

HOW TO PERSUADE WITHOUT PERSUASION

Have you ever tried to sell a clear and obvious winner of an idea, only to feel you're knocking your head against a brick wall? Perhaps all you need is a change in technique...

By Bob Burg

Tammi, a 19 year old waitress at a local restaurant I often frequent, was complaining of a headache.

I shared with her a remedy I once learned that sounds rather odd but has worked amazingly well for everyone with whom I've shared it - cutting a cold lime in half and rubbing the juicy part all over your forehead.

I don't know why it works, but it does.

(Then again, I don't know why the lights go on when I flip on the light switch, but I do it anyway because it works!)

Well, Tammi is the type who generally doesn't believe anything so, when I made the suggestion, she laughed and waved the idea away with her hand.

Now, Tammi's a real good kid and I hated to see her suffer needlessly with a headache. My initial "reaction" was to say, in aggravated voice, "Tammi, what have you got to lose -- just try it!"

Tell me though, had I done that, do you think it would have worked? Would she have said, "Oh, Bob, what a great idea. Just try it. Why didn't I think of that?"

We both know the odds are about 99.9 percent she would not have. Instead, she would have remained resistant to the idea. So, I didn't say anything...and waited for another opportunity.

About five minutes later, as she was refilling my water glass she said, "It's funny, I once heard of this great cure for the hiccups which really works. All you do is...." and she told me what it was.

(Come to think of it, I don't remember what the cure was. I do remember that it sounded even stranger than rubbing the juicy part of a lime over your forehead to relieve a headache!)

So, how should I respond?

Now was my opportunity. And there were various potential responses, both helpful and non-helpful. Let's analyze a few of them.

Choice #1: "Well, Tammi, why would you believe something foolish like that instead of what I told you about the lime?"

While this is the natural response, it certainly won't cause the desired action. It's attacking the person's ego and saying, "I should be listened to but you shouldn't be."

Choice #2: "I'll tell you what; you try the lime right now and next time I have the hiccups, I'll try your idea."

Though a little better than #1, it's still patronizing and is self ego-based. Not likely to be effective. More likely to elicit a polite laugh from the other person but no desired action.

Choice #3: After listening to her suggestion very attentively, I said, "Wow, what a neat idea. I'll definitely try that next time I get the hiccups. Thank you."

Of course, that is what I actually said to her and her response was, "You know what, let me go find a lime and see if it works" (which she did....and it did).

Why did #3 work when we all know that the first two probably would not have?

A matter of respect

As usual, it was mainly a matter of showing another person the proper respect; treating them as a responsible, self-directing individual with an ability to make the best decision for herself.

And, there was one more thing. Instead of trying to proactively persuade her to my way of thinking, I held back (not always easy to do) and allowed her to come to her own conclusion. Her suggestion to me merely allowed me to demonstrate to her that that is what I was doing.

Sometimes it's simply necessary to use positive detachment and allow ourselves to *not* have to have the answer; to not have to "actively persuade." In time - hopefully sooner but sometimes later - that person, seeing and sensing the respect we've given them, will be more open to our suggestion.

Yes, sometimes the most effective way to persuade someone, is not "persuade" at all.