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# The Principles of Persuasion in Executive Leadership

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**CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE**  
**THE PRINCIPLES OF PERSUASION IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

SUBMITTED TO  
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AND  
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BY  
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FOR  
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### Abstract

Persuasion is becoming increasingly prevalent and important for executives in the business world, especially in light of the current economic situation and the shifting dynamic in organizational management. As a result, it is worth examining the scientific process behind persuasion and how applying these findings will produce more effective executive leaders. This paper will dive into the realm of persuasion in the work place by first drawing upon the history between persuasion and rhetoric, how these historical thought processes have influenced the persuasion we know and understand today, as well as examine how certain techniques can make persuasion most effective, to not only produce more influential leaders, but also passionate and motivated organizations as a whole. Specifically, it will look into how becoming a persuasive leader is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle of the four main principles of effective persuasion: establishing credibility, framing the argument, providing compelling evidence, and connecting emotionally.

## Chapter I: Introduction

From the minute we were born, we learned to cry because crying brought our parents running. Crying meant we would get attention. When we started to talk, we immediately began asking and negotiating for things. Now, we cannot go day to day without asking someone for something or convincing someone to do something, whether we are conscious of doing so or not. Essentially, from the moment we opened our eyes in this world, we began practicing the art of persuasion.

Though the purposes of our influence change according to our environments and situations, it is still one of the essential factors to being successful in any endeavor. A majority of our beliefs, thoughts, and principles are rooted in someone else's persuasion over us. Our environment, including parents, peers, television and other daily influences mold our perceptions and opinions. But if everyone has different opinions, why are we persuaded by the things we are persuaded by? What is it about those Coca Cola advertisements that make me immediately salivate for a Coke instead of a Pepsi? How was President Barack Obama able to win the 2008 elections by such a landslide? In this world, the person who has the ability to convince people to say “yes”, to motivate change, to gather followers, to lead others, wins (Granger, 2008). In today's business circle, a traditional command-and-control type of leadership is not well-received. It is no longer enough to simply tell someone what to do or how to do it and expect them to take action. Today, it is about attracting our audiences and showing them why they should do something and how it will benefit them to do so (Conger, 2008). Persuasion is becoming increasingly prevalent and important for executives in the business world, especially in light of the current economic situation and the shifting dynamic in organizational management. As a result, it is worth examining the scientific process behind persuasion and how applying these findings will produce more effective executive leaders. This paper will dive into

the realm of persuasion in the work place by first drawing upon the history between persuasion and rhetoric, how these historical thought processes have influenced the persuasion we know and understand today, as well as examine how certain techniques can make persuasion most effective, to not only produce more influential leaders, but also passionate and motivated organizations as a whole.

## Chapter II: The ancient history of rhetoric

Though persuasion may seem to be emerging as a new tool for executives to master, it is definitely not new to our world. Just as we naturally picked up our techniques of influence from birth, people have been pondering why we act the way we do and how that happens since the beginning of civilization. The study of rhetoric and speech stretches back to the time of the Ancient Greek and Roman agoras centuries ago. Before we can effectively analyze and utilize persuasion, it is important to have an understanding of its history, as that reveals how the ancient philosophers viewed it, as well as how their thoughts and perceptions have shaped the art of persuasion we practice today.

The ancient Greeks loved their rhetoric and public speaking. Ordinary citizens practiced their skills haggling over prices at the open markets every day and used persuasion to plead before legal bodies (Granger, 2008). Orators would stand in the town square and deliver eloquent speeches, competing for both pride and trophies. Public speaking became a cultural norm. Amidst the rise of the new government, leaders were learning the importance and advantage of being influential, of being able to win agreement or lose support through simple rhetoric. With persuasion and rhetoric taking a growing importance in Greek society, there was a growing demand to learn public speaking skills. A few teachers called Sophists (after the Greek word for *sophos* – knowledge) decided to study it and hold rhetoric lessons for those eager to learn it (Perloff, 2008). They traveled from city to city, teaching oratory skills and techniques for public

speaking to the masses.

However, while Sophists gathered a great group of followers, they attracted opposition from other scholars as well. Philosophers such as Plato did not view the Sophists' practice of rhetoric as representing true persuasion, but more as a tool to win people's immediate approval. They were showing and teaching others how to neatly package an argument for the sheer purpose of gaining agreement, often times leaving out hidden details or weaknesses. To Plato, "rhetoric was like cosmetics or flattery: not philosophy and therefore not deserving of respect" (Perloff, 2008); whereas true persuasion involved "discovering the truth or advancing rational, 'laborious, painstaking' arguments" (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 2000). Plato took a more logical and argumentative approach to persuasive communication, while the Sophists emphasized aesthetic persuasive appeals and oratory skills. This key difference between Plato's and the Sophists' perspectives are crucial as it has impacted our definition of persuasion today and how people view its purposes. If Plato were alive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he would condemn all the political campaigns and television advertisements while the Sophists would celebrate their creativity in appealing to their audiences (Perloff, 2008). In today's business world, effective persuasion involves a balance of both schools of thought – presenting enough logic to build credibility, as well as packaging that logic with powerful language and vivid descriptions that elicit an emotion to sway the audience.

While Plato and the Sophists represented opposite ends of the spectrum on persuasion and rhetoric, Aristotle, Plato's student, was the one to create a hybrid by combining the best ideas from both schools of thought. He saw the importance of having an oratory style without diverging from the truth; however, still placed heavy emphasis on logic and reasoning rather than emotion. Aristotle grew to be an expert of his time and wrote three books about persuasion. Even though these books were published in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., he is still considered to be one the

most influential thinkers of rhetoric. His main contribution was developing the scientific approach to persuasion, believing that it should not be used as a tool to persuade people, but rather as a tool to discover scientific principles of persuasion (Perloff, 2008). Based on his research, he concluded that there were three main ingredients to being successfully persuasive:

- *Logos* (message arguments: the appeal to logic, reason, and facts)
- *Ethos* (the nature of the communicator: the appeal of the speaker's authority, character, and credibility)
- *Pathos* (emotional state of the audience: the appeal to their emotions)

(Granger, 2008; Perloff, 2008).

Aristotle believed that logic was the most reliable appeal and persuasion should be based on logic and reason. He also recognized that some people were more persuaded by emotion, but deemed that as a "human failing" (Granger, 2008). Aristotle's emphasis on logos and ethos were practical, but as was later discovered, not the most effective without the element of pathos.

Aristotle's findings were so compelling, persuasive, and effective that the ancient Roman's adopted and continued evolving these practices after they conquered Greece. As Aristotle was to Greece, Marcus Tullius Cicero was to Rome. However, unlike Aristotle, Cicero encouraged the use of emotion in powerful persuasion and realized that persuasion made knowledge useful, that a man would be great if he were the master of both knowledge and persuasion (Granger, 2008; Perloff, 2008). Caesar Augustus capitalized on Cicero's theory and mastered the ethos appeal by starting his speeches with the renowned "Vini, Vidi, Vici" – I came, I saw, I conquered. In the first ten seconds, he was able to capture his audience with whom he was and why they should listen to him (Granger, 2008).

Even after the religious dominance of the Roman Catholic Church and their oppression of studying persuasion and rational thought, Aristotle and Cicero's original theories once again

resurfaced in Renaissance Europe where it was connected with the new field of psychology. In the meantime, the seeds of persuasive thought had been planted on the other side of the Atlantic; in the American colonies (Granger, 2008). While persuasion and rhetoric has had a long and colorful history, only recently have these influence tactics been specifically targeted in the workplace. Leaders of the ancient world harnessed these persuasive tactics to appeal to their audiences and ultimately got things done through them. The leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century business world are starting to display their best persuasive efforts as well. Over time, the understanding of persuasion has grown more complex. The art of persuasion today is broken down into more than just logos, ethos, and pathos. It has become a researched process composed of specific applicable principles and influence tactics in both speech and delivery. Today's perspective of effective persuasion is a combination of both Aristotle and Cicero's philosophies, capitalizing on the logic, factual evidence, and emotion behind the argument.

### Chapter III: What is persuasion?

There are many other associations that come to mind when the term 'persuasion' is used, such as influence, convince, or even manipulate and coerce. Some scholars have ventured to define it a few ways:

“ ‘A communication process in which the communicator seeks to elicit a desired response from his receiver’ ” (Anderson, 1971).

“ ‘A conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or behavior of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message’ ” (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987).

“ ‘A successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom’ ” (O'Keefe, 1990) (Perloff, 2008).

These definitions are all boiled down to the main idea that successful persuasion involves influencing another person so that they have the freedom to choose to change their behaviors or attitudes (Perloff, 2008). Effective persuasion allows for a freedom of choice as it becomes more of a negotiation to arrive at an agreed solution (Conger, 2008). This way, persuasion becomes more of a collaborative effort, rather than a manipulative tactic that only presents the audience with a single, fleeting opportunity or choice.

In a study conducted by Symon (2000), she examined the use of rhetoric on everyday life to weave views of reality through argument and persuasion. She defined rhetoric as “the dynamic and responsive manner in which, in a specific context, our talk presents and justifies a particular perspective on reality to an audience, thereby arguing against other (implicit or explicit) perspectives” (Symon, 2000). Presenting an argument in a ‘dynamic and responsive’ manner supports the idea that there is no cookie cutter for successful persuasion, but rather involves a degree of creativity that is catered to every ‘specific context’. This also takes into consideration the other side of the argument, to be able to anticipate possible counter-arguments because ultimately, rhetoric is used to persuade an audience, whether metaphorical or literal, as well as ourselves.

#### Chapter IV: Persuasion in the workplace

Persuasion is rapidly developing as a crucial role in all organizational positions across the board and is believed to become “the new language of business leadership” (Conger, 2008). Traditional hierarchy in the workplace is changing because ideas are more free-flowing due to advances in technology, increased electronic communication and a new Generation Y dominating the working population. People commonly think that persuasion is used as a business tactic, especially reserved for salesmen and deal-clinching situations. However, real “constructive” persuasion is used by everyone in all levels of the work place, but especially by

executives to motivate change and passion, not manipulation or deceit. Persuasive speech is becoming more powerful than the traditional bureaucratic organizational structure. In fact, Harvard Business School Professor Michael D. Watkins believes that “formal authority alone is never sufficient to get things done. Leaders need the power to persuade” (Granger, 2008). Effective persuaders motivate change, build successful teams and revitalize organizations and are successful by appealing to deeply rooted human needs ” (Granger, 2008). It is about reaching a compromise and working together to arrive at a solution of action.

A majority of an executive’s time everyday is spent talking and interacting to people of all levels—above, below, lateral—usually with the motivation to influence and persuade. In fact, managers spend about 80% of their time communicating with others, essentially trying to convince other people to do certain tasks and accomplish specific goals (Perloff, 2008). Thus, if they were truly effective, being persuasive would inherently help make an organization more time-efficient, by condensing communication and, as a result, allotting more time for executives to attend to other responsibilities. Persuasion can also pull people together, move ideas forward, galvanize change and forge constructive relationships (Granger, 2008). Being persuasive not only makes for a stronger and more influential executive leader, but also an improved, more efficient organization as a whole.

Executives and managers have many different objectives and motivations in trying to persuade their employees, as there are a wide range of frequently practiced tactics. Influence objectives tend to range in altering someone’s plan, supporting a proposal, accepting and carrying out assignments, and other tasks of that nature (Yukl & Falbe, 1990). Yukl & Falbe (1990) found that the most popular tactics exhibited by these executives to influence others below them were pressure, upward appeals (approval from authority), exchange tactics, inspirational appeals, and consultation. This paper will focus more on inspirational and positive

emotional appeals to persuasion of all levels rather than negative influence tactics such as pressure.

It may seem obvious and even common sense that persuasive leaders tend to make for more effective leaders; however, a majority of executives simply feel they cannot be persuasive because they do not have the natural skills of charisma and eloquence. Those who are gifted with the natural ability to be charismatic and eloquent do not know how to pass on their knowledge to others because they cannot pinpoint the science behind the art. However, with modern science, research conducted by experimental behavioral psychologists have examined the art of spoken persuasion in organizations and analyzed how certain types of interactions positively influence people to change, comply and concede to requests without the use of deceptive manipulation (Cialdini, 2001). Interestingly, contrary to what Plato and Aristotle found, while ethos and logos still play foundation roles in persuasion, pathos and the use of language to achieve those emotions, is actually the strongest tool of persuasion. Ironically, in retrospect, the Sophists were not completely off-target when they emphasized appeal and oratory skills centuries ago.

#### Chapter V: Completing the jigsaw puzzle

Delivery is the crux to being persuasive in the organization, to be able to feign charisma. It is important to be able to relay information in a relatable way that is leveled with the audience so that they are actually hearing what is being said, so that they are hearing the substance behind the verbal art. Behavioral psychologists and experts have found that there are certain fundamental principles to persuasion. Essentially, executives who want to proactively improve their persuasive skills can learn and apply tactics to improve their effectiveness as being both charismatic and influential (Cialdini, 2001). Studies have shown that in order to be the most effectively persuasive in public speech, it is essential to have credibility in the given field, be able to frame the arguments in a way that is relevant to the audience, to use vivid language to

provide evidence for arguments and lastly, to tie everything together by connecting emotionally with the audience. By breaking down persuasion into a skill that can be adapted by any executive and applied to their organization, it is surprising that not more executives are taking advantage of these scientific findings.

Essentially, these four main principles of effective persuasion: establishing credibility, framing the argument, providing compelling evidence, and connecting emotionally are all important pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. If one piece is missing, the puzzle is not complete. They are all equally important and inter-dependent and if not harnessed correctly, weaken an executive's degree of influence. The credibility helps establish the framework of an argument, giving it a strong foundation to be built upon. However, it is not enough for the framework to be composed of just facts and statistics because this simple makes for a skeleton of an argument deliverable by anyone. To maximize impact and influence and be differentiated from the masses, an executive needs to take the extra step of engaging the audience through their use of language and emotion, such as stories, metaphors and speech tactics. It is about creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding on an even playing field and planting the seeds of motivation and change from there.

#### *Proving credibility and expertise*

The largest problem is the mindset of many executives, as they overestimate their own credibility by basing their source of persuasiveness solely on power of position and authority. As a result, people naturally wonder, "What makes this person an expert?" or "Why should I trust what he is saying?". As previously mentioned, the command-and-control days of management are on the verge of extinction. People need to genuinely feel that the leader is a true expert in a given field with their personal experiences and be able to reinforce those experiences with credible resources, such as scientific findings or research. Meta-analytical studies have

found that message communicators are typically seen as credible or not-credible and those who come across with high levels of credibility with truth and validity tend to get their messages taken more seriously and are more likely to be internalized by the audience (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Internalization is an important subcomponent achieved by establishing credibility because those who choose to internalize arguments are more likely to change their behaviors, thoughts, or attitudes accordingly (Kelman, 1961). Overall, the audience of a persuasive message is more likely to accept the message arguments and experience a shift in attitude when those arguments come from an expert or trustworthy source (Sternthal et al., 1978; Yalch & Elmore-Yalch; 1984; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). A study conducted by the Public Opinion Quarterly showed that the influence of credibility on a person's opinion is one of the most powerful sources of persuasion, as a 2% shift in public opinion nationwide was associated with a single-expert opinion new story in *The New York Times* (Cialdini, 2001). Meta-analytical studies have also found that expertise tends to have the greatest effect on persuasion with an average of 16% of the explained variance due to the expert versus non-expert manipulation (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). As the technological world is rapidly developing and information is becoming more publicly available over the internet, people have a better-rounded knowledge base and are less likely to believe everything they see or hear. Therefore, they seek a tangible source of credibility that differentiates the speaker into someone worth listening to and believing in.

Credibility is so important, but not difficult to build. Strong credibility largely stems from two sources:

“expertise and relationships. People are considered to have high levels of expertise if they have a history of sound judgment or have proven themselves knowledgeable and well informed about their proposals...On the relationship side...they can be trusted to listen and work in the best interests of others. They have also consistently shown strong emotional character and integrity” (Conger, 2008).

It is insufficient for executives to think that their position or title is enough leverage to garner others' belief and trust in what they are saying. There needs to be a transparency of where their 'expert' knowledge is derived from before they can try influencing their audience. Cialdini (2001) found in a study that many stroke patients would stop their exercise routines once they were discharged, even though they were all repeatedly told by physical therapists how vital consistent and regular rehabilitation exercises were to regaining full body function. When patients were interviewed, an overarching concern across responses was how credible these physical therapists were in their field. The patients knew the background and training of their physicians, but not their therapists. As a result, the physical therapists started displaying their diplomas, awards and certifications in their offices, and through this simple action, exercise compliance increased 34% and stayed consistent. In the case of executives, hanging up diplomas may not be the most effective tactic, as their amount of face-time with their employees and reputation tend to speak louder than what décor is hung on their walls. As a result, it is particularly beneficial for executives to interact with their employees on a regular basis, so that they can build relationships with them, as well as understand their needs and concerns so that they can be more easily persuaded (Cialdini, 2001). These informal interactions work as a two-way street for both executives and employees to learn more about one another on a professional and personal basis, strengthening their work relationships and level of trust.

Another benefit of executive-employee communications is that these "exchanges that are social in nature are based on a trust that gestures of goodwill will be reciprocated in the future...the exchange of mutual support that is of concern to the parties involved in the exchange" (Blau, 1964). These communications solidify an employee's belief as to what extent their organization values their contributions and their well-being, which Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa (1986) labeled as "perceived organizational support" (Settoon,

Bennett, & Liden, 1996). These high levels of perceived organizational support actually create a feeling of obligation in the employee toward the organization and are also associated with a trust that the organization will fulfill its exchange obligations. Research has also indicated that perceived organizational support is positively correlated with performance of job responsibilities, citizenship behavior, and commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Settoon et al., 1996). Settoon et al. (1996) found that perceived organizational support was a stronger correlate of organizational commitment and leader-member exchange was highly related to citizenship within the workplace. If executives are able to create these feelings of commitment and loyalty to the organization by creating a high sense of perceived organizational support through small communications with its employees, it not only creates a web of trust throughout the organization, but more importantly for the executive leader himself.

#### *Framing arguments*

The power of persuasion, or rather the effects of the lack of, is resonated when ‘what you said’ is not understood by anyone because of ‘how you said it’. Substantial and important information can be lost on an audience that is not engaged or cannot identify with the argument or how it can benefit their livelihood. How an argument is framed and approached is just as, if not more important, than what is actually being said. In fact, studies have found that “in some contexts, style may actually become substance, rendering the effects of the two largely indistinguishable...style may inhibit or enhance the accurate processing of message substance [and] provide a convenient means of simply surmising message substance, even with little actual knowledge of it” (Sparks & Areni, 2008). How an argument is introduced and choosing an angle that is both relatable and prevalent to the audience is crucial in setting up a strong platform for successful influence and persuasion. One way of doing so is finding or establishing common ground with the audience, which involves knowing what the employees value, as well as

addressing some concerns that they may have expressed. Researchers have found that an audience that feels like they can identify with the speaker, whether it is through similar ideologies or physical attributes, are more likely to be persuaded (Kelman, 1961; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Again, building relationships with employees surfaces again, as not only a way to build credibility, but also as a tactic of approaching arguments that will most likely face support and approval, rather than rejection and disagreement. Each framework should be tailored to what the argument is and finding a focus for the underlying argument so that it targets a deeper common human need, bringing everyone to the same level.

Finding a suitable frame is only the first step to the start of an effectively persuasive argument. In order to compliment the frame, executives need to match the argument with their tone of voice, the language they use, and even the specific words they choose. The tone and language that an executive takes will show how much they believe in what they are trying to say. Language reflects social power and those who use speech markers associated with high social power tend to be evaluated more favorably than those who do not (Areni & Sparks, 2005). A study conducted by O'Barr (1982), analyzed courtroom transcripts and identified different speech markers that were seen to correlate with high and low perceived social power. Through these repeated tests, researchers were able to categorize types of language into powerful and powerless speech. O'Barr defined powerless speech as containing—nonverbal and verbal hesitations (“umm”), vague phrases (“that man there”), formal language (“sir”, “therefore”), tag questions (“that’s correct right?”), hedges (“I guess”), and intensifiers (“it was very, very dark”) (Areni & Sparks, 2005). Powerful speech, on the other hand, does not contain these speech markers. Powerless speech conveys a sense that the communicator is not as powerful or confident and, as a result, is perceived to be less persuasive and credible than someone who uses powerful speech (Areni & Sparks, 2005; Hosman & Wright, 1987). These speakers are often

more likely to be seen as not as intelligent or knowledgeable and the use of powerless speech may even be a distracter to the audience, reducing their ability to stay attentive and engaged (Granger, 2008). Powerful speech is thus received with more confidence and trust within the audience, as those speakers tend to be “rated more positively in terms of intelligence, attractiveness, competence, credibility, sociability, and social power” (Sparks & Areni, 2008). Therefore, it is in an executive’s best interest to use powerful language by speaking concisely and directly, as well as avoiding qualifiers, hedges, tag questions and the other speech markers that are correlated with powerless speech (Granger, 2008). Using powerful speech will not only boost an executive’s credibility, but also reinforce his passion and personal belief of his argument. Powerless speech will only reduce the overall persuasiveness of even a well structured and researched argument, as it creates doubt and a sense of weakness in the speaker.

As previously mentioned, persuasion is a two-fold process. It is both persuading the audience as well as oneself. If a speaker seems engaged and invested in the argument, the audience is more likely to feed off of that energy and not only be more attentive to what the executive is saying, but also be in more agreeability. This phenomenon is also known as emotional contagion. In a simplified explanation of emotional contagion, developmental psychologist Goldie (1999) related it to “ ‘catching’ another’s emotional state in the way in which children can catch each other’s excitement or hysteria”. It is about infecting the audience with the energy or spirit that is framing the argument and exuding the executive’s passion about it. Half of the persuasive process is getting the audience engaged and enthralled, the next half is actually forming the potential for them to change their minds or beliefs on a matter, making a possibility into a reality.

### *Compelling arguments*

Thus far, building credibility and framing arguments by creating common ground

with the audience, while using powerful language, have been the main focus. While those components are very important in building a strong starting point and foundation for a persuasive speech, using vivid language in evidence to support arguments and connecting emotionally with the audience are what ultimately determines whether or not someone is successful in being persuasive or not. Using statistics and research results are effective ways of building credibility and expertise in an area; however, simply presenting statistics is not enough. The most effective way to utilize statistics and harness the structure that is slowly being built is, once again, in the way everything is being presented to the audience. Researchers have found that “the most effective persuaders use language in a particular way. They supplement numerical data with examples, stories, metaphors, and analogies to make their positions come alive. That use of language paints a vivid word and picture and, in doing so, lends a compelling and tangible quality to the persuader’s point of view” (Conger, 2008). While framing an argument targets powerful speech in the specific words that are being used, building compelling arguments involves using powerful language overall that focuses on the big picture. In this context, using “intense language” does not fall into the category of powerless speech markers, but rather encompasses the use of metaphors and vivid language that is filled with emotionally-charged words (Granger, 2008). In a meta-analytical study of the effects of metaphors on the power of persuasion, it concluded that messages which contained metaphors were more likely to create greater attitude change than messages without metaphors because metaphorical language creates greater interest in a message and increases motivation for processing the message (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Being able to paint a mental picture with a story or vivid language for an audience so they can imagine and submerge themselves in this hypothetical world that is ultimately being created by the executive (speech maker), will not only provide the audience with something tangible to hold onto, but also generate more motivation to entertain the

possibility of changing their perspectives or viewpoints. Essentially, persuasive executives can place others into a world laden with a personalized and targeted emotion.

This is where emotional primacy comes into place. An effective persuader knows how to harness their own primacy by creating a visual description to instill emotion in someone, which is a quick and efficient way to place someone in an emotional space (Conger, 2008). While Plato and Aristotle were correct in emphasizing logic and facts, which contribute to an executive's credibility and platform, the Sophists were correct in emphasizing emotion, as that is the main driving force behind an audience's involvement, as well as likelihood to be persuaded. Emotion with a combination of powerful language become the strings that tie an entire argument together, bundling and packaging it into something that is not only attractive, but also garners a sense of motivation and passion of change within the audience.

#### *Connecting emotionally*

In today's world, ethos has become credibility and knowledge, a sense of authority; logos is translated into logic supported with data and facts; pathos is pure emotion fueling the non-cognitive reasons behind why we make the decisions we do (Granger, 2008). In fact, targeting emotion can be a very useful and effective tactic for being persuasive because it overpowers logic and authority. In the hustle and bustle of the business world, most people are running on "automatic mode" where people generally tend to make decisions and change their attitudes and actions largely based on cues of language and emotion. They start to rely on their gut feeling and immediate judgments rather than on in-depth analyses (Granger, 2008; Griskevicius, Shiota, & Neufeld, 2010). A strong executive leader must show emotional commitment in their brain, heart, and gut and match these levels with those of the audience. They need to exhibit enough passion and commitment to be convincing, but simultaneously show they have control over their emotions, so that they are not solely driven by feelings. It is a

tight rope to walk, as executives who seem to let their emotions go out-of-control tend to cause their audience to doubt their judgments (Cialdini, 2001; Conger, 2008). As a result, it is equally important for an executive to be able to harness and control their own emotion, as well as accurately gauge the employees' emotions in order to best match it, whether it is through the use of changing tones, volume of voice, or even pace of speech.

It is very improbable for executive leaders to be liked on a personal level by all their employees; however, regardless of these feelings, in order for an executive to lead change and influence, they need to be able to garner trust and respect from their employees, at least on a professional level. In order for an executive leader to have an influential impact on their workforce, the employees need to genuinely feel that their executive leaders are "committed to what they want them to do" (Cialdini, 2001). One way for an executive to gather followers is through public commitment. Cialdini (2001) found "that most people, once they take a stand or go on record in favor of a position, prefer to stick to it" and "a choice that is made actively – one that's spoken out loud or written down or otherwise made explicit – is considerably more likely to direct someone's future conduct than the same choice left unspoken". This commitment is further reinforced when people see approval from peers around them, as well as from higher authority. One way executives can ensure that people's votes of support are not just temporary and short-lived, is to get these commitments in forms of writing, such as a memo or even verbal agreement. As a result, these people are more likely to hold themselves accountable because they feel "obligated to live up to their commitments because those commitments were active, public, and voluntary" (Cialdini, 2001).

As previously mentioned, an effective executive leader must show emotional commitment in the brain, heart, and gut and is used to not only match the emotional levels of the audience, but to ultimately use emotion to leverage commitment from the audience. Effective

persuaders know how to gauge the emotional state of their audience and to change their own angle or tone accordingly (Conger, 2008). This sixth sense of anticipating someone's reaction or emotional level may come naturally to some, just as how some leaders are naturally charismatic and eloquent. Similarly, like charisma and eloquence, emotional anticipation can be learned as well. In fact, it is not as abstract as it may sound, and just involves some extra research and communication on an executive's part. In order to best gauge the current emotional state of the audience as well as best anticipate their reaction, it is up to the executive to actively reach out and get a sense of the 'status quo' in the employees. This can be done through simple, informal conversations with other staff members of all levels to test their reactions to certain suggestions of change (Conger, 2008). Many factors need to be taken into consideration, such as current company morale, types of pivotal changes that have been faced with opposition or support in the past and why, as well as determine how those reasons can be geared toward framing a more successfully persuasive argument. This testing phase will help ensure, or at least increase the chances that the emotional appeal behind the argument matches what the audience is already feeling or expecting to feel (Conger, 2008). Sometimes matching an audience's emotional stage may require presenting strong, forceful points to motivate support and change, or simply soft whispers to create a sense of hope and opportunity (Conger, 2008). It all depends on what the audience will respond to most effectively and may very well involve a combination of different speech tactics, such as tone, volume, and speed. An executive's ability to connect on an emotional level with its audience not only shows a sense of good leadership, but more importantly of responsibility and care for its workforce overall. The executive put in the time and effort to learn about its employees concerns and based changes off of those results, so those actions not only create support but also build respect and trust in the executive's credibility, reputation, and intentions.

Interestingly, psychologists Griskevicius et al. (2010), have found that most people are in positive affect stages, where they are “less likely to scrutinize incoming information carefully and more likely to base their judgments on simplifying heuristics” and as a result, people in these positive or happy moods tend to be persuaded by both strong and weak arguments. On the other hand, those who are in a state of negative affect tend to be more systematic. They “scrutinize incoming information and do not base judgments on simplifying heuristics”; therefore, people in these states are generally only persuaded by strong arguments. While this may be a rough rule of thumb to sort an audience, it also supports the idea that it is in the best interest of a persuasive leader to emphasize emotional appeal, as most people in the audience will be persuaded by that tactic alone. In fact, people can even be triggered into certain heuristic positive moods so that they are more likely to be persuaded. In this same study, the most effective heuristic triggers were anticipatory enthusiasm and amusement, whereas awe and nurturant love created systematic emotions. Applying these findings to the executive world, leaders would be able to trigger their audience into creating these individual heuristic emotions in their own minds by asking them to think of a time when they “knew something good was going to happen and they were looking forward to that event” (anticipatory excitement) or a time when they “heard a funny joke or a specific time when something funny happened” (Griskevicius et al., 2010). People induced in these emotions tend to be more easily persuaded by weaker arguments, so leaders can even create these emotions for the audience through the metaphors, stories and language they use.

## Chapter VI: Applications of persuasion

Just as Caesar Augustus captivated his audience with “Vini, Vidi, Vici” in 44 B.C., executives and leaders alike are learning to utilize the power of emotional engagement in their persuasive attempts. Effective persuasion has the power to create large-scale change and

motivate others to join and be a part of the change. An essential quality of being a leader is charisma. It is the quality that “makes people want to follow you. It is the ability to inspire. People follow a leader because they trust him” (Iacocca, 2007). This section will focus on two prominent and very charismatic leaders of our business and political world today: Lee Iacocca, former president of the Chrysler Corporation, and Barack Obama, the president of the United States of America. Though they play rather different but very crucial roles, their ability to persuade, apply the principles of persuasion, and gather support from surrounding resources are the main components to their success as leaders. They have the charismatic ability to appeal to whoever their audience is and motivate change in their beliefs, actions and ideas. They create trust and hope through their tunnels of communication and characteristics, whether as the CEO of a private corporation or the president of a country. Each of their jigsaw puzzles varies slightly in the type of end result they want to create, but they share the essential persuasive pieces in their arguments to first create that desired change.

*Lee Iacocca: Savior of the Chrysler Corporation*

*Overview of the crisis*

In the summer of 1979, Chrysler Corporation’s chairman John Riccardo publicly announced that the corporation was struggling financially, as “second-quarter losses reached \$207 million and Chrysler owed \$4 billion, nearly 10% of all U.S. corporate debt”, and asked for government assistance (Anastakis, 2007). At the end of that year, when Iacocca was brought on-board Chrysler as their new president, the corporation had totaled \$1.2 billion in losses that fiscal year, the largest recorded loss in U.S. corporate history, and was on the brink of bankruptcy. One of Iacocca’s first moves as president was to work toward persuading the federal government for: “a \$1 billion U.S. tax holiday, a two-year postponement of federal exhaust emission standards (worth \$600 million to the company), and concessions from the United Auto Workers”

(Anastakis, 2007). In January of 1980, Chrysler closed the Dodge plant in Hamtramck, Michigan, the ‘symbolic heart’ of Walter Chrysler’s company and stopped paying their suppliers, company morale was at an all-time low when President Jimmy Carter signed the Chrysler Corporation Loan Guarantee Act of 1979 into law later that month. This act essentially provided Chrysler with an aid package of \$3.5 billion: \$1.5 billion in loan guarantees and \$2 billion in private financing, concessions from banks, suppliers, union employees and salaried employees; and also approved a two-year exemption from federal exhaust emissions (Gardner, 2008; Anastakis, 2007). Less than two-years later, in the summer of 1981, Chrysler turned a small-profit of \$11.6 million for the first time after consecutive quarters in the red. Then in 1983, less than four-years after the federal bailout, Chrysler paid off their debt, almost seven years ahead of schedule.

#### *How Iacocca brought change*

Revitalizing Chrysler as a corporation involved tackling multiple layers of a complex corporate system. It was not enough to gather money to pay off the debt. He had to rebuild the corporation’s image and reinstall trust in the brand. He appealed to a vast group of people that “saving the company his way was the best and only option for Chrysler” and emphasized that “we have a tough task ahead of us. The challenge is formidable. But together we can do it. It’ll take everyone—the employees, the dealers, the suppliers, the union, the government—and we’re asking for your help” (Anastakis, 2007). Iacocca successfully turned the corporation around because he was able to effectively address and attend to the three key parties directly involved in the financial package: the federal government, employees and stakeholders of Chrysler, and the American people.

First and foremost, he leveraged the crisis, by making it urgent and serious, but recoverable. Chrysler’s financial crisis was headlined all over the newspapers and media, making

the serious consequences of their possible bankruptcy a highly publicized event. At the time, it was estimated that if Chrysler went bankrupt,

“400,000 workers would lose their jobs...unemployment in Detroit would jump from 8.7% to between 16% and 19%. The U.S. economy as a whole would lose 1.5% of America’s entire gross national product. Welfare costs would increase by \$1.5 billion a year...and add a further \$1.5 billion” in the nation’s deficit (Anastakis, 2007).

However, Iacocca was able to use this negative press to his advantage. These research statistics clearly underlined the magnitude of the after-effects of Chrysler’s failure, which not only included consequences for Chrysler’s direct employees, but more importantly, huge financial repercussions for the country as a whole. Presenting these numbers to Congress showed that a federal aid package would not just help Chrysler stave off bankruptcy, but save the U.S. federal government from even more serious financial burdens in the future. Essentially, Iacocca created a win-win situation for both the corporation and for the well-being of the American economy. He also stated that “the importance of money is almost overshadowed by the importance of the government’s vote of confidence needed to keep our present creditors in line” and that “Chrysler was a ‘good company’ that was ‘worth saving’ ”, showing respect and trust in the federal government (Anastakis, 2007). In another attempt to win Congress over, Iacocca appealed to patriotism in order to save this American brand. There were signs and mottos that read “We Are Americans...Chrysler needs help” and that granting federal loans was not “Un-American”. In fact, when President Carter announced the aid package, he stated that “the bailout was necessary ‘to avoid the loss of hundreds of thousands of American jobs among automobile workers and to keep a highly competitive automobile industry in our country’ ” (Anastakis, 2007). Iacocca’s appeal to the nation’s pride and patriotism for Congress’ help was a pivotal first step in his overall success in saving Chrysler Corporation.

Secondly, Iacocca was successful in managing and aligning the complicated web of

networks that were strung around Chrysler's existence as a corporation, which involved suppliers, banks, multiple local and state governments, unions, as well as foreign firms. He had to fire thousands of managers and salaried employees, but was also able to have unions, suppliers, and banks agree to concessions. He was able to address each of their concerns and prove that ultimately, all these risks and changes would help bring Chrysler out of bankruptcy risk and ultimately be for the greater good of themselves, as well as the corporation. Persuading so many different players to trust in him and his plan was key to putting the corporation in the ideal positions to best take advantage of the bailout package.

Lastly, Iacocca utilized his marketing and communication skills to maintain consistent interaction with the public and the American people. He leveled with the politicians, the employees, and the stakeholders (Anastakis, 2007). He brought the problem down to a personal level and “ ‘made every person feel personally involved in the recovery’ ”, which he did by traveling to all the Chrysler plants, thanking employees for their loyalty and “ ‘asked them to join [him] in restoring the company to greatness’ ” (Anastakis, 2007). He broke down the bureaucratic dividers between management and the workforce, as it was a combined effort of everyone in the company to bring Chrysler out of its current situation. It was a team effort that could not be completed without everyone's help. To the American people, he was honest and transparent. He focused on presenting the truth to the people about the situation Chrysler was in and how they were trying to revitalize it, marking every advertisement and commercial with his signature. He rebuilt the trust by appealing to the loyalty of Americans to an American brand. Lee Iacocca became the face of Chrysler. Iacocca knew how to harness his talents and strengths, as well as personality to reach out to all the different people invested in this corporation to ultimately put Chrysler on the track to recovery.

*Iacocca's jigsaw puzzle*

Iacocca had all the pieces of his puzzle in place. His credibility actually stemmed from his past experience and rapid success at competing Ford Motor Company, where he first started out of college as an engineer. Soon after starting, he switched to sales where he excelled, and quickly became general manager of the Ford Division in 1960 (Anastakis, 2007). Eventually he was put in charge of the company's car marketing and went on to create his own line in 1964, the Mustang (Cole, 2001). It was an immediate success with people flocking to the dealerships, wanting to buy the new car. However, shortly after being promoted to President of Ford Motor Company in 1970, Henry Ford II fired him as he felt threatened by Iacocca's success and innovation. If anything, Iacocca's dismissal at Ford and immediate hire by Chrysler spoke to Iacocca's credibility through experience, expertise and potential in leading Chrysler out of their downward spiral. Even though he had a strong foundation of credibility from personal expertise and past success, it did not ensure repeated success, so it was not enough for Iacocca to be named president; he had to win the trust and confidence of his employees, the stakeholders, and Congress. He was able to do this by framing this of his arguments toward whichever group he was speaking to. To Congress, he targeted the magnitude of the repercussions that would result from Chrysler's failure, which were in the interest of both parties to avoid. To the stakeholders and employees, he leveled that it was a big risk, but that they would move toward change together. To the American public, he understood their concern and hesitancy to invest in Chrysler; however, they humbled and differentiated themselves from competitors by delivering products the public wanted and being truthful about their situation and future plans.

Iacocca was not proposing in making this large change all by himself and keeping his plans behind a shroud of secrecy, but rather was transparent in his efforts, garnering trust from people of different levels. His evidence of the current situation and success were actually largely

through the media. The headlines that attracted a lot of attention also solidified his argument that a government bailout was necessary. His appeal to American patriotism also targeted the deeper emotion of freedom and unity, that Americans would come together to help an American-brand in a serious time of need. His efforts to talk to the employees personally by visiting every plant, addressing their concerns, thanking them for their loyalty and reinforcing that it was a team effort. These proactive actions actually reaffirmed his framework of arguments because by directly interacting with the people, he was able to show his genuine appreciation, as well as form his points of persuasion by listening to their concerns and suggestions. These interactions also allowed him to gather a sense of how people are feeling toward him and the Chrysler image. By leveling with the American public, Congress, and stakeholders and targeting their deep concerns and persuading points, he was able to create the emotion of patriotism, creating both hope and optimism for change. Iacocca was able to mesh all the basic principles of persuasion and flexibly adjust with his tactics according to who his audience was. His ability to execute these persuasive insights enabled him to step in to Chrysler Corporation during such a desperate time of need and turn the company around 360-degrees by not only bringing them out of debt, but also restructuring the work force and organization with the motivation to change and improve, so that the Chrysler corporation was permanently moved onto a track of long-term recovery in a period of less than four years.

### *Barack Obama: Changing This Nation*

#### *Brief overview*

When Senator Barack Obama first announced his candidacy for the presidency of the United States in February 10, 2007 and was declared a nominee of the Democratic Party for the 2008 presidential election, he became the immediate underdog for many reasons, but not limited to his race and ethnicity, age, and experience. Obama even said in his victory statement that he

was “never the likeliest candidate for this office. [They] didn’t start with much money or many endorsements” (NPR, 2008). At the time of his candidacy, the Black-American public was hopeful and proud, but not ambitious because Obama was not the first Black-American in history to run on a major party ticket. But in the end, it was his speech-making skills, eloquence and sheer ability to inspire and motivate change in his fellow Americans that set him apart from the rest of the Primary candidates. He not only captured America’s votes with his votes, but also their hearts with his passion.

During the 2008 election year, the American morale was low, as the economy was in a slump and progressively becoming worse, national debt was at about \$10.2 trillion, and an endless flow of troops were being sent to both Afghanistan and Iraq (Marquardt, 2008). The citizens of this country were lost and dissatisfied and knew things had to be changed, but did not know exactly who could do so or how. Obama was the only candidate who truly recognized the urgency and desperation in the American public and capitalized on that by being their change, their hope. Throughout his entire campaign and even victory speech he gave on the night of November 5, 2008, his overarching theme was change. Change that ‘we’ as a nation could achieve together—“Yes, we can” (NPR, 2008). He did not take the position as a politician above the problems, but as an average American who lives amidst the problems with the rest of the nation’s people.

*Change—“Yes, We Can”*

In Obama’s case, specifically his victory speech, his puzzle is centralized around the idea of working together as a country toward change and a better future. Like Iacocca, he targets the patriotism, pride and freedom that run deep in every American. Reading through his different speech transcripts, Obama really is a master of powerful, emotional language embedded in core stories and snippets of life situations that average Americans can all relate to. In several

instances, he refers back to history and draws on the trials and tribulations we have faced and risen from as a country in the past, but regardless of our differences and difficulties, “we have never been a collection of red states and blue states; we are, and always will be, the United States of America...It’s been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America” (NPR, 2008). In that one simple sentence, he is able to clear away all the dividing barriers and differences between race, political party, age and gender, if just for the night to create a fresh start for the nation’s people. He brings the victory to the people, dedicating it to them, the key ingredient to his success. He analogizes the change that he is going to lead with the help of the American public to how the American public helped him create and win his campaign:

“It began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of concord and the front porches of Charleston. It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give \$5 and \$10 and \$20 to the cause. It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation’s apathy...from the not-so-young who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on the doors of perfect strangers; from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized, and proved that more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from this earth. This is your victory” (NPR, 2008).

With such a strong framework established, he is then able to shed light on the reality and enormity of the future that lies ahead of them. He connects to the audience on a deeper level of basic human need and showing a true understanding of the struggles that Americans have been encountering due to the poor economy and low morale by addressing them instead of brushing them under the victory rug. He touches everyone’s hearts with a reminder of patriotism, love, and freedom:

“Even as we stand here tonight, we know that there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after their children fall asleep and wonder how they’ll make the mortgage, or pay their doctor’s bills, or save enough for college...The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep...but America – I have never been more hopeful than tonight that we will get there. I promise you: We as a people will get there” (NPR, 2008).

Each time he speaks of a specific struggle or story, he is targeting the hearts of Americans and the hardships that everyone has endured. He shifts some of the nation's burden onto his own shoulders, promising to be the change and the solution. It is through this pain and hardship that he brings light and hope, hope to "join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it's been done in America for 221 years – block by block, brick by brick, callused hand by callused hand...It cannot happen without you... we rise or fall as one nation – as one people" (NPR, 2008). He closes with a story about a 106 year-old Black-American woman by the name of Ann Nixon, who was born right after slavery ended, grew up during the Women's Rights Movement, witnessed the Great Depression, and lived through all of America's successes and failures in the past century. She lived the change, through all the times people said 'no', they said 'Yes'. He is able to light the fire of passion in the American people, of taking heed of the opportunity for change and to not be complacent, but grow proactive in the fight for America, for: "this is our chance to answer that call...This is our time – to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream ...and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can" (NPR, 2008).

#### *Obama's jigsaw puzzle*

President Obama knows how to weave these intricate and beautiful metaphors and stories within his speech to not only grasp America's attention, but give motivation and meaning to their actions. He empowers the public to stand up and be a part of the change that is America. He does not grow proud or boisterous with this victory, instead he approaches it with humility and a sense of humbleness that is infectious to the audience. He does not grow complacent or stagnant, but becomes more eager and motivated to lead the change in America. It is this level of

emotional understanding and connection seen in both Iacocca and Obama that executive leaders should strive to establish through their framework structure and use of language. When all logic and supporting statistics have been presented, emotional content acts as the weight that tips the scale in either direction. It boils down to pinpointing that gut feeling of inspiration and driving force of passion that is alive in all of us and targeting the core reason as to why someone should act in a certain way or believe in a certain thing.

#### Chapter VII: So what does this all mean?

In today's rapidly changing world, "the capacity to lead change will become the most valued skill for leaders...constructive persuasion, talent assessment, leadership development, team building and organizational design with will become the critical capabilities for leaders" (Conger, 2002). It was Lee Iacocca and President Barack Obama's ability to use their oratory skills to lead and motivate change by creating a sense of unity and inspiration that contributed to their wide-scale success and respect. Unfortunately, despite the growing importance of being able to create change, many CEOs, executives, and people in organizational leadership positions do not know how to fully utilize their persuasive tools, rendering them not as effective as they could be and short-changing their potential to lead.

The scientific research provides a roadmap that is available for executives to adapt into their leadership styles; however, not enough of them take advantage of these resources. In fact many executives make the mistake of taking their powerful position and past success as automatic proof of credibility and future success, when that is simply not enough to persuade the new generation of employees that are dominating the workforce. While many executives may have been successful at lower levels in their expert areas, it does not mean that they magically become effective leaders as they move up the ladder to the executive position. Persuasive tactics need to be honed and practiced in order to be to deliver the most effective results. There is not an

abundant amount of research conducted on the effectiveness of applying these techniques in executive leaders and seeing how they work. Most of the research and principles that are available now are based off of observations of charismatic or effectively persuasive leaders.

What is even more concerning is that there is a gap between executive business leaders and psychologists as they ride on parallel tracks that never cross paths. Executive leaders typically do not explore the realm of scientific research in this field. Even if they have come across some of the psychological findings related to effective leadership, they do not apply them. Some executives may have brilliant ideas, but cannot put those ideas into actions because they cannot get the right people on board. A large part of successful management is “getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats” and that comes from being able to persuade people into those desired positions (Collins, 2005). For example, Jack. St. Clair Kilby invented the first integrated circuit, the forerunner of today’s computer chip (Gardner, 2008). Today, this chip is the heart of almost every piece of technology used everywhere around the world, from cell phones to digital cameras and a host of other handheld electronics. Finally 42 years after the patent issue for his invention, in the year 2000, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics and value of all the goods that are powered by this chip are estimated to be worth over \$2 billion. However, Kilby’s invention that has now changed the face of technology today went quiet and unexploited for over a decade because he could not persuade anyone to invest in his chip (Gardner, 2008). Think of how different today’s world could be if he had not lost those ten years. Who knows what new inventions and even more technologically advanced devices would be available now if Kilby had been able to persuade his company and other corporations of the potential this chip had in changing the technological world. The example of Kilby’s lack of persuasive skill to launch his ingenious product is just one specific case in a myriad of lost opportunities that happen every day because leaders are not able

to harness their influential skills. By not taking advantage of the available information, executives are essentially putting themselves at a disadvantage, literally missing out on potential opportunities, investments, and changes.

These four principles of persuasion outlined here may be a small puzzle in the overarching frame of being a leader, but it is a crucial piece. It is insufficient to just present numbers and graphs. Mastering the ability to captivate and move others, as well as provoke change through powerful language and emotion is what truly differentiates good leaders from great leaders. Taking advantage of the research that is available, experimenting with the right combination of the fundamental pieces of the jigsaw, and finding how they fit together for each individual will not only help more leaders in today's world become more innovative and persuasive, but ultimately put them in the position to spearhead change rather than follow it.

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