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# “THE ART OF WOO: USING STRATEGIC PERSUASION TO SELL YOUR IDEAS”

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RESEÑA DEL LIBRO DE RICHARD SHELL Y MARIO MOUSSA

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Former Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca once noted, *“You can have brilliant ideas; but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere.”*

This book, edited by The Penguin Group, is basically an instruction manual on how to use persuasion inside organizations following a systematic way. Woo is a talent for Winning Others Over, one of the most important skills a team leader should possess.

When selling ideas, people make three top mistakes, according to Richard Shell. These are:

- Focusing on yourself instead of your audience (the “egocentric bias”).
- Believing there is no systematic way to persuade people to accept an idea.
- Forgetting about politics, which will become an issue at the implementation stage of the idea when the idea might affect resources, power, control or turf. You need to prepare a campaign, not just a presentation.

The book presents a four-step approach to the idea-selling process:

1. Polishing the idea and devising a strategy.
2. Confronting the five barriers: relationships, credibility, communication mismatches, belief system and interests and needs.
3. Presenting your proposal.
4. Closing the sale: commitment and politics.

**Step 1: polishing the idea** and surveying the social network that will lead to the decision makers. This means knowing your goals, the audience and yourself. In other words, you should answer the following questions:

- What is the 5 minutes summary of my idea?
- How do decisions like this get made in my organization?
- Whom should I woo first to gain entry into that process?
- What follow-up strategy should I use?

Step 1 means devising a strategy of whom to call and in what order and setting specific goals for each encounter. Goals can be very different, from idea polishing, to help mapping the process, persuading, getting authorization, finding allies, getting decisions or obtaining the commitment of resources.

**Step 2: confronting the five barriers**, the most common obstacles that can sink an idea before you get started: relationship, credibility, communication mismatches, belief system and interests and needs.

Relationships and credibility are the most important aspects when mastering woo.

Relationships start with first impressions. Respect the need of other people to feel important. Keep the focus on the problem rather than on who will get credit for solving it.

It is critical to manage relationships: no kind action is ever lost. Relationships are based on similarity, liking and reciprocity. For relationships, face time matters. You can benefit from reciprocity even when nobody owes you a personal favor: for example, allies that are willing to use their networks and associated reciprocity systems.

**Credibility** is not something you have. It is a perception in your audience's mind. To enhance credibility, associate yourself with people known and respected by your audience. Credibility comes down to the perception of competence (track record), expertise (when presenting an idea, refer to authorities your audience considers reliable) and trustworthiness (reliability, i.e. consistency between what you say and what you do, and integrity).

**Communication mismatches:** choose the right communication channel. Basic persuasion languages parallel the 6 communication channels:

- **Authority:** appeal to formal position, authoritative rules or policies to get others to agree. Need to be accompanied by justification that the exercise of authority is legitimate and consistent with the audience core interests.
- **Rationality:** influence by offering reasons or evidence to justify a proposal on its merits. It is almost always needed. It means taking everything into consideration, not a logic course.
- **Interests:** pitch in terms of the other's interest.
- **Vision:** People make their decisions based on what the facts mean to them, not on the facts themselves. This includes any appeal to audience's overriding sense of purpose, values and beliefs as the foundation for selling your idea.
- **Politics:** includes lobbying, informal decision making processes, use of passive resistance. A healthy use is handling different points of view and creating forums to discuss interests.
- **Relationships:** you are accessing the relationship channel whenever you use similarity, liking, rapport or reciprocity, or rely on existing network of contacts and friends to open doors as part of an idea selling strategy.

Channel shifting is a skill common to all great persuaders. Self-awareness both to monitor your own feelings and the audience is critical to adjust the channel when required.

**Belief systems:** Discover and salute your audience's core values whenever possible. Appeal to values works because of the belief bias (people accept conclusions that fit their beliefs), the consistency principle and the pull of power (respond to appeals invoking ultimate values).

Remedies to belief bias (when your idea does not fit the beliefs of the audience) include being persistent and seeking a new audience.

**Interests and needs:** People tend to favor ideas that benefit them. They see arguments as more persuasive. Ask yourself: (1) Why might it already be in the other party's interests to support my idea? (2) What do other parties want that I can give them to gain their support? (3) Why might they say no?

Use negotiation, take time and ask questions about their needs. Make comments that open the door to learning about their interests.

### Step 3: presenting your proposal

Present your proposal following the PCAN model:

- Problems: definition is key to persuasion. Framing: setting the context.
- Cause: avoid assigning blame.
- Answer: show how your proposal solves the problem, and show it can be done. Feasibility is central.
- Net benefit: show why it is the best. Propose experiments or pilot projects.

Provide evidence of each step. Evidence can be: data based statistics (with the standard your audience expects, unscientific surveys can carry considerable weight when there is little time to make decisions), specific examples, demonstrations and tangible objects, personal testimonies, social consensus.

Best practices for presenting your proposal are:

- Lead with your best arguments and summarize them at the end. Don't oversell weak arguments.
- Present both sides.
- State your assumptions.
- If you have a conflict of interest, admit it.
- Make your conclusions explicit.
- Keep it simple.
- Face to face communication is best.

You need to balance two credibility factors: come across as a committed advocate of you own idea and show objectivity as an expert who has considered all sides.

To make your presentation memorable, use the following 8 pathways to grab attention and keep focus:

- Make it vivid: visualize it.
- Use demonstrations and symbolic actions.
- Put your heart into it.
- Tell a story. Preferably, a story with mystery, false leads or a hunt story (problem, cause, quest, solution).
- Personalize it: the most persuasive stories are the ones your audience can relate to.
- Make it a puzzle: look for puzzles in the problem for which your proposal is the solution.
- Build bridges with analogies and metaphors.
- Force your audience to think: question the obvious, use reversals and "let's pretend", reconceptualize (rethink a basic purpose or mission).
- Surprise your audience.

- Turn off the computer and speak directly to people. Tell them the difference the solution will make to someone specific.

#### **Step 4: closing the sale: commitment and politics.**

The final stage of Woo is to secure both individual and organizational commitments. *"One of the most common mistakes people make in selling ideas," says Shell, "is to think that their job is finished once they succeed in getting someone to say 'yes' to their proposal. That's only the beginning."*

Once your idea has been accepted, you need to keep it in motion in the same direction. Ask a performance based rather than promised based commitment. Keep in mind that small actions seed commitment to bigger ones, so it might be wise to start asking small actions first.

Politics play an important role when trying to keep others interested and willing to cooperate with your idea.

The book suggests a number of political moves to keep your idea in motion:

- Find a simple theme that captures your idea: a slogan.
- Get your idea on the agenda, create a sense of urgency.
- Score small wins early and broadcast them widely.
- Form key alliances to broaden your base about your idea.
- Create a snowball effect to have the momentum become self-sustaining.
- Be flexible-Respond and adjust is important for your idea to survive.
- Lock it in: You can use authority or just office politics in making the final idea belong to everyone.
- Secure appropriate credit in which is due from your idea without taking what is not yours.

The book contains two personalized tests: the six channel survey, designed to help you learn which channel you feel compelled to use more often, and the Persuasion Style Assessment, to help you determine your degree of assertiveness and natural social intelligence.

Now, it is up to you!

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