

Persuading other people

Jean-luc Doumont

Power stems from “who we are,” both as a person (personal power) and as a member of an organized structure (organizational power).

Communication, especially non-verbal, radiates power through confidence, presence, sincerity.

PERSUASION IS A DIFFICULT TASK. How convincingly we can, in a certain situation, influence an individual or a group depends, among others, on two key factors: the power we hold, as evidenced in the way we communicate, and the tactics we deploy, which harness five basic influences. Still, what works with one person may not work with another. Moreover, the tactics must often be subtle to be successful: in most professional situations, persuasion is a gentle art.

Personal power stems from knowledge, skills, and attitude. It expresses itself in the way we communicate with others, through the verbal and, especially, the nonverbal component. Being tightly linked to our personality, it cannot be granted upon us, like organizational power can: it must be acquired.

Organizational power stems from our role within (or outside) an organization and on the associated control of resources (money, people, information, etc.). The “organization” can be any social or professional one, with its matching resources: our friends or allies are thus part of our organizational power.

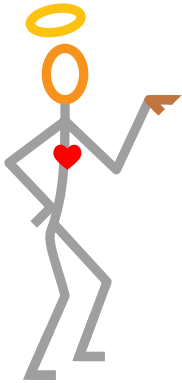
Confidence projected by a speaker endows his or her ideas with credibility. It stems from a stable stance, a poised voice (slow and deep), and sharp, deliberate gestures—with no noise.

Presence ensures that a speaker cannot be ignored. It stems from position (close to and possibly higher than the audience), stance (tall, self-assured), and eye contact with the audience.

Sincerity goes a long way toward convincing others. It stems from a match between the verbal and nonverbal components. Speakers who put on an appearance antagonize the audience.



Tactics are more or less effective depending on how adapted and how skillfully deployed they are.



Halo Ideal

Head Intellectual

Hand Material

Heart Emotional

Tactics can be grouped in four categories, which reflect four basic human planes, and combine five basic social influences.



Appeal to values	Rely on idealism	
Be a model	Be an example to follow	
State	Say things like they are	
Argumentate	Appeal to logic	
Legitimate	Appeal to authority	
Exchange	Play "give and take"	
Appeal to friendship	Call for help	
Ask for advice	Involve the other	
Develop empathy	Integrate socially	

Influences—factors that make us more likely to accept a request—evolved naturally for the survival of individuals in a social group.

Evolution has selected individuals who tend to reciprocate favors, behave consistently, are in tune with the group (and its leaders), favor requests by those they like, and value any scarce resources.

Reciprocation is deeply rooted in human conduct: if I have done something for you, you will likely feel indebted to me and you are thus more likely to accept a request on my part. Reciprocation is a sufficient reason for offering free samples and business gifts. It is also strongly induced by concessions (in other words, retreating from a large to a smaller request).

Consistency in the way we behave is a strong motivation, too. Public behaviors or statements, especially commitments, will drive us to accept requests that make us appear self-consistent.

Validation plays on our sensitivity to what others are doing or thinking: as a social species, we are more likely to accept a request if we know or are told that others have accepted it, too. Thus we recognize the behavior of others as a validation of our own, especially if they are numerous and similar to us (peer pressure) or are regarded as authorities (endorsement).

Liking the one who makes the request makes us more likely to accept it, though we may not want to admit (or be aware of) this kind of influence. Liking may stem from such factors as similarity, flattery, or sheer physical attractiveness. Bonding may also result from a common cause—or a common enemy.

Scarcity, be it real or perceived, makes objects, information, and opportunities seem more desirable. Commercial ads thus emphasize a product's *unique* benefits; marketing campaigns typically rely on *limited-time-only* or *while-supply-lasts* offers.

