

Book Persuasion IQ

The 10 Skills You Need to Get Exactly What You Want

Kurt Mortensen
AMACOM, 2008
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Recommendation

This book is a useful primer for learning well-established persuasion techniques. Although author Kurt Mortensen makes few new points, he does a good job of compiling and synthesizing the current wisdom. Nothing here will challenge readers who are already familiar with the art, but newbies will find Mortensen’s book a useful introduction, with references to classic motivational writers such as Napoleon Hill, time-management gurus such as Stephen Covey and classic thinkers such as Ben Franklin and Mohandas Gandhi. His enthusiasm helps, as do his checklists and examples. *BooksInShort* recommends his book to aspiring salespeople and negotiators, and to anyone else who wants to improve his or her persuasion skills but doesn’t know where to start.

Take-Aways

- Persuasion is the most important skill for business success.
- Most people think they are better at persuasion than they really are.
- To become more persuasive, program your mind for success.
- The best way to persuade people is by touching their hearts.
- To persuade people, earn their trust.
- To motivate people, inspire them by providing a vision of a higher purpose.
- In any presentation, you have around 30 seconds to grab listeners’ attention.
- Connecting with people and getting to the heart of your message right away are vital.
- To improve your public speaking abilities, make sure you know yourself, your message and your audience.
- Develop an ongoing plan for personal development.

Summary

Rules and Obstacles

Ultimately, your financial success depends on your skill at persuading people. No matter what or whom you know, if you can’t convince people to listen to your ideas, the ideas are essentially worthless. Most U.S. CEOs come from sales, which depends upon persuasion. Fortunately, persuasion is not an inherent talent but rather a skill you can learn – even though these days, persuading others is more challenging than ever, for both positive and negative reasons. People are better educated, but they also are more vulnerable to trickery and exploitation.

“Persuasion is the number one skill possessed by the ultra-prosperous.”

Most would-be persuaders run up against these 10 obstacles:

- “**The Woebegon effect**” – In radio humorist Garrison Keillor’s fictional town of Lake Woebegon, “All the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average.” Similarly, most people believe they are above-average persuaders. As a consequence, they think they have nothing to learn.
- “**The brick wall of resistance**” – Consumers assume salespeople are insincere and deceptive, and salespeople fail to confront this stereotype.
- “**Thinking like an employee**” – Instead of taking personal responsibility, people settle for doing a good-enough job.
- “**Talking too much**” – Persuasion is not about you; it’s about the other person. Make your point and then listen. In a conversation, take up only one-third of the airtime.
- “**An avalanche of information**” – If you don’t listen, you may pile on irrelevant data, distancing yourself from your audience.
- “**Being motivated by desperation**” – Others can smell your fear. If you make a sale by pressuring or guilt-tripping your customer, he or she will resent it.
- “**Fear of rejection**” – Customers who decide not to buy your product are not rejecting you personally. They don’t even know you.
- “**Lack of preparation**” – Good persuaders constantly bone up on their products and their audiences. They know how to use more than one approach, so they can customize their presentations for particular audiences.

9. **“Prejudging and making assumptions”** – Don’t go into an interaction believing you know all about the person to whom you are talking.
10. **“Assuming closing skills are the magic cure-all”** – Your opening is more important than your closing. If you haven’t made a personal connection, phrases such as “trust me on this one...” will not help you.

“The worst time to learn a persuasion skill is when you need it. Persuasion must be mastered before it is needed, or the opportunity is lost forever.”

Persuasive people tend to be emphatic and determined. They are good listeners. To improve your “persuasion IQ,” or PQ, work on these 10 skills:

“PQ Skill #1: Mental Programming of Top Persuaders”

To change the results you’re getting from the world, you must change the way you act. To change the way you act, you must change your feelings, and to change your feelings, you must change your thoughts. Eliminate negative thoughts, not by trying to drive them out or repress them, but rather by replacing them with positive ones. Visualize success.

“Instead of learning techniques and strategies, think in terms of transforming yourself into a naturally persuasive person.”

Ask yourself what you want most out of life, and write down your dreams and goals. Reread your list before bed, so your mind can work on it as you sleep. Review your goals and plans regularly, until you know for sure what your life’s purpose is. Then, ask yourself: Are you doing the most important things? Or are you wasting your efforts on things that don’t really matter? Eliminating trivia will improve your focus and reduce procrastination.

“Great persuaders instinctively sense and know what other people are thinking and feeling.”

Scrutinize your beliefs about yourself because these determine your actions. For the greatest power, you must align your beliefs. If you want to be wealthy, yet also believe that “money is the root of all evil,” you’ll never reach your goal. Self-reflection forces you to face your fears, but ultimately, it improves your self-esteem.

“By ‘programming’ our minds, we dictate our future. It’s just that simple.”

In addition to looking at the big life issues, examine your daily habits, such as how you eat, drink, sleep and generally maintain your health. Hold yourself accountable. No one else is responsible for your success but you.

“PQ Skill #2: Understand How Your Audience Thinks”

Once you understand how your own mind works, you’ll gain insight into the minds of others, which will increase your powers of persuasion. You can appeal to people’s minds or to their hearts, and while the ideal pitch would do both, emotional appeals tend to be more powerful. All the logic in the world won’t change people’s fears – or their attachments. This is why “new Coke” was such a disaster. Coke drinkers felt attached to the old formula.

“Your life is an accumulation of all your habits. Your ability to become a great persuader hinges on your habits and choices.”

Emotionally, people reject new ideas because they are afraid of failure, they lack emotional support or they just don’t have the drive. Logically, they reject proposals because they don’t have the time or money to make them work, or because they simply aren’t convinced. When people feel confused or overwhelmed by new information, they reject the information that contradicts their assumptions. They’ll take any “mental shortcuts” they must to feel they are right.

“PQ Skill #3: Instant Rapport and Social Synchronization”

People judge one another quickly – almost instantly – and if you make an initial positive impression, “you have an 85% chance of persuasion.” To make that connection, strike a balance. Be “friendly, but not fake.” Show genuine enthusiasm, but don’t crowd your audience. Share essential information, but focus on meeting people as individuals and fulfilling their unique desires. Continually read others’ verbal and nonverbal signals.

“Whether we realize it or not, we love shortcuts to thinking.”

Most people think they are better at listening than they are. Give others time to talk. Don’t pry, but do ask questions that show you’re interested and paying attention. Let others reach conclusions at their own pace.

Practice and analyze your self-presentation by videotaping yourself. Relax and maintain an easy pace, eye contact and a firm handshake. Different cultures (and individuals) have different comfort zones about proximity, so pay attention to how closely you stand to others. If you can make people laugh, you’ll get them on your side. Dress professionally.

“PQ Skill #4: Establishing Automatic Trust”

Building trust is more difficult than it used to be because these days, people assume that they should not trust you, especially upon first meeting. The problem is even worse especially if you work in a distrusted profession such as law, for a company with a bad reputation or in a field that people don’t understand. To overcome habitual distrust, use “the Five Cs”:

1. **“Character”** – Maintain good values.
2. **“Competence”** – Do a good job.
3. **“Confidence”** – Trust your abilities and products.
4. **“Credibility”** – Make a good impression on others.
5. **“Congruence”** – Align your values, words and actions.

“PQ Skill #5: Command Attention with Power and Authority”

The word “power” has a negative connotation to many people, but it is actually “a neutral force.” Power is the ability to convince others to change. Authority provides power. When you convince your audience of your expertise and access to resources, you increase your authority. Your position and job title contribute to your authority, as do your reputation and appearance. You can develop power by rewarding people for doing what you want, but that can backfire – they’ll stop once the reward disappears. Motivating them to choose the action themselves is better. Respect is the most difficult form of power to develop, but “it is also the longest lasting.”

“PQ Skill #6: The Ability to Influence Other People”

Inspire people, and they’ll want to become more like you. Identify with your audience and praise them for what they do well. These qualities are essential to inspiring others:

- **“Charisma”** – To develop charisma, you need “a strong and clear vision” of your goal, confidence in your vision and the ability to present it convincingly. Break your message into small pieces that are easy to grasp. Let your passion influence others.
- **“Optimism”** – “Attitude is a habit,” not a natural gift. Your thought patterns determine your approach to the world. When you recognize that a thought signals a negative or passive attitude, reword the idea into a statement of active choice and power.

“PQ Skill #7: How to Motivate Yourself and Others Every Time”

To persuade people, you must motivate them – starting with yourself. Establish a “motivation safety net” – a way to generate new energy and passion when you’re feeling down. Commitment helps. You’re going to stumble – that’s human. When that happens, develop habits that will help you draw your actions back in line with your dreams. Certain factors weaken or even inhibit motivation, such as a negative mindset or friends who don’t support your vision. If your friends are dragging you down, the time may have come to find new ones.

“Many persuaders have a tendency to fight on price, incorrectly thinking that the lowest price or the most economical bid will always seal the deal.”

To motivate others, remember that negative external drives, such as fear or threats, only work on people who are desperate. Positive motivators such as duty or respect last far longer. The longest lasting motivator is passion. Make others feel they are serving a higher purpose.

“PQ Skill #8: Advanced Presentation and Communication Skills”

During the past two decades, people have come to demand more from presenters. Now they want you to both educate and entertain them. To make matters worse, “people’s attention spans are getting shorter and shorter.” You have about 30 seconds to grab their attention.

“We are all suckers for titles because they create power.”

Therefore, good public speaking skills are essential. Start with the basics: find ways to conquer your nerves and relax, for example, by stretching or meditating. Convince audiences to care about your message by showing them how it will make their lives better. Anticipate both negative and positive responses, and plan ways to deal with them. Don’t overuse or misuse PowerPoint. Make your points using the TESS technique: “Testimonials, examples, statistics and stories.”

“PQ Skill #9: Preplanned Anticipation: The Secret Formulas of the Pros”

To persuade, you must understand both your audience and your message. To understand your audience, use a combination of research, empathy and imagination. Research listeners’ social, cultural and political backgrounds.

“Motivation is critical not only for achieving the big, milestone steps toward your objectives, but also for making all the little steps in between.”

Determine how your message fits their needs, how it compares financially with other options and who the decision makers are. Then put yourself in your listeners’ place. What will people close to them say? How will they feel if they allow you to persuade them? What other choices do they have? If you have the chance to address a group, adapt your preparation for that specific audience and venue. If possible, visit the space beforehand to check its size, acoustics, equipment and distractions.

“We have all heard that repetition is the mother of all learning; it is also the mother of effective persuasion.”

To understand your message, blend vision and tactics. Be able to articulate your goal and its significance. Why should listeners trust what you say about it? Calculate the numbers: costs, the number of positive responses you need and how often you need to contact your customer.

“PQ Skill #10: Self-Mastery and Personal Development”

Developing your persuasive skills is a lifelong commitment, for which you need an ongoing program of personal development. Don’t limit this to self-mastery, though. Continually seek knowledge and a deeper understanding of your product, firm, industry and the economy.

“The more you learn, the more you realize how little you know.”

Attend seminars and training programs where you can learn from experts. Because they can radically accelerate your development, the expense is worthwhile in the long run. Consider hiring a coach – it’s not only for those with weak skills. Even greats such as Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods use coaches to polish their already world-class skills. A coach can help you with everything from character attributes such as self-confidence to skills such as public speaking.

About the Author

Kurt Mortensen speaks and trains people in persuasion techniques. He founded the Persuasion Institute and is author of *Maximum Influence*.
