Lecture 21
Writing Persuasive Messages

In this lecture we will learn to

• Strengthen your persuasive messages with an appropriate appeal
• Gain credibility by supporting your persuasive message with relevant facts
• Use attention, interest, desire, and action (the AIDA plan) to organize persuasive messages
• Write a message persuading your audience to take action or grant you an adjustment
• Design a sales letter around selling points and benefits

Motivating with persuasive messages
• The business meaning of persuasion is the influencing an audience by information them aiding their understanding – the audience is free to chose.
• Ethical business people inform customers of the benefits of a product or an action so that customers can recognize how well that product or action will fill a need they truly have. 
• Your consideration of customer needs is more than ethical; it’s the proper use of persuasion.
• Also, it’s more likely to evoke the desired response from your customers and colleagues.
• Persuasive messages aim to influence audiences who are inclined to resist, so they depend heavily on strategic planning.
• Before you begin to write a persuasive message, ask yourself what you’re writing about, who you’re writing to, and what you want to happen as a result.
• When analyzing your audience, take into account their cultural expectations and practices so that you don't undermine your persuasive message by using an inappropriate appeal or by organizing your message in a way that seems unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

• When writing persuasive messages, four things to keep in mind about your audience are:
  - Needs and appeals
  - Emotion and logic
  - Credibility
  - Semantics

Needs and Appeals
• Some researches believe that certain needs have priority and that the most basic needs (such as safety and security) must be met before a person will seek to fulfill higher-level needs (such as esteem and status).
• Because everyone’s needs differ, people respond differently to any given message.
• Not everyone is interested in economy, for instance, or fair play.
• Some people’s innermost needs make appeals to status and greed much more effective.
• To accommodate these individual differences, analyze the members of your audience and then construct a message that appeals to their needs.

Emotion and Logic
• When people’s needs are not being met, they’re likely to respond emotionally.
• For example, a person who lacks a feeling of self-worth is likely to be sensitive to the tone of respect in a message.
• A collection letter to such a person carefully avoids any hint that the person might be considered dishonorable.
• Although emotional issues can be a pitfall for persuasive messages, you can actually call on human emotion, as long as your emotional appeal is subtle.
• You can make use of the emotion surrounding certain words, for instance, freedom brings forth strong feelings, as do words such as success, prestige, credit record, etc.
• Emotion works with logic in a unique way: people need to find rational support for an attitude they’ve already embraced emotionally.
• To help satisfy this need, a logical appeal calls on human reason.

Credibility
• Your credibility is your capability of being believed because you’re reliable and worthy of confidence.
• For you to persuade skeptical or hostile audience members, they must believe that you know what you’re talking about and that you’re not trying to mislead them.
• One of the best ways to gain credibility is to support your message with facts.
• Testimonials, documents, guarantees, statistics, research results, and the like all provide seemingly objective evidence for what you have to say, so they make your message more credible.
• The more and relevant your proof, the better.
• It also helps to name you resources, especially if they’re respected by your audience.
• Other ways of gaining credibility are:
  – Being enthusiastic: Your excitement about the subject of your message can infect your audience.
  – Being sincere. Your honest, genuineness, good faith, and truthfulness helps you focus on your audience’s needs.
  – Being an expert. Your knowledge of your message’s subject area (or even of some other area) helps you give your audience the quality information necessary to make a decision.
– *Having good intentions.* Your willingness to keep your audience’s best interest at heart helps you create persuasive messages that are ethical.

– *Being trustworthy.* Your honesty and dependability help you earn your audience’s respect.

– *Establishing common ground.* Your beliefs, attitudes, and background experiences that are like those of your audience help them identify with you.

**Semantics**

- The words you choose to state your message say much more than their dictionary definitions.
- For instance, *useful, beneficial,* and *advantageous* may be considered synonyms, yet these three words are not interchangeable.
- She suggested a useful compromise. (The compromise allowed the parties to get to work.)
- She suggested a beneficial compromise. (the compromise not only revolved but also had a positive effect, perhaps for both parties.)
- She suggested an advantageous compromise. (The compromise benefited her or her company more than it benefited the other party).
- Another way semantics can affect persuasive messages in the variety of meanings that people attribute to certain words.
- Abstractions are subject to interpretation because they refer to things that people cannot experience with their senses.
- You may be able to sell more lags by appealing to your audience’s patriotism (which may be interpreted in many ways) than by describing the color and size of the flags.
- You may have better luck collecting an overdue bill by mentioning honesty and fair play than by repeating the sum owed and the date it was due.

**Organizing persuasive messages**

- Persuasion requires the indirect approach.
- One specialized version is the AIDA plan, which has four phases
  - Attention
  - Interest
  - Desire
  - Action
- In the attention phase, you convince the audience right at the beginning that you have something useful or interesting to say.
- The audience wants to know “what’s in this message for me?”
- Try to tell them without making extravagant claims or threats and without bringing up irrelevant points.
• For example

You’ve mentioned several times in the past two weeks that constructing an employee schedule become increasingly difficult. Let me share an idea that could substantially reduce the time you spend making and revising schedules.

• In the interest phase, you explain how your messages related to the audience.
• Continuing the theme you started with, you paint a more detailed picture with words.
• Your goal is to get the audience thinking “This is an interesting idea. Couldn’t it possibly solve my problems?”

• For example

Inc. magazine ran an article in the July 2 issue about a scheduling concept called flextime. It gives employees leeway to schedule their own work, within certain guidelines. Two companies profiled in the article were having problems (as we have been) with late arrivals, long lunches, early departures, and too many “sick days.” They found it nearly impossible to set up a schedule everyone would adhere to. However, once these companies instituted flextime, their problems practically disappeared.

• This interest section ties together a factual description and the benefits of instituting the program.
• Also, the benefits relate specifically to the attention phase that precedes this paragraph.
• Even though the flextime system might help improve employee morale, that benefit is secondary to the main interest of the intended audience (to reduce the frustration of devising useless schedules) and is therefore not mentioned.

• In the desire phase of a persuasive message, you back up claims and thereby increase your audience’s willingness to take the action that you’ll suggest in the next section.
• Whatever you use to prove your claim, make sure the evidence is directly relevant to your point.
• For example

One of the people interviewed in the article, the heard of manufacturing for a $10 million company, said: “I seemed to be spending all my time making schedules and then tearing them up. Now I let my employees figure out their own schedules. I have more time to oversee the work that’s being done and to track the quality of the products we ship.” This company had a flextime program in full operation within three months of deciding to start it. Attached is a copy of an article about the factors to consider before going to flextime and the three steps involved in instituting it.
• In the action, you suggest the action you want your audience to take.
• All persuasive messages end with a section that urges specific action, but the ending is more than a statement such as “Institute this program as soon as possible” or “Send me a refund.”
• In fact, this section offers a good opportunity for one last reminder of the main benefit the audience will realize from taking the action you want:

Let’s meet early next week (Monday, 3:00 p.m.?) to see how we might implement a flextime schedule. With a little bit of extra effort, now you could soon be concentrating on something more important than scheduling.

Writing Persuasive Request for Action

• Many persuasive messages are written to solicit funds, favors, information, or cooperation.
• In an organization, persuasive techniques are often required to get someone to change policies or procedures, to spend money on new equipment and service to promote a person or to protect turf.
• An external persuasive message is one of the most difficult persuasive tasks you could undertake.
• First, people are busy, so they’re reluctant to do something new; it takes time and offers no guarantee of any reward in return.
• Second, competing requests are plentiful.
• In fact, the public relations departments of many large corporations receive so many requests for donations to worthy causes that they must sometimes resort to lotteries to decide which to support.
• If you’re lucky, they may believe in the project or cause that you’re writing about.
• If you’re lucky, they may believe in the project or cause that some benefit, perhaps an intangible benefit down the road or a chance to make a meaningful contribution.
• Also, especially in the case of requests for professional favors or information, people may believe that they are obliged to “pay their dues” by helping others.
• When making a persuasive request, therefore, take special care to highlight direct and indirect benefits.
• Direct benefits might include a reduced workload for a supervisor who institute flextime or a premium for someone who responds to a survey.
• Indirect benefits might include better employee morale or the prestige of giving free workshops to small businesses.
• The attention-getting device at the beginning of a persuasive request for action usually shows the reader that you know something about his or her concerns and that you have some reason for making such a request.

• In this type of persuasive message, more than in most others, flattering comment about the reader is acceptable, especially if it is sincere.

• The body of the letter or memo covers what you know about the problem you're trying to solve with the reader’s help: the facts and figures, the benefits of helping your experience in attacking the problem.

• The goal is to give you and your request credibility, to make the reader believe that helping you will indeed help solve a significant problem.

• The most important thing to remember when preparing a persuasive request action is to keep your request within bounds.

• Nothing is so distressing as a request so general-all-encompassing, or inconsiderate that it seems impossible to grant, no matter how worthy the cause.

• Also, be careful not to doom your request to failure by asking your reader to do all your work for you: to provide information that you were too lazy to seek, to spend time saving you from embarrassment or inconvenience, or to provide total financial support for a cause that nobody else is supporting.

Writing Sales Letters

• By and large, sales letters are written by specialized and highly skilled professionals.

• The letters come in letter-size or larger envelopes, with brochures or without.

• Knowing the laws that govern sales letters can help you avoid serious legal problems.

• Making a false statement in a sales letter is fraud if the recipient can prove
  – That your intent was to deceive
  – That you made the statement regarding a fact rather than an opinion or a speculation
  – That the recipient was justified in relying on the statement
  – That the recipient was damaged by it

• Using a person's name, photograph, or other identity in a sales letter without permission constitutes invasion of privacy – with some exceptions.

• Using a photo of the members of a local softball team in a chamber of commerce mailer may be perfectly legal if team members are public figures in the community.

• Legal problems can also result from publicizing a person's private life in a sales letter.

• Stating that the president of a local bank (mentioned by name) served six months in prison for income tax evasion is a potentially damaging fact that may be considered an invasion of privacy.
Planning Sales Letters

• The three steps involved in planning a sales letter are similar to those involved in planning any other persuasive message
  – Determine the main idea (in sales letters, it revolves around a selling point and related benefits)
  – Define the audience
  – Choose the approach and format

Determining Selling Points and Benefits

• Selling points are the most attractive features of a product; consumer benefits are the particular advantages that buyers will realize from those features.
• One selling point of a personal computer might be its numeric keypad.
• The consumer benefit of this selling point is that the user doesn't need a separate calculator or the skill to type numbers on the regular keyboard.
• Obviously, you can't write about selling points or benefits without a thorough understanding of your subject.
• The first step in writing any sales letter is to take a good look at the product.
• Ask yourself (or someone else, if necessary) everything you think a potential buyer might want to know about it.

Defining the Audience

• Marketers seek to define consumer in terms of
  – Demographics: age, gender, occupation, income, and education
  – Psychographics: personality, attitudes, and lifestyle

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