial, a time commitment, even just a change of mindset. Be honest and realistic about this cost so you have control of how it is perceived. Put it in perspective with comparisons or breakdowns. For example, “It will cost you less than the cost of your morning coffee” or “Only one minute a day, that’s all I’m asking for.”

1. Describe the Benefits

Just like you were graphic with describing the problem, be equally graphic when you describe the benefits they will receive in your desired future. Put clear, relevant images in the minds of your audience. As Dr Noel Tichy (Professor of Management, University of Michigan) says, “The best way to get humans to venture into unknown terrain is to make

that terrain familiar and desirable by taking them there first in their imaginations.”

1. Provide the First Step

Once you have convinced them of their need to act, you have to tell them what to do. Make the first step of this process very easy, and if possible, something they can do now. You need to get them to act as quickly as possible – while they are still persuaded by your presentation and before they are distracted by something else.

1. Finish on a Note of Encouragement

The conclusion is the most important part, so you need to finish on a high. You do this by assuming that everyone in the audience has been convinced by your presentation, and telling them how great life is going to be now that we’re moving forward positively.

These steps – when followed in order – use proven principles to give the best chance of persuading an audience. They will need to be supported by effective research beforehand to identify strong, relevant examples for this audience and a confident delivery on the day.