



Cheryl Conner (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/cherylsnappconner/>) Contributor

I write about communications, business and the ways the two intersect

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ENTREPRENEURS (ENTREPRENEURS) 7/14/2015 @ 8:31AM 179 views

What Just Happened? The 9 Counterintuitive Ways To Persuade

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“In the heat of verbal battle you frequently hear someone say, ‘We’re just quibbling over semantics,’ as if the words didn’t matter. Words embody thoughts, shape opinions, and direct actions. They can change the behavior of a few or move a nation. They can sink a stock or launch a war. They can mend a marriage or end a partnership.” –Dianna Booher, What More Can I Say?

I recently met an individual as passionate about communication as I am—perhaps even more, as she has written 46 books so far with more than 4 million sold.

Dianna Booher, a communications and productivity expert who has served a number of the largest U.S. corporations, knows a great deal about how to persuade. She is also keenly aware of the deal-killer potholes that leave even the best-prepared executives wondering, “What just happened?”



Dianna Booher is a business communication strategist, speaker, and author of What More Can I Say?: Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It

Today I'd like to share Booher's counterintuitive tips for persuading people to action as included in her newest book *What More Can I Say?*
<http://www.amazon.com/What-More-Can-Say->

[Communication/dp/0735205337](#) Whether selling a product, making a pitch to investors, or simply asking your boss for a raise, these tips are sure to include at least a few ideas you haven't yet thought about that will help you succeed:

1. **Trust vs. Mistrust.** Trust is the absolute foundation for getting persuasion to “stick.” Have you noticed how many crooks are really nice guys? But they are experts at cultivating high trust before committing their crimes. Conversely, many good plans go awry because their proponents failed to instill trust in their audience. It is therefore imperative that you tell the truth. Share the real reasoning behind your recommendation. Use body language that communicates openness. Show consistent reliability over time. In a sales or persuasive conversation, even with a new prospect, doing the first three of these four things will automatically put you on the path to a better result.
2. **Collaboration vs. Monologue.** Think about the language we use to collaborate and contrast it with the words we use to inform. “My understanding is that...” “From my point of view, you could...” “It seems to me that...” versus, “The reality is...” “What you really need to do is...” Which approach would leave you inclined to go forward? When someone goes into “pitch” mode, the audience instinctively “ducks.” Think about the words that inspire mutual reflection and discovery versus declarative orders. In the online arena, this principle equates to publishing as well. How does the audience react to an expert who drops pearls of wisdom onto their devices and desktops but then ignores the questions and dialogue that follow? Not very well. As a note, many of the greatest people I encounter (including Boohar) are those I've met through the follow up dialogues around things I have written. I'm betting the same is true for Boohar as well.
3. **Simplicity vs. Complexity. Too many messages are muddled by too much communication, ironically.** The company with 19 key initiatives for the year, for example, is doomed at the outset. In contrast, consider the key initiative of Walmart: “We save people money so they can live better,” or Zappos: “To provide the best customer service possible,” or Disney: “To make people happy.” In an experiment, WSJ editor Laura Landro gathered statistics from healthcare agencies on the missed messages that plague patients who receive complex and lengthy instructions. Eighty percent of what doctors tell patients is forgotten as soon as they leave the office. Fifty percent of what the patients do recall is incorrect. In these cases, complex communication is not only ineffective at moving an audience to change, it can also be life-threatening. In your own persuasive conversation, think about limiting the choices and eliminating the doublespeak and officious language. Get down to basics and your audience will get on board with your plan.
4. **Tact vs. Insensitivity.** Have you noticed the way some people's language gets more stilted and pompous when they're conducting business? And some words are simply off-putting or “hot.” Replace them. Instead of “audit” consider “review.” Instead of “have a legal liability,” use “to ensure we are in compliance.” “Your complaint” could become “Your question or concern.” “Our contract” could become “our agreement.” “Your payment” could become “your investment.” As a visual reminder, Boohar notes actor Alex Baldwin as an example of what to avoid. He is routinely caught on camera insulting the very people whose allegiance he needs. If you work in a field where persuasion's required, practice tact.
5. **Potential vs. Achievement.** Some time ago, Boohar received a request from another author to ghostwrite his book. Although she was not in the market, curiosity prevailed and she asked for some additional details. He was a brilliant speaker and was frequently referred to in the press as a rising star. Did he have a start on his manuscript? Nope. An outline? No again. A topic? No, not really. Something around

“motivation.” Through other channels she learned he had been paid a \$750,000 advance as an untested author for an unwritten book on an undetermined topic, at a time when many proven authors were receiving less than one-tenth of that sum. Never underestimate the allure of potential, she advises, whether it be a résumé, a partnership or a pitch. What is the splendid outcome or answered problem this product or hire will achieve? Perhaps it’s not quite on the level of “vote for Pedro and all your wildest dreams will come true.” But paint a picture of the possibilities for your audience rather than simply tout the historic metrics of what your product has done.

6. **Distinction vs. Dilution.** When offering benefits, go for impact. For example, offering a 30% discount on a \$399 annual fee for early renewal is more effective than offering the 30% discount *plus* \$10 off on monthly meetings *plus* a 5% discount on merchandise you buy from the site. Simpler is better. The same principle applies to your slides, your speech or your sales presentation. For example, the 18-minute TED (<http://www.forbes.com/ted/>) talk format is becoming a welcome standard for audiences overwhelmed by too much information. Speakers are benefitting who’ve learned to substitute impact for length.
7. **Specificity vs. Generalization.** Quick, what is the brand of hairbrush you use? Coffee mug you drink from? Most people won’t know. But “what cellphone do you prefer, iPhone or Android?” is sure to garner a very specific response. Same with “which car do you prefer? Jaguar, Mercedes, BMW or Lexus (/companies/lexus/)?” These are brand identities that evoke unique responses. Likewise, the product you sell or the selling of yourself that you do as an employee or speaker is memorable for its specific and consistent attributes such as “customer experience pro” or “profit enhancement expert” as opposed to “solid presenter and great employee.” Executive leaders make this mistake when they attempt to create a presentation that impresses everyone in the company and instead they end up resonating with no one. As a strategy, though, it can be great to open a pitch or a presentation with an overall umbrella or blanket such as “no child should go to bed hungry,” followed by the very specific strategies you propose to succeed in enacting that change.
8. **Emotion vs. Logic.** Overwhelmingly, research shows that we make our buying decisions with emotion, then we support them with logic. This is a fundamental secret to persuasion in business. You should always speak first to the heart. Metaphors, analogies, and direct, forceful statements are powerful for this. For example, “*Had enough?*” (the 1946 Republican slogan) or, “*It’s the economy, stupid.*” (Bill Clinton (<http://www.forbes.com/profile/bill-clinton/>)’s 1992 election campaign). Yes, your audience expects a logical argument for your position. But don’t expect it to be the logic that wins them over. First, you must win over their hearts.
9. **Distortion vs. Perspective.** Persuasive communicators are expert at recognizing distortion—misperception that arises from listening to only what is said—and perception, which comes from empathy, effective listening, a genuine desire to understand others and reading between the lines to know what’s not being said. Effective negotiators will always strive for perspective in order to complete the most meaningful possible deal.

In summary, while you may never be called upon to talk a suicide victim away from a ledge, the words you choose and your communication skills can have a life-changing impact on your success at achieving funding, your company’s revenue, the effectiveness of your team, and the trajectory of your career. There is much more detail to each of Dianna Booher’s nine principles

here. To go further with this topic, you can find additional information at www.BooherResearch.com (<http://www.booherresearch.com/>) She will likely be collaborating with me on future columns as well.

*Additional editing for this article was provided by W. Craig Snapp. Cheryl Snapp Conner is author of the Forbes eBook [Beyond PR](http://www.forbes.com/ebooks/beyond-pr/) (<http://www.forbes.com/ebooks/beyond-pr/>): *Communicate Like a Champ In The Digital World*.*

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10 Tips For Communicating Across Generations



Navigating The New Workplace

Four wildly different generations are now working together in one office, and it can be a Petri dish for problems. Veterans (born before 1946), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), and Generation Y or Millennials (1980-2000) grew up in different times, have wide-ranging value sets and often conflicting communication styles. Can't we all

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