

The Power of Persuasion: Logic, Emotion, and Character

By Dianna Booher

Women particularly are often tagged "emotional" when communicating persuasively about situations or decisions, and usually the connotation for that label is negative. "She should be able to look at the facts without getting so emotionally involved in the situation." Or: "Let's look at this idea a little more objectively." Or: "You've got to have more data to back up that position; otherwise, when you go into that meeting, they'll kill that project before you get it off the ground."

So what's wrong with being emotional in your persuasive pitch or reacting emotionally to what you hear? Nothing. Emotions are one-third of the success equation.

A sales rep couldn't understand why his buyer wouldn't make a simple inked alteration in a particular purchasing contract. The sales rep had written the wrong model number for the furniture on the contract. And when the buyer had phoned to tell him about the error, the sales rep responded, "No problem. Why don't you just line through it, ink in the correct number, submit it to your boss for approval, and we'll avoid any delays in getting in the order to the manufacturer. The purchasing agent refused, asking the rep to send a completely new version of the contract with the correct model number. Why, despite the delay, did he balk at making the inked change? Upon further investigation, the sales rep identified the problem the purchasing agent's boss had just given him a big lecture about submitting "messy" paperwork. The purchasing agent valued what his boss thought of the neat paperwork over any possible delays with the furniture order. He balked for an emotional reason, not a logical one.

Another case: "I got my \$6 million approved in three days after I rewrote that budget proposal!" a client recently told me. We could have tried for weeks to persuade him that his proposals were not well written. There was a logical explanation for the poor reception his budget request had received from the CEO over the previous eight months. Did logic win him over? Absolutely not. He had an immediate need—get that \$6 million. His was an emotional reaction and acceptance of the "logic" of restructuring his proposal.

If we can believe Aristotle about being persuasive communicators, we need to understand three dynamics to change people's behavior, attitudes, or opinions: logic, emotion, and character. Each plays a part in winning people over to our way of thinking—be they customers, bosses, or colleagues whose attitude or behavior we'd like to mold.

In short, after your boss thinks you're trustworthy (appealing character), you have to make him or her angry at the "unfairness of the system" (appeal to emotion) so as to change that system. And then you'll have to give proof of that unfairness by supplying the wide-spread evidence (appeal to logic).

You'll have to excite the customer about the status he or she will enjoy with your new product (appeal to emotion), and then you'll have to convince that customer that your

product is the best of its kind on the market with user surveys (appeal to logic). Finally, the buyer will need to believe you're an honest salesperson who tells the complete truth (appealing character).

Do you have a cause to which you'd like your peers to donate time or money? You'll have to make those peers feel compassion for the group in need (appeal to emotion), show them exactly where and how their money and time will help (appeal to logic), and then demonstrate your own integrity and concern in the process of fund-raising (appealing character).

Do you want to gain funding for health-club memberships for employees in your division? You'll have to convince the executive who holds the purse strings that wellness reduces absenteeism and increases productivity by supplying statistics (appeal to logic). You'll have to create a fear of heart attacks among key executives to make them feel the potential loss (appeal to emotions). Finally, you'll have to demonstrate that your interest is not only concern for your own health but concern for the well-being of the organization as a whole (appealing character).

Should anyone think Aristotle's observations have little bearing on the present day, he or she need look only to the last few presidential elections for evidence. If you'll recall, each candidate's pitch aimed to gain support for a specific political position or legislation by employing one of these tactics:

Appeal to reason: "Here are the facts, voters." Appeal to emotions: "Let me tell you about my friend in Tallahassee who is out of work and has no health-care insurance." Appeal based on character: "Do you respect and trust this person? Look at the lies told so far." "Does this person have the experience and fortitude to carry out these promises?"

Those who are successful at persuading others to accept their ideas in a business meeting, to vote a certain conviction, to buy a specific service, or to invest their life savings use all three appeals.

Yet most women resist being labeled "emotional" from our counterparts in the business world or by our significant others. Instead we want to be known as rational, logical thinkers. But emotions do underlie everyone's decisions, even at work. In any persuasive transaction, aim to stir in all three ingredients: logic, emotion, character. Your success in getting others to accept your ideas will depend on all three parts of the equation.

#

911 words

© Dianna Booher, Booher Consultants, Inc. All rights reserved.

***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.