

On Persuasion

Author: Poran Tudor

Introduction

“On Persuasion” intends to explore the phenomenon of persuasion and why a proper understanding of this process of interpersonal communication is essential for protecting oneself and others from the harms that can be caused by beautiful illusions. Paradoxically, it seems that in most cases it is easier to deceive people than to convince them of a truth.

What is persuasion?

Persuasion is a process of interpersonal communication through which one party tries to convince the other to accept a certain idea as true or to act in a specific way.

How is persuasion possible?

Do we accept something as true only when it is sufficiently proven to us?

The truthfulness of the thesis itself seems not to be a necessary condition for the acceptance of the thesis as being true, because there is always a great diversity of opinions about what is true or not true, and when there are at least two different opinions about the veracity of something, at least one of them must be wrong

Thus, the necessary condition for accepting something as being true, is not that it is in fact true, but rather that it appears to be so.

Hence, we can classify persuasion by the genuineness of the discourse. By this criterion, persuasion can be either an eloquent demonstration, or an act of deception.

- **Eloquent demonstration**

When the speaker claims the veracity of the content imparted not only superficially, but when he also believes it as being true, then we are talking about an act of persuasion by way of an eloquent demonstration.

- **Deception**

When the one that imparts the information claims only superficially that the imparted information is true, but intrinsically he is indifferent to it being either true or false as long as the intended audience ends up thinking or acting in a specific desired manner, then we speak of an act of deception.

- In both the first and the second case, if the intended audience ends up adopting the desired way of thinking or the desired behaviour, then the act of imparting information was undertaken in the appropriate fashion.
- The act in itself, naturally, differs depending on the case, because to accomplish an eloquent demonstration is not the same thing as misleading someone. However, the two cases also share to some extent a similar content, in view of the manner in which the act of persuasion is to be undertaken.

This similarity of content consists in the fact that both those who seek to persuade by means of an eloquent demonstration and those who seek to persuade by means of deception, are necessarily obliged to “season” whatever information is being imparted, whether that information is true or not, in such a way that it can easily be chewed by the intended audience; and in such a way that it can be smoothly integrated into the belief structure of the listeners. The fundamental difference between the two cases, of course, lies in the veracity of the information that is being imparted.

The “seasoning” of the information, in short, consists of identifying and using the most appropriate way to deliver a certain information, so that it is received and accepted as true.

The one who tries to convince someone of a truth, must exert greater efforts than the one who only seeks to convince by all means, because the one who seeks to convince by all means, obviously has severally more means of doing so than the one who intends to persuade in a specific way.

A greater effort does not imply that persuading someone of a truth is less efficacious than deceiving someone. On the contrary, it is the other way around. A greater effort means a greater cost, that is, it implies a careful and thorough research beforehand of the veracity of the thesis plus the preparation of an eloquent demonstration by which to communicate to the audience the genuineness of the thesis.

The same information can be imparted in a wide variety of ways, both through different sign systems and through different uses of the same sign system, and these ways differ in terms of allure. Hence, for the persuasion to be successful, first of all, the most appropriate system of signs for the delivery of that information must be identified.

E. g. For example, the Danish language is not the most appropriate system of signs by which someone from China (that does not understand Danish) could be persuaded, because the Chinese in question does not understand the meaning of the sounds he hears or of the words he reads in that specific system of signs.

The same situation occurs depending on the level of understanding of the audience. If the audience is initiated, the specialist will be able to ascertain this and will also be able to adjust his speech to a higher level of conceptualization. If the audience is not initiated, then a high level of conceptualization is not the most persuasive way to address that specific audience, because the sign system used is not understood by the audience, so in other words, it is like a foreign language.

Once the most appropriate system of signs has been identified and the level of conceptualization has been adjusted, the one who intends to convince must use the most alluring display of those signs (verbal and nonverbal), in order to charm and keep the attention of the audience.

Conclusions

The eloquent demonstration is the best act of persuasion, but it is also the hardest to perform. If a demonstration is eloquent, then it is in all cases persuasive.

The act of deception is easier to perform, but it is effective only in front of an uninitiated audience - *because it is extremely difficult to cover up some fallacies that are obvious to someone that is well-versed.*

Hence, the decrease in effectiveness of the act of deception is inversely proportional to the rise in the level of competence of the audience.