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8 Ways to Motivate People To Say Yes More Often

By Ken O'Quinn (Published at [FastCompany.com](https://www.fastcompany.com))

You are trying to persuade your team to embrace your ideas, but they are reluctant. No surprise there. Anytime you try to impose your will on others, you will meet with a degree of opposition. The challenge is to overcome that resistance.

You have two options. People frequently try to take additional steps to highlight the benefits of their ideas or their product, doing whatever they can to make it look more appealing. An alternative approach is to reduce the audience's resistance.

Here are tactics of influence that can motivate people to say yes:

1. INFLUENCE PEOPLE TO ANTICIPATE REGRET

When a prospective customer resists a pitch to buy an insurance policy, a sales rep will often remind the buyer about what could happen in the future if he or she does not have coverage. Anticipating that things will not turn out well influences the choices people make, says psychologist Matthew Crawford. But you must explicitly ask people to anticipate the unfavorable outcomes. People “do not spontaneously anticipate the regret they may experience.”

2. REPLACE BUZZWORDS WITH CONCRETE LANGUAGE

Buzzwords are not persuasive because they don't resonate with people. Boring, vague clichés that people use simply because everyone else uses them don't motivate people. Great speakers and speeches are memorable because their words relate to real people, real objects, and real concepts that the audience can visualize.

3. PROVIDE REASSURANCE

Get a sense of why the person is reluctant to accept your idea, comply with your request, or buy your product. What is she concerned about? Provide some assurance that will allay her worry.

Retail customers sometimes hesitate to buy because they fear that a product won't work or might shrink in the wash. That's why L.L. Bean says its products “are guaranteed to give 100%

satisfaction in every way. Return anything purchased from us if it proves otherwise,” and you can do that even without a sales receipt.

Similarly, if an employee is reluctant to take on an assignment, provide assurance that you will ask someone else to replace him if it doesn't work out. People often worry about the implications of their decision, so a guarantee provides the person an escape route, making it easier to say yes.

The guarantee doesn't make something a better product or a more attractive committee assignment, but it makes the offer more attractive.

4. URGE THE AUDIENCE TO IMAGINE

If people visualize something favorable, such as a higher-paying leadership position, they mentally rehearse that scenario, and they feel capable of achieving it.

When people imagine themselves performing a behavior or enjoying a particular outcome, it becomes an expectation, and people do not like when their expectations aren't met. This is tied up with their self-image, says MIT Professor John Carroll. When people envision something happening and it doesn't, they feel less competent.

5. ASK FOR SOMETHING SMALL INITIALLY

Too many persuasive attempts fail because people overreach. Suppose you want a new training program for your team and it is expensive. Rather than ask for the full package, consider asking to try it as a pilot program, and then come back later and ask for money to fund the full program.

Asking for things in smaller increments invites less resistance. A smaller request is less complicated, less of a financial burden, and less risky. And you increase your chances of gaining approval later for the larger request because of the principle of consistency. People are more likely to be persuaded to say yes to something if they said yes previously because they feel an inherent need to be consistent in their behavior.

6. ACKNOWLEDGE THE RESISTANCE

When you know an audience is resistant, honor their opinions by candidly addressing them at the start. Saying “I understand your concerns about . . .” expresses empathy, validates their point of view, and helps you connect.

7. CHANGE THE COMPARISON

Ask someone to lead a fundraising campaign and she might say no because when comparing that commitment to no involvement, the free time is more appealing. But if you then ask the person to volunteer two hours a week, she is more likely to say yes because you have changed the reference point. Now she is comparing a major commitment with just two hours a week, which looks more manageable.

People consider their options in relation to an anchor point, and you often can persuade them to accept an offer depending on what they are comparing it with.

8. CHANGE THE FRAME OF REFERENCE

You can reframe your idea so that the audience sees it through a slightly different lens, one that makes it appear more positive.

Psychology majors at the University of Kansas had to participate in four hours of research experiments each week, and if they failed to show up for one of the hours, they were penalized one hour and had to complete five hours of research.

Responding to student complaints, psychologist Eric Knowles and colleagues reframed the requirement. They said students had to complete five hours of research, but if they completed four without missing an appointment, the fifth hour would be waived. Students reacted positively. They still had to complete the same amount of work; it was just presented in a different framework.

About the Author:

Ken O'Quinn is a writing coach who teaches workshops in corporations and PR agencies throughout the world. Writing is the only thing he has wanted to do since eighth grade, so after a journalism career with the Associated Press and newspapers, he started Writing With Clarity. In addition to extensive work with corporate communications and PR specialists, he also helps other staff and managers at all levels to sharpen their professional writing skills. When he is not teaching, he enjoys fitness training, hiking, playing competitive softball, walking the ocean beach near his home, and reading nonfiction and fiction. Find Ken at WritingWithClarity.com.

