The 10th dimension... the power of ten

By mere dint of the fact that we have a professional qualification, it can (for the most part) be assumed that we are competent in our sphere of endeavour. Why then are some of us successful and others less so? James Borg, an eminent work psychologist, business consultant and development coach believes that the crucial factor may be an individual's power of persuasion.

We all know people who, regardless of the issue under consideration, seem able to get us to see, accept and even vote for their point of view. We also know others whom we like and respect, but do not have the power to persuade us that we should accept and buy into their ideas. Compare Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, or Margaret Thatcher and John Major, for example.

Now, you may not think this is all that important, but if you think about the number of treatment plans that you have suggested to patients and consider how many of those have not been taken up, you might come to the conclusion that your inability to get others to accept that it is to their overwhelming advantage to ride with you is actually costing you a huge amount of lost revenue.

If you cannot move others, you may remain unmoved yourself. As Borg says: “Every day at work – and in your personal life – you come into contact with people who need to understand your point of view, either for you to help them, or for them to help you. Equally, you need to understand their point of view.” We need to find that magic formula, that ‘message that attempts to influence people’s opinions, attitudes or actions’.

10 factors increase our powers of persuasion

1. Treating people as individuals

The first big key; unlike socks, there is no “one size fits all” approach that will work for all patients. Some need to be given dollops of TLC, while others want only efficiency, by the same token. Some staff need an authoritarian approach, others thrive under the “I trust you, get on with it” tactic. Successful dentists find the key and then use it to persuade both patients and staff that the surgery is the best place to have their dreams fulfilled.

2. Being a good listener

The second big key; really hearing what your patients and staff tell you about their problems, rather than simply imposing your solutions on them. Listening to them tells them that you really care, but having heard, it is necessary to act as well. Pay attention to detail – this tells the person with whom you are communicating that you have heard, remembered and valued everything they have said. Paraphrase what they have said, so that they can hear that you have heard them.

3. Avoiding too many options

We are obliged to discuss all treatment options explaining their benefits and downsides, and we should note that we have done so. This said and done, when you actually come down to give them a choice between the two or three best options and emphasise the one you favour most.

4. Positive body language

Two people in discussion send messages to each other, not only verbally but by their dress, demeanor and posture. You are more likely to trust someone when the words they are speaking are in harmony with their body language as expressed by eye contact, position of arms, activity of fingers etc.

5. Having a good memory

Ever noticed how impressed people are when, at a party, having only met them once and that 50 minutes before, you remember their name? Magic! Not as difficult as you think, but it requires concentration and focus – or writing it down. Remembering people’s names, birthdays, where they went on holiday, family details, but most of all what you discussed last time is an essential key to being able to get them to buy into your ideas.

6. Avoiding ‘attention breakdown’

An example of this might be the scenario where you are discussing something with a patient, the phone rings, you take the call, and on completion you say ‘Right, where were we?’ Remember, it’s difficult to control attention when there isn’t any in the first place!

7. Understand why ‘difficult’ individuals behave the way they do

Difficult people use stratagems to achieve certain objectives for themselves, for example very autocratic or authoritarian people try to persuade you that you are stouter than you and bully you into submission: I understand that you can only come on at night/weekends, but I cannot get staff of the quality I have during the week to achieve your perfect result.

Needy people try to persuade you that their needs are more important than yours and make you feel sorry for them. See where they are coming from, get behind their attitudes, and then adopt tactics that will help you get them to see your point of view; ‘I understand that you cannot afford to pay £2,000 up front, but perhaps we can split it into 10 payments of £200.’

8. Using ‘open’ communication

Instead of saying, ‘You have to floss twice a day’, you could say: ‘I think that it would really be of benefit to you if you could floss twice a day.’ Other useful ‘open’ phrases include: ‘In my opinion...’, ‘I feel that...’. Make the words you use work for you rather than antagonising the patient or employee.

9. Selling the benefits, not the problems

The message that people take away from a meeting is the one that makes the biggest impact on their minds. By having the treatment now, you will save yourself a lot of money and pain in the future and help keep all your teeth and your lovely smile”, is a better message than, ‘Because you have such serious problems, your treatment will be painful and it’s going to cost you a lot of money, and I can’t guarantee success’ Creating fear will send them elsewhere.

10. Creating mutually beneficial outcomes

Stephen Covey was clear that in order to be successful, we need to create win/win results where both parties benefit. It will benefit you not at all when the cost (to you and/or that person) of working with someone exceeds the benefit you or they experience.

Listen to your patients and act on what you have heard

So, what 10 factors increase our powers of persuasion?

About the author

Adrianne Morris is a highly trained success coach whose aim is to get people from where they are now to where they want to be, in clear measured steps.

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