

From *The Power of Ethical Persuasion:*
Winning Through Understanding at Work and at Home

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- The "persuasion" of this method is not the sort where one person convinces another of the "right" viewpoint. Ethical Persuasion (EP) is an approach that persuades people to treat each other with greater *respect, understanding, caring, and fairness*. These values can reconnect and anchor our feelings to our inner spirit and ethically guide the conduct of sensitive communications.
- EP helps people communicate to each other what it *feels* like to live in their separate, private worlds of experience.
- EP didn't invent the ideas of careful listening, restating others' viewpoints, or confirming mutual understanding, but it adds a deeper understanding of the role of *feelings* in difficult communications. Strong feelings often prevent us from achieving mutual understanding. Yet when usefully interpreted and managed, feelings can vastly accelerate and deepen our connections to each other, for they arise from the inner world of our shared human spirit.
- Rather than following the steps of EP mechanically, you will benefit most if you use it because you want to sincerely pursue the healthy integration of values and feelings. You cannot act or be treated in ways that are different from those you are used to—even if those ways are better—without becoming increasingly uncomfortable; however, this is the discomfort of growth.
- Because negative feeling experiences from childhood are imprinted on everyone, most people have a significant amount of self-doubt within their self-concept. When we defend ourselves, we are really maintaining self-doubt. Our survival and security seem to depend on self-defense, but *understanding, cooperation, and closeness* require that we risk *vulnerability*. Five barriers to human communication:
 - We all live in unique and private worlds of personal experience.
 - When we feel threatened, hurt, angry we tend to react with blame and self-defense.
 - Everyone has difficulty handling strong feelings.
 - Feelings are facts to the person experiencing them.
 - We almost always perceive power imbalances but rarely discuss them openly.
- Instead of looking at feelings as uncontrollable, dangerous energies that can screw up your most important communications, look at them as the very *bridge* that forms and keeps a relationship going. Feelings come from the deepest part of ourselves and give us our spiritual connection. Feelings are information, messages about who you are, what you need and care about, what's right and wrong for you, what you have to share with each other. *Upset feelings give you the opportunity to deepen your relationship.*
- We are consistently taught that our thinking functions are superior to our feeling functions. Yet, we feel feelings before we think thoughts, and they help create the core of our identity, our fundamental sense of worth as human beings. The more we respect, listen to, and learn to interpret our feelings, both good and bad, the more spirited and natural our personalities will be.
- Ethical Persuasion is the interpersonal application of the counseling mode, "guided self-change." Thus, EP isn't just a negotiation strategy, but also a method of healing self-doubt and alienation within oneself. If you learn to respect and appreciate another's feelings, you will learn to treat your own feelings more wisely in the process.
- When we get angry with each other we are reacting defensively against *feeling inadequate*, no matter what we might say we're angry about. You need to be aware that both of you are sensitive,

vulnerable human beings. So, the signal for shifting into Ethical Persuasion is whenever you become aware of strong feelings rising up in yourself or in the other person.

- Consider a definition of *power* as *creative influence*, the ability to affect any human interaction in a way that *adds energy* to the situation, that leads to results greater than the sum of their parts. In ordinary interaction people have *positional power* and *personal power*. *Positional power* is the ability to influence people by virtue of your job description. *Personal power* is a creative kind of influence based on self-understanding, respect and caring for others, and fairness.
- What is required to undertake EP is *courage*, the willingness to consider the possibility of change—that life can be better, that people can have a greater understanding and connection, that we all have a great untapped potential for creativity and community. *Courage is not the absence of fear, nor is it the ability to completely conquer our fears; it is the willingness to take a single step in the face of our fears.*
- Why should you listen first? To learn from the other's presentation of their thoughts and feelings; to earn the leverage of fairness; to defuse any negative effects of their pent-up feelings; and to cultivate your patience, openness, and objectivity under stress. Restating is important because feelings are messages that usually have to be decoded to be fruitfully understood—and that takes time and self-restraint.
- The difficulties that arise during Phase 1 occur as *resistances* within oneself. The first is the *difficulty of restraining strong feelings* while giving the other person a full hearing. Another common resistance is the *fear that explicit understanding implies giving in*. There is also the simple *fear of being wrong—that you are mistaken about something and may have to admit it*. Phase 1 can also bring up the *fear of hearing something you don't want to face*. Whatever their roots, the cure for these difficulties is the same: courage.
- Phase 2: The three chief resistances that people face while explaining their viewpoint include (1) *the fear that revealing your point of view increases your vulnerability*, (2) *the fear that your point of view will sound unreasonable, silly, weak, or confused*, and (3) *the fear of upsetting the status quo in a relationship*. Many long-standing but dysfunctional relationships derive their stability from a significant and fiercely protected degree of misunderstanding and mutual mistreatment. Again, it is courage that takes us beyond our familiar limits and into new realms of understanding.
- During Phase 3, keep in mind that any suggestion you have should follow the structure of what has occurred before: ask for the other's viewpoint before proceeding with any concrete action. The rule of thumb is: *resistance increases under pressure, and dissolves when respectfully and considerately explored*. You can increase your power by making clear your willingness to take responsible action to change things and improve the situation at hand. This does not imply that you are at fault—merely that you are ready to take responsibility for improving the relationship.
- In the real world your conversations will not be so orderly as the model implies. Try to remember that Ethical Persuasion is a process of ongoing self-discovery—not a technique that can be entirely mastered through memorization and one or two rehearsals. The best way to learn to use it is to apply the most understanding you have at any moment to a real-life conversation. Later, you can review how well you did at each phase and decide what aspects you need to improve.
- Remember, the best way to improve a relationship is to *change yourself* in a positive direction.

The Three Phases of Ethical Persuasion

PHASE 1: EXPLORING THE OTHER PERSON'S VIEWPOINT

1. Establish that your immediate goal is mutual understanding, not problem solving.
2. Elicit the other person's thoughts, feelings, and desires about the subject at hand.
3. Ask for their help in understanding them. Try not to defend or disagree.
4. Repeat their position in your own words to show you understand.
5. Ask them to correct your understanding and keep restating their position.
6. Refer back to your position only to keep things going.
7. Repeat steps 1-6 until they unreservedly agree that you understand their position.

PHASE 2: EXPLAINING YOUR VIEWPOINT

1. Ask for a fair hearing in return. Explain how their thoughts and feelings affect you—avoid blaming and self-defense as much as possible.
2. Carefully explain your thoughts, desires, and feelings as *your* truth, not *the* truth.
3. Ask for restatements of your position—and corrections of any inaccuracies—as necessary.
4. Review your respective positions.

PHASE 3: CREATING RESOLUTIONS

1. Affirm your mutual understanding and confirm that you are both ready to consider options for resolution.
2. Brainstorm multiple options.
3. If a mutually agreeable solution is not yet obvious, try one or more of the following options:
 - Compromise between alternate solutions ("O.K., I'll leave the decision up to you when it only has to do with equipment; otherwise, you need to get my approval").
 - Take turns between alternate solutions ("Let's agree on decisions together when we're in staff meetings; but when we meet one-on-one you come to me with a summary of decisions you have made").
 - Take time out to reconsider, consult, exchange proposals, and reconvene.
 - Yield (for now), once your position is thoroughly and respectfully considered (works especially well when they clearly want their option more than you want yours).
 - Agree to disagree and still respect each other; then, if you can, go your separate ways on the particular issue.
 - Agree to neutral arbitration, mediation, or counseling.