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Persuasive Personal Skills

By Adam Leitman Bailey

You may have an idea that is crucial to the viability of your building. How do you convince other that your idea is a good one? Here are a few suggestions that should allow you to persuade others and as a result, make your building a better and economically efficient place to live.

Listening gets results. First, it allows you to obtain information that you may not have already known. Second, listening also allows you to understand your critic's ideas and may enable you to improve, change, and evolve your ideas. Third, you are more likely to disarm and receive cooperation when your critics believe that you respect them enough to listen to their viewpoints. As a real estate lawyer and litigator, many of the cases, I have participated in could have been avoided if the adversaries listened to each other's positions. The analysis is simple - I have witnessed thousands of cases that are litigated because of the failure of the adversaries to listen and understand each other's arguments. Many times, the clients and adversaries have failed to even understand and are unable to even repeat/summarize the other side's arguments,

Let your opposition know that you want to understand and listen to their position, so you can understand why they disagree with your plan of action. Whether or not you learn something new or change your position you will at least earn the respect of your critics (for caring enough to listen to them). That should allow your organization to improve its relations and that will yield coopera-

tion and positive results.

Of course, many of the cases I have counseled involved no amicable interaction because parties already disdained each other long before the present situation arose. Recognizing this problem, I am an advocate of meeting with adversaries in which both sides will be able to present their argument. If any intercourse can be established, the parties may not need to rely on a judge's opinion resulting in thousands of dollars in damages and legal fees.

I profess a specific detailed approach to earning your critics respect and obtaining the results you desire. Next time you present your ideas to a board, the shareholders or even your spouse, (1) look the person you are persuading directly in their eyes, and (2) repeat back to your speaker a summary of their position explaining that you want to make sure you understand their insight and enjoy the results and respect you have achieved by following this simple rule.

In order to persuade, compliment. Never insult, antagonize, or criticize and never underestimate the value of a team. You will never be able to obtain optimal results or persuade after you have condemned another person. One of the greatest lessons I have been taught was the power of a compliment. Of course, you must give a truthful compliment about the quality that a person possesses that you admire or appreciate. I have never understood why, but humans remember relish compliments. It is difficult to get mad at someone that says something genuinely pleasant about you. The person will not only be thankful that you took the time to commend him or her but he/she will be eager to listen to you and will want to assist you. (It should be noted that false compliments have the opposite effect, and may result in losing credibility with the receiver.)

Begin by complimenting the person on a characteristic that you appreciate them. This is not

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usually too difficult – I have been able to learn or admire something about almost every person I have ever encountered. People provide knowledge or examples and this provides a world full of information that can be gathered.

At a board meeting, when tension has already filled the room, before complaining, start with examples of how the board as whole or individually did something well. You may want to really show that you personally appreciate their time and efforts. When posing the problem, address the issue as a team asking the other how ‘we’ can work together to reach a positive or better result. People usually like an idea better when they think they thought of the idea or participated in its creation.

I recently attended an annual shareholder meeting at which the board members traded harsh insults. I then watched the meeting turn into a mob scene where everyone’s opinion was drowned out by noise. The president of the board personally insulted another board member in front of over one hundred shareholders. The real tragedy was not the personal insults traded but the important needs of the building that could not be accomplished or even addressed as a result of the bantering. The even greater tragedy was recognizing that a board that disdained each other could not possibly effectively govern the cooperative effectively or use essential personal skills required hiring the best vendors at the best prices or even motivating the buildings staff effectively.

Disagreements usually lead to better, more thoughtful plans of action. However, such debates cannot be fruitful when the adversaries do not have the ability to communicate with each other. By complimenting and refraining from insulting, you will not only form a fruitful relationship in which you have the potential to obtain beneficial results, but you will probably be amazed by your joint success.

A wise man once told me that he learned in his native country as a boy that in order to understand another person, you must first walk in their shoes. Learn not only your adversaries’ opinions but also it may assist you to know how and why that person believes in what he/she is promoting. Our childhood, customs, religion, lifestyles, political affiliations, the weather, and many other reasons may contribute to why a person had arrived at an opinion.

By understanding the people you are attempting to persuade, you have given yourself the best and most powerful weapons when entering the meeting. You know how to present your viewpoint so your peers can understand it. You know which analogies to make to explain your opinions. You may be able to use just the right words to explain yourself. You may even have a better understanding of what not to say to avoid upsetting or even offending another person.

When negotiating with another or even when appearing before a judge, I attempt to find out as much as I can about the other person. I read articles that they have written; I speak to their friends and enemies. I look at what magazines they subscribe. I look at the clothing they wear, notice the pictures on their walls, and analyze how their minds work. I go to great lengths to learn about people.

You may find things you have in common and you may develop a greater respect for that person. You may be able to learn how the person thinks, what he or she believes in and even how and what to say when attempting to persuade the other person. I constantly use examples when persuading; the more you know about the person you are persuading the better chance you have to find just the right words and stories to use to obtain the extra edge in the world of persuasion.

Facts persuade. Whether you use visual aids, charts, samples, stories, surveys or comparison,

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people will be persuaded by your data and results. People will want to know how you achieved a certain result and by demonstrating your proposal through research and facts, you will be able to persuade. Always provide reasons why your proposal will be successful. Hundreds of years ago, John Ruskin once stated 'better the rudest work that tells a story or records a fact, than the richest without meaning'. As thinkers, we want to be persuaded by reason. I know no better way to persuade than to prove through reason or facts your proposal is the best.

People will follow your lead, trust and respect you if they label you as a good, conscientious person. No matter what you say or how you present yourself, you cannot persuade if the listener refuses to believe you and cannot rely on your statements. This is not a quick fix but a life long endeavor. Ask yourself whether your actions deserve the respect and trust of the other board members.

I have always derogated "effort", because I believe that if one is satisfied with only putting in a good effort, this will lead to mediocrity and success occurs when you are not satisfied with "effort" but reach for the higher plateau of success and results. However, without effort, your chances of success are the same as at a casino. For persuasion purposes, effort shows the people you are negotiating with that you care about the debated topic. This work effort also demonstrates that you are knowledgeable on the subject. Your effort should also provide you with the confidence to explain your proposal and demonstrate reasons why the proposal should be beneficial to your building. Vince Lombardi may have been correct when stating, "The object is to win fairly, squarely, by the rules-but to win."

However, when persuading, people appreciate "effort" and will reward you for your best efforts. Your proposal may not be the "winning" proposal but your best effort may lead to a better result for everyone and may assist you in a future en-

deavor now that you have earned the respect of your peers.

It was not until recently did I learn to understand and value these two important skills that my father cherishes and allows him to lead and garner the respect of others. There traits are life long endeavors where the results cannot be measured by touchdowns but certainly will assist you in persuading.

Many of my peers who have joined me in studying in the subject of persuasion consider Abraham Lincoln the greatest American negotiator. However, many considered Lincoln a very average man who displayed exceptional personal skills. Woodrow Wilson even called Lincoln 'a very normal man with very normal gifts.' By improving our abilities to persuade, we all have the ability to turn any divided house into a more fruitful and successful enterprise.

Adam Leitman Bailey is a real estate attorney and litigator who has offices in New York City and Hoboken N.J. He was recently featured on national television on a dateline NBC segment titled 'Persuasion and how to get what you want.' He has also negotiated thousands of real estate deals and contracts.