

LINE ON LIFE

7/30/86

The Persuasive Person

David A. Gershaw, Ph.D.

All of us try to get others to do what we want them to do. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes not. How can we become more successful in persuading others?

Psychologists have found that the more **credible** (**believable**) you are in communicating your view, the more likely you are to get the other person to change. What specifically makes you more credible?

One factor is **expertise**. Although this can be obtained through a formal college education, expertise can also be achieved through a background of experience. A plumber with a background of 15 years of successful business is more believable than a plumber who is a novice. However, experts only have credibility when talking about their own field. A plumber would not be any more successful than anyone else in telling people how to raise their children, but a child psychologist would be more believable.

Beside expertise, credibility also relies on being **trustworthy**. One way to discover if people are trustworthy is to ask the question, "*Do they have something to gain personally?*" If the answer is "*No*," they will seem more trustworthy. This is why people rarely trust media advertisements — the person who is doing the ad has something to gain.

For example, I recently broke my windshield on my motorcycle. I went to a motorcycle shop, but they no longer had the style that fit my motorcycle. Rather than modifying one of their windshields, the parts man recommended a glass shop that might be able to make one for me. I followed his advice and had a new windshield made for me at an inexpensive price. Since he gave me advice that did not benefit him — it may even have lost him some money — I will be more likely to trust him in the future — even if future recommendations are to his advantage.

Beside your credibility, the **message** you give is very important. Most advertisements only give a "**pro**" **message**. They give only the good points about their product, typically ignoring the disadvantages or bad points. This type of argument is more likely to convince less-educated people or those people whose initial position was already favorable.

For example, many of you may have heard or seen ads that indicate, "*Our product is unsurpassed...*," meaning that there is none better. In most cases, however, it really means that the products are *all equally good*. The advertisers won't tell you that!

Con and anti-con messages are more effective with those who initially oppose your view.

If you are dealing with more-educated people or those who are initially against your point of view, a pro-message alone will not be effective. With these people, you also need "**con**" and "**anti-con**" messages. The con argument gives the disadvantages of your position. (This will make you appear more trustworthy and credible.) The anti-con reply minimizes or eliminates the negative effects of the con message.

To demonstrate this, let's suppose I was trying to convince you to become a motorcycle rider. First, I would give you a **pro** statement.

"Not only is riding a motorcycle fun and thrilling, but you also save on gas and can park in many spaces that are too small for cars."

If I know that you are against riding motorcycles, I would try to anticipate your objections by giving a **con** message.

"I realize that many motorists don't even see motorcyclists, and you are more likely to be injured if there is a crash."

However, I would immediately follow the con argument with an **anti-con** reply.

"You can avoid being hit by a car by driving defensively. They can train you to do this in motorcycle safety courses. Motorcyclists who get hurt are typically those who are untrained or careless."

Since I have only covered some aspects about motorcycling, I doubt if my arguments would change your mind, if you were against it. However, I hope it does illustrate the method.

I have covered only a few points on how to convince others. There are many other factors that influence your effectiveness. Even so, I hope the hints I have given you will help to make you a more persuasive person.
