



Book Just Listen

Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone

Mark Goulston
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Recommendation

Being the life of the party won’t help you make a sale. In fact, letting other people take the spotlight will actually garner more admiration and eventual “buy-in,” explains psychiatrist Mark Goulston. This advice follows his axiom, “be more interested than interesting,” which is one of his nine principles for connecting with others. Goulston, who has trained police officers and US Federal Bureau of Investigation hostage negotiators, devotes a chapter each to 12 powerful techniques you can use to be more persuasive. His systems and strategies will help you cross the natural barriers people erect to protect themselves, so you can communicate your ideas and goals. He fleshes out each lesson with real-life examples and engaging stories. *BooksInShort* thinks you’ll find this book quite helpful in refining ways to “get through” to others. If Goulston can negotiate with a desperate gunman, he surely can help you sway a customer – or even your teenager.

Take-Aways

- To persuade other people, first listen to them. Make them feel understood, valued and interesting.
- You can “get through” to people if you can get them to “buy into” your ideas.
- Don’t let your preconceived notions about other people affect the way you listen.
- Ask questions that encourage them to reflect; listen carefully to their answers.
- Move people from resisting to considering your ideas and goals by posing the “impossibility question.”
- To use it, first, ask people to identify something impossible but highly desirable. Then, ask them to consider what would make it possible.
- Surprising people with your empathy often will get them on your side.
- When people are overwhelmed, let them vent and “exhale” their stress. Then they can listen to you.
- Instead of hiding a problem, bring it out into the open and discuss it candidly.
- These tips come from “nine basic rules” and “12 quick techniques” you can use to persuade others.

Summary

Persuasion at Gunpoint

A man is sitting in his car in a mall parking lot. He’s holding a shotgun. Mark Goulston, the police negotiator, knows this volatile situation has every chance of ending poorly. How can he reach this clearly desperate man?

The negotiator asks a question: “I bet you feel that nobody knows what it’s like to have tried everything else and be stuck with this as your only way out; isn’t that

true?”

“Reaching people isn’t magic. It’s an art...and a science. And it’s easier than you think.”

The man with the shotgun pauses and thinks before replying, “Yeah, you’re right, nobody knows and nobody gives a f#@&!” - As surprising as it may seem, this begins a dialogue.

The negotiator’s question resonated with the gunman, who answered by agreeing. This was the first step toward a peaceful resolution. Most people who want to persuade others push too hard. They use arguments, counterarguments, facts and figures to support their positions. Rather than convincing people, this tends to create resistance. Instead, try listening, empathizing and connecting with the people you are trying to sway. Logic alone won’t achieve your goal. You can “get through” to people only if you can persuade them to “buy into” your ideas. You need to move them from “resisting” to “listening” to “considering” and, finally, “agreeing.”

“Almost all communication is an effort to get through to people and cause them to do something different than they were doing before.”

Knowing a little bit about how the “three-part” human brain operates will help you understand the art of persuasion:

- The low-level, protective “reptile” brain kicks in the fight-or-flight reflex.
- The middle “mammal” brain handles emotions, and logic originates in the upper, or “primate,” brain.
- The reptilian “amygdala” responds to threats.

“If someone can’t or won’t listen to you, get him to listen to himself.”

The primate brain also engages during a threat, but it is more analytical and, therefore, slower. If the amygdala “hijacks” someone’s responses, reasoning alone won’t penetrate that reaction. You can get through only if you can intercept before the reptile reaction takes over the brain. That is what professionals try to do when they deal with enraged or frightened people. “Mirror neurons” are another aspect of human brain function that matters in persuasion. These neurons cause people to want to conform, and enable them to feel empathy and relate to each other.

“Nine Basic Rules”

Use the following nine rules to influence people to shift toward your way of thinking:

1. **“Move yourself from ‘Oh, f#@&’ to ‘OK’”** – When a stressful incident occurs, your body reacts by going into fight-or-flight mode. After a time, you calm down, get your emotions under control and let your logical brain take over. If you can learn to move more quickly from panic to containment, you can navigate a bad situation in seconds, not hours. To shift quickly from freaking out to focusing, label what you feel. When you name your emotions with concrete words, like “frightened” or “angry,” you put the logical part of your brain to work and promptly begin to calm down. With practice, you’ll learn to handle tense situations calmly, enabling you to connect with those around you.
2. **“Rewire yourself to listen”** – Even if you think you are a good listener, be aware that your preconceived notions about others influence how you interpret what they say or do. If your young, scattered receptionist forgets to give your package to the messenger, you might jump to the conclusion that she’s incompetent. But if you later learn that she spent the night in the emergency room with her grandmother, you would revise your opinion. First impressions may prevent you from hearing the real person. Focus on your reactions. Try to discern which thoughts are grounded in reality and which are based on misconceptions.
3. **“Make the other person feel ‘felt’”** – When you empathize with people, they feel ‘felt.’ That is, they feel understood, less alone and more open. So instead of focusing on what you want from them, turn your attention to what they are feeling. Name their emotions by saying, “I’m trying to get a sense of what you’re feeling and I think it’s (fill in).”
4. **“Be more interested than interesting”** – Most people try to make a good impression, offer clever conversation and impress the crowd. However, when you’re totally intent on impressing others, you neglect to hear them and you don’t learn about them. So focus on the other person. Don’t think of conversation as a back-and-forth game of one-upmanship. Instead, let the other person dominate the dialogue. Ask questions and follow-up questions. Listen carefully and attentively to the answers. Reflect back what you are hearing in the conversation so the other person can reconsider his or her ideas.
5. **“Make people feel valuable”** – Everyone wants to feel as if he or she matters. When you tell people you appreciate them, they’ll reward you with loyalty and regard. Letting wonderful people know you value them is easy. The challenge is showing annoying people you value them. Yet, often the squeaky wheel is squeaking for a reason. Even irritating people want love and attention. When they get it, they’ll respond positively.
6. **“Help people to exhale emotionally and mentally”** – When people are distressed, they cannot engage with you because they’re too preoccupied with what is bothering them. You can help. Allowing someone to “exhale” provides relief and helps you form a connection. When someone is overwhelmed, let him or her vent. Don’t interrupt and don’t make suggestions. Just listen and say, “Tell me more.” You might even say, “Close your eyes and just breathe.” Hint: This approach works very well with teenagers.
7. **“Check your dissonance at the door”** – Your attempts to be clever can come across as cutting. Similarly, when you think you’re acting self-assured, you may appear arrogant to others. This gap between the impression you think you are making and the way others perceive you is called “dissonance.” It can create a barrier between you and those you want to reach. The best way to find out how others evaluate you is to ask. See if a few people you trust will tell you honestly how you come across to others.
8. **“When all seems lost – bare your neck”** – Society has taught you not to show weakness. However, trying to hide whatever is upsetting you is deceptive and will create dissonance. Sometimes, showing your vulnerability is a better course. When you do, you’ll find that most people will readily forgive a mistake, and they may even offer to help. Ask for help before you get into trouble. Reaching out and “baring your neck” to others creates a bond. Pretending that everything is OK when it’s not creates a barrier.
9. **“Steer clear of toxic people”** – Although connecting with others is the key to getting what you want, some people are not worth your effort. These toxic people are bottomless pits who demand more attention, are never satisfied or happy, let you down, make excuses for their behavior and refuse to accept responsibility. You can try confronting such people or neutralizing their effect on you. Or, you can disengage entirely.

“12 Quick and Easy Ways to Achieve Buy-In and Get Through”

Using these tactics will help you to respond to tough situations and move forward:

1. **“The impossibility question”** – People will always find reasons to discourage you from trying something. The trick is to persuade them to imagine that your goal is possible. That is where the impossibility question, noted by Dave Hibbard, can be quite effective. When people resist your idea, ask, “What’s something that would be impossible to do, but if you could do it, would dramatically increase your success?” Then follow up by asking, “OK. What would make it possible?” This will move them from resisting to considering, the first step in persuasion. Now they’re working with you, not against you.
2. **“The magic paradox”** – When things aren’t going well, people become wary and defensive. Disarm them by doing something unexpected. For instance, if an employee is underperforming, don’t scold. Instead, relate to the staffer’s negative thoughts and surprise him or her by saying something like, “I’ll bet you feel that nobody understands how hard you are working and what kind of pressure you are under.” The employee will feel that you are very understanding and will begin to agree with you. You’ve shifted the conversation from negative to positive.
3. **“The empathy jolt”** – “Ignorant blamers” love to rant and rave and criticize others. However, unloading on someone is not the same as communicating. To stop a blamer in his or her tracks, provide an empathy jolt. That is, help the steamrolling person replace anger with empathy. For example, if someone complains about another person, ask him or her to imagine being in the other person’s position. When the blamer begins to empathize with the defender, the anger dissipates and cooperation can take over.
4. **“The reverse play: empathy jolt #2”** – The reverse play is a way to use the empathy jolt with an employee who knows that he or she is not in your good graces. To put the reverse play into action, surprise the underperformer by apologizing instead of reprimanding. List three areas where you might be at fault. For example, you might say, “I’m sure you feel that you get all the boring assignments.” When the staffer agrees, say you’re sorry and promise to do better. The employee will go back to work with renewed vigor.
5. **“Do you really believe that?”** – People tend to exaggerate the depth of a problem. When someone is storming on about an issue, calmly ask, “Do you really believe that?” This simple question will often diffuse the situation. In the few cases where the stressed-out person really does believe the problem is severe, you can tackle it together.
6. **“The power of ‘hmmm...’”** – Dealing with someone angry is challenging. Your first instinct might be to react in kind or to become defensive. Instead, try saying, “hmmm...” By listening and saying “hmmm,” you encourage the person to continue to voice his or her concerns while showing your attentiveness. “Hmmm” can de-escalate a volatile situation and move people toward working together to find a solution.
7. **“The stipulation gambit”** – Stipulating to something means acknowledging the elephant in the room. Instead of hiding a problem, bring it out into the open before it has a chance to fester. For instance, if you have a stutter, take the opportunity to acknowledge it at the start of a conversation so both parties are comfortable. In a job interview, admitting to a weakness up front lets you explain why it won’t interfere with your performance.
8. **“From transaction to transformation”** – Most conversations concern the nuts and bolts of life, not emotions. “Where did you put the stapler?” is a question, but it doesn’t evoke a thoughtful answer. To relate and connect with someone, ask a “transformational” question that causes the respondent to pause, reflect and then reveal something about himself or herself. You could ask, “If you could change one thing about your company, what would it be?” or “How difficult did you find it to get started in your career?”
9. **“Side by side”** – One of the best ways to connect with people is to talk while you are participating in an activity together – something as simple as sharing a meal, stuffing envelopes or driving somewhere. Working side by side creates an atmosphere of sharing that is conducive to meaningful conversation. Seize the moment and ask questions and then dig a little deeper to help the conversation flow. This is also a great way to connect with your kids.
10. **“Fill in the blanks”** – Every good salesperson knows that asking questions is important, but you don’t want the client to feel interrogated. Asking a person to fill in the blank is a nice alternative. It invites people to share something in their own words and stimulates dialogue. A salesperson might say, “You’re thinking of buying our software, or a product like it, because (fill in the blank)?” This lets the client tell you what he or she is seeking.
11. **“Take it all the way to ‘no’”** – Clients may put you off without actually saying no. If you don’t hear the word “no,” maybe you haven’t asked for enough. Sometimes, in business, “no” means “maybe.” So always ask a follow-up question. For example, if Ned tells you he’s not interested in your software, try saying, “I either pushed too hard or failed to address something that was important to you, didn’t I?” When Ned answers, you’ve reopened the discussion, leaving the way clear to a “yes.”
12. **“The power thank you and power apology”** – Saying “thank you” is always nice, but some situations call for more. They call for a power thank you, an expression of gratitude that goes beyond those two little words. For instance, thank someone in front of a group of co-workers. Write a note or buy a gift. Let people know that you appreciate their efforts and that their actions make a difference in your life. Just as some situations call for a power thank you, some demand a power apology. That’s the right thing to do for those times when a simple “I’m sorry” won’t cut it. The power apology contains the “Four Rs: remorse, restitution, rehabilitation and requesting forgiveness.”

About the Author

Mark Goulston, author of *Get Out of Your Own Way* and *Get Out of Your Own Way at Work*, is a columnist, psychiatrist and business consultant.
