

If you're a leader, it's likely that not everyone who works with you will agree with the decisions you make — and that's okay. Leadership involves making unpopular decisions while navigating complex relationships with colleagues, partners, and clients. But often, you will need to get buy-in from these constituents, and therefore you will need to convince them to change their mind.

There is little friction involved in convincing people who are your natural supporters. But trying to change the mind of a dissenter, or a *detractor*, is a different story. How do you go about convincing someone who, for one reason or another, doesn't see eye-to-eye with you? Someone who gives you a flat out "no"?

In the recent research we completed for Laura's book, *Edge: Turning Adversity into Advantage*, we observed, and then interviewed, more than 60 leaders who were trying to convince business associates and other constituents to change their minds on a course of action that they initially disagreed with. The leaders who were most successful in overcoming others' skepticism were those who diagnosed the root of the fundamental disagreement before trying to persuade. They first asked themselves, "What's driving my detractor's resistance?" These leaders often pinpointed which aspects of their arguments elicited the most pushback and the most emotional reactions. Then, depending on the answer, they approached the situation with one of the following three targeted strategies.

### **The Cognitive Conversation**

When to use it: The detractor may be opposed to your argument because of an objective reason. If they've clearly articulated a logical set of objections, and they don't appear to be hiding ulterior motives, approach them with a cognitive conversation. This is especially useful when the detractor is known to have a no-nonsense attitude and can easily set aside emotions in their decision-making process.

How it works: A successful cognitive conversation requires two things: sound arguments and good presentation. Take, for example, a situation where you are pushing to switch suppliers and you've found one whose materials and products are superior

to the current supplier, whose products have been causing numerous downstream issues. But your colleague is in favor of sticking with your current supplier with whom he has a longstanding relationship. He expresses his resistance to your proposal by pointing out the higher prices the new supplier charges. You want to prepare sound arguments that disprove the detractor's objections. In this instance, you might point out that the new supplier is actually less expensive in the long run, when you take into account all the additional production costs caused by the current supplier. You also want to use a logical framework and clear storyline to force the detractor to reassess their thinking. For example, you can emphasize that the decision is based on cost, quality, and service, but above all, cost and quality.

Be cautious about not introducing emotions into the discussion, which could give the impression that you and your detractor are not on common ground. For example, you don't want to make it seem as if you believe your colleague's relationship with the former supplier is irrelevant. The goal is to show the person that, on an objective and factual basis, their initial stance on the situation isn't as reasonable as your argument. Be warned, these detractors are not easily swayed by broad generalizations. Be ready to mentally spar with them and come prepared with facts that back up each aspect of your overall argument.

The catch: Don't assume that getting a "yes" from this type of detractor signals a conversion into an everlasting supporter. You may have persuaded them on this specific issue, but they may disagree with you again in the future. If that's true, expect to have another cognitive conversation on that separate argument.