

# October 2007, Power of Persuasion

Leading others to do what you want takes more than just having the authority to tell them what to do. In his weekly publication, "Reflections on Leadership," Ed Miller, Managing Director of the Poynter Institute, explains, it also takes the power of persuasion.

Harry Truman offered this definition of leadership: "Getting others to do what you want them to do, and like it"

But, it's the "like it" part that can be difficult. Authority alone is insufficient. You can order people to do something, but eventually coercion will erode confidence in your leadership. To be influential - especially with peers, bosses and others over whom you have no direct authority - you need to master the art of persuasion.

**Find the common ground.** You'll be more successful in getting others to do what you want if they want the same thing. A difficult or unpleasant task is more palatable if it's driven by shared values and objectives. Being explicit about your own goals and knowing the goals of others is important. The broader the common ground, the more persuasive you are likely to be.

**Maintain credibility.** Credibility is like a bank account: You can tap into assets only if you've made sufficient deposits. Expertise is a good way to build your account; it's always helpful to know what you're talking about. Preparation can shore up the account; if you don't know everything about everything, you can at least prepare well.

**Understand the role of compromise.** If there's a secret to persuasion, it's found in the art of compromise. By demonstrating a willingness to listen and discuss, a leader sets the stage for a collaborative dialogue. Instead of drawing battle lines defending rigid positions, the process becomes a series of give and take across common ground.

The one element that can stand in the way is fear. People fear authority, or the loss thereof. Managers who use their authority to "convince" others should remember that the root of the word comes from the Latin meaning to conquer. To be conquered is not necessarily to be persuaded, especially if the conquered lose self-esteem and control in the process. Compromise can mitigate fear and reduce resistance to the ideas being proposed.

To gauge your own persuasiveness, ask yourself these questions: Have you earned sufficient trust to be persuasive? Are you willing to use compromise as an effective tool?