

THE SCIENCE OF PERSUASION IN LEADERSHIP



HOW TO INFLUENCE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU?

TO GET OTHERS TO SAY "YES", ROBERT B. CIALDINI, A WELL-KNOWN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST, SUGGESTED SIX STRATEGIES:



1 LIKING

People tend to listen and comply when they meet someone they know or like, as compared to strangers or someone they don't like. Consistent with the similarity-attraction paradigm—individuals are more attracted to similar others.

In an organisation, leaders tend to have greater influence on their followers when followers perceive that their values are congruent with those of their leaders. That is, when a leader is favoured by their followers through perceived similarity, the leader is more likely to possess the power to influence.



2 COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY

Individuals are more willing to comply with requests for actions that are consistent with their own action or position.

Leaders are encouraged to lead by example through their exceptionally high energy and commitment towards their roles and organisation. Giving voluntary and public commitments may signal to the employees that the leaders are reliable, and the employees are expected to do the same in return.

Leaders may also consider making their presence in a meeting evident with other employees (e.g. through face-to-face interaction), being articulate, and persisting throughout hardships or self-doubt moments consistently.

By NG YIN LU
editor@leaderonomics.com

PERSUASION, the attempt to change one's attitude via the use of different kinds of messages, occurs at all levels of society. This could be national leaders influencing citizens' voting behaviours during election, top management teams acquiring unanimity across multiple stakeholders, an inter-departmental teamwork, a social group leader getting their members to listen to them, or a salesperson closing a deal at a price that is higher than the market price.



3 SCARCITY

People appreciate objects that are decreasing in availability. For instance, a uniquely exciting work task given to a selective group of employees induces a sense of privilege.

To further elicit the perception of scarcity, charismatic leaders could explicitly communicate to their employees about the rare chance and the potential losses if a particular opportunity is missed.

As a result, followers will value their newly assigned roles more and become more committed to performing well.

John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman and Scott K. Edinger, authors of *The Inspiring Leader*, suggest in *Harvard Business Review* that followers of inspirational leaders are more engaged at work as these leaders are not only adept in developing emotional connections with their subordinates, but are also more willing to spend more time communicating with them.

This highlights the critical role of effective communication (e.g. style and message type) in persuasion.



4 RECIPROCATION

Individuals are obliged to return a favour to someone who has helped them. Leaders are thus encouraged to show sincere respect and appreciation in order to expect the same from their subordinates.

For instance, employees stay with an organisation because they feel that they should return the favour (e.g. trust and recognition by their leaders). Employees perceive that their departure is morally wrong if they have been given such good treatment.

Hence, to return a leader's favour, the employees would choose to stay and contribute to the organisation.



5 SOCIAL VALIDATION

People want to engage in the same actions or thinking as the similar others in order to feel correct. This is evident especially when dealing with a charismatic leader.

In one of their published journal articles, Jay A. Conger and Rabinra N. Kanungo explained, "Charismatic leaders differ from other leaders by their ability to formulate and articulate an inspirational vision and by behaviours and actions that foster the impression that they and their mission are extraordinary."

Based on the social categorisation theory, followers of charismatic leaders want to identify with their leaders so that they feel good about themselves. The charisma of a leader can be transmitted to followers, which in turn influences their work behaviour.

This suggests that charismatic leaders are more likely to be inspirational, and thereby influence subordinates through internalisation of the leader's vision and beliefs.



6 AUTHORITY

People are more willing to comply with requests by someone who has legitimate authority. Rosabeth Moss Kanter from Harvard Business School emphasises personal credibility and power as the main factors to stay influential.

Based on the social power theory, there are two major bases of power: harsh and soft. The differentiation between harsh and soft bases of power is dependent on the amount of autonomy one has over the choice of whether to comply or not.

Recent research shows that followers with a charismatic leader are more likely to respond positively to soft power bases by being more committed to the organisation.

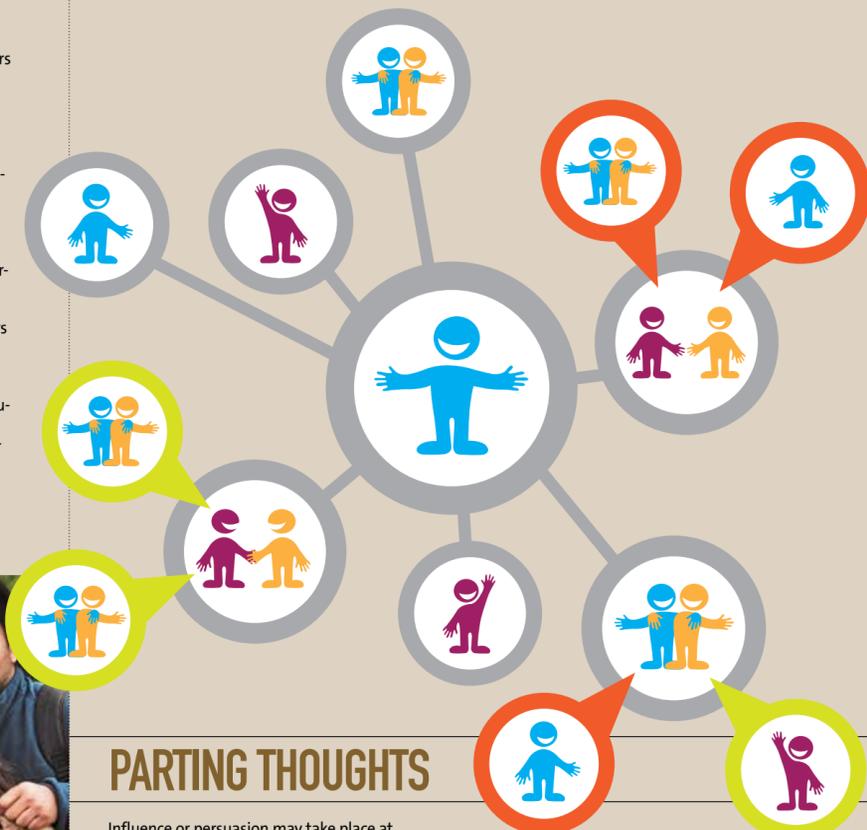
In other words, followers tend to comply with requests by transformational leaders because these leaders use soft power bases. Hence, leaders who practise soft power bases are more influential than those who practise harsh power bases.



Barack Obama



Martin Luther King, Jr.



PARTING THOUGHTS

Influence or persuasion may take place at various levels within an organisation. C-level and senior management should not be the only ones required to exert influence on followers or subordinates.

Middle managers and even entry-level executives should also learn how to influence their colleagues, customers and stakeholders in the organisation.

To be persuasive, leaders should:

- 1 Show genuine concern to their employees to foster liking.
- 2 Be committed to their work and influence their employees through exemplary behaviours.

- 3 Explicitly communicate the value of the new task or roles and emphasise "rare, golden opportunities".
- 4 Engage in good deeds for employees.
- 5 Be a role model for employees through charismatic leadership.
- 6 Practise soft bases of power.

These are strategies leaders ought to master in order to be a great leader who is able to influence followers in the right direction.

Ng Yin Lu is a senior lecturer at an established university, teaching research methodology and statistics in the Department of Psychology. She conducts industrial and organisational research, particularly in the areas of diversity recruitment and employee engagement. If you are looking to develop or enhance your influencing skills, engage us at training@leaderonomics.com. Article first published on www.leaderonomics.com.