

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Are Persuasive**



GREAT LEADERS ARE PERSUASIVE

“ To be **persuasive** we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful.

— Edward R. Murrow

Persuasiveness is the ability to sell others on ideas, approaches, products, or services. Individuals who are persuasive are able to influence their followers and can induce certain mindsets or behaviors from their employees. Persuasive leaders can not only communicate their vision or directives to their employees but convince these employees to get on board with their plans.

One of the key duties of a leader is to influence others, especially direct reports. Leaders often have to convince employees to follow new initiatives, implement difficult changes in how work is conducted, or gain employee buy-in for long-term strategic directions. Persuading employees is about more than getting individuals to behave in certain ways — it also involves garnering support for leader proposals, ensuring commitment to new projects or approaches, and building trust in the leader’s ability to plan, implement, and maintain organizational changes that are positive for both the organization and the employees.

Are You Persuasive?

In assessing your ability to persuade others, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have a positive relationship with employees so my opinions and directions are heard?
- Do I appear to be knowledgeable on the topic when attempting to persuade employees?
- Am I explaining and defending my agenda in a logical, rational manner?
- Can I encourage small commitments to my initiatives?
- Can I build on these small commitments to ensure greater buy-in?
- Would support from another leader help me convince employees to follow my plans?
- How can I frame my agenda so that employees see the personal benefit in following my direction?

Improve Your Ability to Persuade

Maintain positive, trusting relationships. Before a leader even approaches employees regarding a new direction or approach, leaders should have positive relationships with their employees. Without a previous warm relationship, employees may feel the leader is untrustworthy, or that the leader does not have the interests of employees in mind. A sense of trust that leaders can and do keep their promises to their employees will go a long way in persuading employees to listen to leaders. Note, while interpersonal liking and positive emotions may help a leader open a discussion with employees, emotional or personal appeals tend to be ineffective. The most persuasive leaders use rational, logical arguments when seeking to influence others.

Encourage connections. Persuading others shares some common aspects with negotiation — in order to persuade employees, a leader must find out what their employees value, then show employees how the leader's plan fits with the employees' values or desires. If a leader can convince an employee that following the leader's initiative will help them accomplish their own goals, employees are much more likely to be persuaded by the leader's plans.

Emphasize the support of others. At times, a leader seeks to persuade employees to follow them through a large change that will alter the employees' day-to-day work environment or tasks. Even leaders who have positive, trusting relationships with their employees can have a difficult time introducing dramatic changes to the workplace. Having other leaders or individuals in positions of power endorse the leader's agenda may help them to persuade employees to agree to even large changes.

Start Doing These 4 Things Now to Become More Persuasive

The following steps can help you become better at influencing employees:

1. **Ensure you have set the stage to influence others.** As noted above, individuals are more likely to listen to leaders who they perceive as friendly, trustworthy, and sincere. These interpersonal factors can influence how well a leader can highlight the opportunities for personal employee fulfillment within long-term departmental changes or plans.
2. **Use logical arguments to persuade employees that your proposal is feasible.** Where possible, show evidence that your plan will be successful. Always communicate the aims of your agenda, as well as the methods you used to form your plans. Avoid emotional appeals or calls for loyalty to your initiatives, as this may prevent employees from expressing legitimate questions or concerns about your plans and may encourage them to pay lip service to initiatives they don't really agree with.
3. **Seek the support of key individuals.** Highly esteemed or experienced employees can be important allies in gaining support for your initiatives. When employees who are less confident in your plans see other employees show their support, they may feel more

comfortable lending their own endorsement. This is also true when seeking to persuade individuals above you in the hierarchy. Having other leaders, managers, or department heads supporting and speaking well of your ideas can help you to persuade CEOs of the merits of your plans.

4. **When seeking to implement large or dramatic changes, take your time.** Asking employees to commit to a small piece of your plan makes it more likely they will commit to larger changes later. Explaining each component of your initiative can maintain employee buy-in as your agenda unfolds.

Assess Persuasiveness With the LSP-R®

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