

SANTHOSH BABU'S VIEWS ON PERSUASION SKILLS

Presuppositions By using presuppositions, we are able to make a statement and gain acceptance of the basic assumptions contained in a statement, unconsciously. Presuppositions occur when certain information or relationships must be accepted as true in order to make sense of a particular statement. For example, to understand the statement, "As soon as you stop trying to sabotage our therapeutic efforts, we'll be able to make more progress," one must assume that the person to whom the statement is directed already has been, in fact, trying to sabotage the therapeutic efforts. The statement also presupposes that there is some kind of therapeutic effort being attempted and that at least some progress has been made. Similarly the statement, "Since they leave us no alternative, we must resort to violence," presupposes that no alternative, in fact, exists and that "they" are the ones who determine whether there are alternatives or not.

How do you write sentences with presuppositions? You first figure out a suggestion, or idea you want someone to accept. Then you preface it with words like, aware, realise, before, understand, wonder, discover, experience etc. Here are some examples of this at work:

- *As we talk today, you'll become aware of the most important reasons why this feels like the right thing to do. So don't be surprised when all of a sudden it makes sense.*
- *Do you realise how much better the results will be, if you incorporate this into your language?*
- *You can begin to experience the effects of this language as you read each example.*
- *Have you discovered why this (what you are selling) feels so good*
- *As we get closer to the house you will start to understand why it is such a great neighbourhood. It just feels like home.*
- *As I explain how this works, you can begin to discover the many ways you will find this useful. Let me start by...*
- *Are you aware of how much power your subconscious mind has to create the reality you most want? Naturally, as I tell you some of the strategies you can be using, you will begin to apply them to your own life...and for your own reasons, begin to see how you can tap in to this power...through language like this...and start getting incredible results right now! Are you beginning to see how you can use this in situations where you want more persuasion leverage.*

Some of the oft used words in forming sentences with presuppositions are - *Before, After, During, As, Since, Prior, While, yet, Now, Again, Begin, End, Stop, Start, Continue, Proceed, Already, Yet, Still, Anymore.*

Pacing and Leading

Another technique in persuading is Pacing and Leading. It works by blurring the distinction between what is absolutely true and undeniable (observable in the person's own experience) and what we want to be believed as true.

Pacing is basically that you go along with whatever the person is doing at the time. You match where she is. If she is bored, match her boredom; if she is full of energy, be full of energy; if she is talking slowly, talk slowly. You don't have to do exactly the same, and often it would be unhealthy for you to do exactly the same. But you can always match something about you with something of the person's. If you do this smoothly you will both feel that you understand each other to a certain degree.

Leading is whatever you say or do that is intended to get the person to change her state of mind, get access to different information, find out something new, or see things differently. Usually it is something you say. You might ask questions, or you might give directions, or you might explain something. You might also just change the way you talk about something and see if the person goes along with it. If the person goes along with the change you are introducing, then she is following the lead. Like, if you ask her to see an issue from different viewpoints, and she starts answering, then she has already gone along with the idea of there being several different viewpoints.

Pace: As you look at what I have written

Pace: and you read each of the words,

Pace: you have thoughts, in your mind, about what I'm saying

Lead: and how you can begin to incorporate this material into your everyday life.

Pace: And you have thoughts

Pace: and have feelings that you are having,

Lead: you know that this is something that really interests you

Lead: and because of that it will be easy for you to learn.

Pace: and as you wonder about being able to understand and learn what I'm writing here,

Lead: you begin to think about where in your life you can use this process

Lead: and what outcome you might want to obtain by using this skill.

Lead: And you wonder how you can set aside enough time to really learn these skills to improve your results.

Are you beginning to see how powerful this is? When used correctly it is almost impossible to tell which statements we are using are undeniably true and which statements we want to be believed as being true (or action we are suggesting be taken).

*Deletion,
Distortion and
Generalisation*

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Very often, when we are engaged in conversation, we end up with an impression of what was said is incomplete, inaccurate or both. Not all of this is a result of the listening - what we say is also filtered to make our conversation concise and easy to follow. A useful tool for understanding someone else's point of view and recovering what has been lost in the filtering process is known as the Meta model. It is essentially a set of questions that can be used to challenge incomplete or inaccurate statements and recover the meaning that has been lost to the filters. The result of using it is that you can help people to be more precise and specific in what they say, and sometimes help them to view their experience more constructively.

We access information through our five senses - seeing, hearing, feeling, smell and taste. There is so much sensory information to 'take in' that our mind cannot 'digest' it all and so we delete some of it.

Deletion...

There are several different kinds of deletion. One of the most common forms of deletion is heard in business as comments like 'Communication is terrible at present' or 'There's a complete lack of teamwork' or 'Performance is up this month'. What these statements have in common is that they have deleted information about what is actually being done and covered it up with an abstract noun. For example, the word 'communication' replaces details about who is communicating what to whom (or not!). To recover these details, simply ask 'Who is not communicating about what?' or 'What work should the team be doing together?' or 'Who is performing well at what?' Simply ask. But since this is not the kind of question that people get asked regularly, you should take care in how you ask. It must be done with rapport, you must demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in the details, otherwise you risk sounding like the Spanish Inquisition!

Another common form of deletion is where the information about who is doing something is lost. For example 'They don't listen to me' or 'She didn't invite me to the meeting' or 'They turned up late'. You may think you know who is being referred to, but sometimes it's a good idea to check. The

ubiquitous 'they' is usually worth challenging, to find out whether or not the speaker actually knows whom they are referring to! In this case all you have to ask is: 'Who specifically?'

Sometimes this kind of deletion is paired up with a further type, known as an unspecified verb. This is when the details of how something was done are filtered off, as in 'He rejected my idea' or 'They upset us' or 'She ruined that project'. Again we may think we know what is meant by each of these statements - and we may be wrong again! Find out more by asking 'How specifically?' In the former case you may find that what 'he' said about the speaker's idea was he needed more time to consider it.

Of course, if you are going to ask these questions, there has to be a purpose. You will quickly lose a lot of goodwill from friends and colleagues if you start challenging every deletion you hear. It is probably most useful to use this kind of approach in interviews, coaching sessions, counselling and investigation of training and organisational development needs.

Distortion

Think of a time when you had a major project to undertake or were dealing with an issue. Did you find it seemed to take over your whole life? This is because you will have distorted it by making it larger than it actually was. This is often the case with problems, which is why they seem so intractable when we are experiencing them and yet fairly insignificant afterwards.

The second area of the Meta-model deals with distortion. I should emphasise that this is unconscious distortion as a result of unconscious filters, not any willful distortion of facts. One of the most common forms of distortion is 'mind-reading', where a person claims to know someone else's feelings or thoughts, as in 'You don't like me' or 'He's angry with me' or 'They won't agree'. Sometimes these judgements are made on valid information, but if you suspect that they are simply invented you can ask 'How do you know?'

Again, done with rapport and genuine interest, this can be a powerful question that could bring someone to a useful realisation that they actually have no reason to assume hostility from another person (or assume anything else!) Another form of distortion is when opinions and value judgements are expressed without being attributed to anyone. These may be heard as comments such as 'You should work hard all the time' or 'It's not a good idea to throw away those files' or 'It's best to keep an open mind'. None of these comments are presented as a subjective judgement, but rather as objective fact. All proverbs also

come into this category. A statement like this may be preventing someone from thinking for himself. To challenge it, a good question to ask is 'Who says?' or you could use 'According to whom?' There is, as with all Meta-model questions, a risk of this sounding aggressive, so ensure that you are in rapport before asking.

A third kind of distortion comes when something is taken to have a meaning that may not be accurate. For example 'I didn't get the promotion. The boss doesn't like me.' Or 'Sales are down. The product range is awful this season.' In neither case does the one statement necessarily imply the other, but the speaker is taking the two to be connected in this way. There are two ways that this can be challenged. First you can challenge the logic. For example, 'How does your not getting promoted mean that the boss doesn't like you?' or 'How does a drop in sales mean that there's something wrong with the product range?' The other way to challenge this would be to focus on the counter example. For example 'Are there other people whom the boss likes that didn't get promoted either?' or 'Have sales ever fallen when the product range was good?' Either way, to challenge this type of distortion will focus attention on faulty deductions and get back to what is actually known as fact. This can be really useful in problem solving and counselling situations where there seems to be no way forward and no choices. Challenging the distortions will usually open up some possibilities.

Generalisation

The third area of the Meta-model deals with generalisations. Generalisations are useful; they give us the ability to spot patterns and to apply experience in one situation to another similar one. However, they also form the basis of prejudice and narrow-mindedness, so it can also be useful to challenge them on occasion. The most common form of generalisations involve words like never, always, everyone, no one, all. For example 'It always rains in Manchester' or 'Nobody ever listens to me' or 'All salespeople are extroverts'. Clearly these statements are untrue, but many people act as if their generalisations were true and miss opportunities and possibilities because of it. The 'rule of thumb' here is that all generalisations are untrue - including this one! The way to challenge generalisations is simple: you echo back, 'Always?' or 'Nobody? Ever?' or 'All of them?' (with a suitable amount of incredulity). Alternatively you could look for the counter example, as in 'Is it ever fine in Manchester?' or 'Has anybody ever listened to you?' or 'Are there any salespeople who are introverts?'

However, one should take particular care when challenging generalisations. Often when a person says something like 'Nobody ever listens to me' (especially if it's said with some

feeling) it's an indicator that somebody in particular is not listening to something important right now. The person may be feeling undervalued or rejected and a smart response like 'What nobody? Ever?' may not be the most tactful thing you can say! In that case, treat it like a deletion and ask 'Who in particular is not listening to you?'

There are other kinds of deletions, distortions and generalisations. The ones I have discussed here are some of the most common I have encountered in business. The overall effect of the questions I have suggested is to challenge the validity of the statement and encourage the speaker to be more precise, more specific in what they are telling you. With practice you will be able to avoid some of the common frustrations of communications at work - such as preparing a report and being told afterwards 'That wasn't what I wanted' or tailoring a presentation to suit what you had been told about the audience, only to discover that the information was incorrect. Using Meta-model questions won't entirely remove the subjectivity from a point of view, but it may bring you closer to understanding what is really being said - and what is really meant!

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Santhosh Babu, Training Alternatives, at PR Pundit's Seventh PR Workshop held in New Delhi on December 10, 2002)