



Persuasion styles

Barry Johnson and Mandy Geal

Introduction

We believe in client-based coaching. Having said that, we run into situations where we have to persuade our clients to take action that they may be unsure about or did not generate for themselves. This module looks at a coach's natural style and the styles that are not necessarily natural for the coach, bearing in mind that using the client's style is most likely to succeed.

We shall explore a simple model. There are many influencing and persuasion models. This one is based on a modification of the influencing tactics by Kipnis and Schmidt¹ that over the years we have found to be highly effective.

Basics

If you are to persuade a client, you need four things:

- Firstly, to be absolutely clear about what your client wants to achieve and how they may progress in order to achieve it. The 'what' element is straight-forward. The client has decided that with you. It is the 'how'

activity that may require some persuasion from you as a coach.

- Secondly, you will need to know your preferred persuasion style. This is because you will tend to use it to the exclusion of other styles, particularly when under pressure.
- Thirdly, you will need to identify the preferred style of your client. As we said above, using the client's style is more likely to be effective than any other style.
- Fourthly, you will need to be able to use all four styles to match your clients' styles, and also to be able to move between styles during the process of persuasion – using the most effective style to achieve progress as the persuasion process is unfolding.

There is no right or wrong style, only the most appropriate style for the person, purpose and phase of the persuasion process.

Styles

So what are these styles? The modification of the original broader influencing tactics results

in four styles. These are called logical thinker, friendly helper, firm driver, and enthusiast.

Logical thinker

Logical thinkers work with facts and data. Logical thinkers use reason, structuring the arguments logically, using justification and building towards a rational conclusion, irrespective of the consequences. Logical thinkers often rely on their 'expert power'. This approach works well with those who are rational, logical and open minded, and are not quarrelsome or contrary.

Logical thinkers tend to reject emotional impact or subjective argument. Their approach therefore requires a fine balance as facts may be challenged and a weakness in the logic of the argument destroys their credibility.

The logical thinker normally operates within the client's personal zone², which is 30-48 inches, but may move to within an arm's length – 18-30 inches – in a close phase.

'Pull' behaviours engage the client directly, causing them to respond; or they are responses to behaviours emitted by the client. The skills at this phase include seeking information using open questions and probes, seeking clarification, testing understanding and summarising.

The second phase, having established the client's present position, moves on to problem questions. This builds on the client's awareness of the value of change, using the pull behaviours and adding seeking feelings and reflecting feelings to your repertoire.

These questions seek information about problems or dissatisfactions with the present situation and how the target person feels about the situation. What you are doing is building the client's dissatisfaction with the present situation. For example, you may seek feelings: 'So how do you feel when faced with this problem in front of a customer?' Then you may paraphrase what the client says: 'So you feel embarrassed and that creates further confusion for you.' This may be followed by seeking information on the broader implications: 'How do you think the customer may feel?' The style here may be logical thinker or friendly helper, depending on the client's preferred style, need or emotional state.

The third is to develop with the client a commitment to change. Any of the four styles or a mixture may be used here. For example, enthusiast style may raise the emotional commitment to the outcome, whereas the logical thinker may compare and contrast the present position with the new position. The friendly helper may emphasise how they may help the

client achieve the outcome, whereas the firm driver may close with clearly defined targets and actions presented in a firm 'you will be able to achieve' way, using 'push' behaviours.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let's explore with this mini-questionnaire how effective you are as a persuader.

Push behaviours	Pull behaviours
Seeking information	Giving information
Seeking proposals	Giving feelings
Seeking clarification and testing understanding	Disagreeing
Reflecting feelings	Making content
Supporting	Proposals or suggestions
Building	Making process proposals
Summarising	Clarifying
Suggesting	Shutting out
	Bringing in

References

- David Kipnis, Stuart M Schmidt and Ian Wilkinson, 'Intraorganizational Influence Tactics: Explorations in Getting One's Way', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 65, no. 4, 1980, pp. 440-452.
- Eward T Hall, *Silent Language*, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1990.

Further reading

Barry Johnson and Mandy Geal, 'Behavioural Analysis in Training', *Train the Trainer*, Issue 23, 2005.

Mandy Geal ran her own software company before co-founding Learning Partners, a people development consultancy, in 1995. **Barry Johnson** started his career as an aircraft engineer before taking a degree in psychology and changing career direction to HR and training management. Barry and Mandy are Neuro Linguistic Programming master practitioners who use competencies in the design and running of assessment centres for development and selection, behavioural learning events and performance management. They also design and produce development guides for self-development and coaching.

- Telephone: +44 (0) 1276 29978
- E-mail: barryj@learningpartners.co.uk

Rate yourself on a scale from 5 to 1
Always Rarely

	5	4	3	2	1
1 I am always clear about the client's goal.					
2 I am always clear about what I want the client to do to achieve their goal.					
3 I am competent in using <i>push</i> and <i>pull</i> interactive behaviours.					
4 I establish both the facts and the client's feelings about the current situation.					
5 I know my preferred style.					
6 I am able to use all four styles.					
7 I can establish the client's preferred style.					
8 I can move between styles appropriately.					
9 I can establish commitment in the client to go for their goal.					
10 If I score below 40 points, I will take action to improve my persuasion skills					



An effective persuader moves appropriately between the persuasion styles

A possible problem with using this style is a failure to develop ideas adequately and to organise the information appropriately. It follows that the use of the logical thinker style requires thought, thorough preparation and good communication skills.

Friendly helper

The friendly helper builds rapport so that suggestions tend to be accepted. The friendly helper is empathetic and helpful, and causes the client to think well of them. A valuable tool is ‘sensing’ the client’s mood. This is useful in all styles, but it is a requirement for being a friendly helper. Friendly helpers offer direct help to the client to achieve their goals. This makes it an excellent style

to use with people who are unsure, vulnerable or under stress. The friendly helper also uses promises of rewards and inducing guilt.

Friendly helpers sometimes move into an exchange of favours. This is not bargaining in the negotiating sense. It is entirely at the intangible, personal, supportive, friendly level and is not seeking a compromise, nor is the ‘trade’ weighed for equality in value.

The friendly helper normally operates close to the client; that is, within an arm’s length – 18–30 inches in a close phase and 30–48 inches at a distant phase. It is not unusual for a friendly helper to move closer, to 6–18 inches, when dealing with intimate information.

The danger is that, used alone, the friendly helper’s style may appear weak. The style must be used with a degree of assertion and an avoidance of non-assertion. Overuse of the style could lead the client to suspect the coach’s competence or motivation.

Firm driver

The firm driver is assertive, using a direct, open, positive approach. They may use repetition, the setting of deadlines and time pressure. The firm driver may give the impression of expectation of compliance and being in charge, and may rely on the position power created by the organisational structure or by the expertise.

To be successful with this style, it is essential that the language used is

positive. The use of negative words or phrases should be avoided when presenting the requirements, even if one of them is to move ‘away from’ a given situation or method. The coach’s emotions must be under control, generating a calm if somewhat forceful demeanour. It is easy for the coach using this style to be ‘caught’ by their own emotions.

Firm driver is a double-edged sword. It should be used only when the coach is absolutely certain they are correct and they are relatively certain of overcoming the resistance of the client without rancour. If used ineffectively, the firm driver style can create ill-will, putting the coaching relationship in jeopardy. A firm driver may gain compliance but not commitment.

In the extreme, this style moves to **tough battler**, in which the influencer is insistent and threatening,

using aggression, criticism and sarcasm. This is extremely unlikely in a coaching relationship.

Enthusiast

The fourth style may be an adjunct to the other styles. This style is often associated with charisma and commitment, energy and drive when used by successful influencers. It is unlikely that commitment will be gained using the other styles without some overt enthusiasm.

The coach using the enthusiast style is intuitive and spontaneous, stimulating the client’s emotions, and is likely to take interpersonal risks. The feeling of enthusiasm has amazing effects on the physical body as well. Voice, posture, heart rate and energy are all positively affected and one is filled with drive. When a client finds you enthusiastic about something, it may be difficult for that person not to share some of your enthusiasm.

The extreme enthusiast can create a schism with some clients, strongly in favour or strongly against the proposed action. Some people dismiss enthusiasts as ‘theatrical’. The rejection is not connected to the rationale of the argument, but to the high level of overt emotionality.

Identifying the styles

The normal style of a person can be identified by observation. Above we have produced a matrix of key words for each style. These may be restructured to produce the basis of a questionnaire to give a guideline on your or your client’s primary style. The matrix may also be used as an observation guide to decide on the primary style of a client. It is important to recognise that individuals tend to have a primary style, but have or use a range of attributes from the other styles as well.

	Friendly helper	Firm driver	Logical thinker	Enthusiast
For each style the persuader is likely to be seen:	Encouraging clients Establishing friendships Expressing warmth Rewarding people Trading favours	Initiating action Pressing for agreement Insisting on results Offering challenges Repeating the need	Working systematically Clarifying ideas Evaluating the logic of ideas Appealing to logic Presenting the facts	Working hard Trying to convert clients Outlining opportunities Emphasising benefits Talking about the future
For each style the persuader wants to be seen as:	Trusting Helpful Caring Co-operating Sympathetic Adaptable	Self-confident Organising Forceful Being ‘strong’ Exercising power Risk taking	Practical Methodical Analytical Knowledgeable Understanding information Thorough	Energetic Optimistic Cheerful Enthusiastic Having a goal Outgoing
For each style the persuader is likely to be concerned about	Not being liked Conflict	Lack of power Sentimentality	Chaos or confusion Emotional behaviour	Critical evaluation Apathy
For each style the persuader is likely to be accused of being:	Impractical Self-sacrificing Deferential Without principles	Arrogant Controlling Pressuring Dictatorial	Unimaginative Dispassionate Rigid Finicky	Impatient Unrealistic Poor listener Theatrical

Using the styles

The most effective style is the one that matches the client’s natural style. That having been said, the use of the styles has a tendency to fall into a pattern.

Let’s go back to fundamentals. The reason that the coach needs to persuade the client is that the client can’t decide on the action they need to take, or the client has chosen a route that you as an experienced coach know will be unproductive, or the client does not want to take the productive route they have

selected. Irrespective of the reason to persuade the client, you – as the coach – must be crystal clear about the action you want the client to take.

Persuasion has three phases

The first is to explore how the client sees the present situation, and to uncover any dissatisfaction they may have with the present situation or way forward. From this comes the recognition by the client of the value of change. Here the coach is drawing out information and facts. The style being used is logical thinker and the mode is ‘pull’.