Persuasion Tips for Product Managers

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There’s one fundamental rule about persuasion.

People make decisions emotionally and justify them rationally.

This is a bit of an oversimplification, but it’s certainly a good rule of thumb.

If you want to be persuasive...

...if you want to convince people about something...

...if you want them to change their mind...

...to make a decision.

Then you have to give them both parts. You need an emotionally compelling argument...

...that you then justify rationally, with facts.
Applying The Fundamental Rule

It’s easy to say "convince them emotionally" — but how do you do this?

You have a lot of different tools — everything from your appearance and your voice to the tips in this ebook.

You have more control over some of these than others. (One of my tools is that I’m an older white man with a lot of experience— it gives me intrinsic privilege as a persuader in many situations. You may not have that! Even so I use a lot of other persuasion tools and techniques.)

For example, how you dress in an in-person meeting can have a big impact on your persuasiveness.

Likewise, your tone of voice. A smoother, more dynamic, and more confident tone will often give you more credibility.

But I want to assure that the rest of the tips in this book are a bit more concrete than "tone of voice!"

You can use these tips right away — and they don’t depend on your physical state.
Persuasion Tip #1: Have a goal

Don’t just go in presenting information and data – “show up and throw up” – and hope that something good will happen.

Your goal might be to convince someone to make a decision in your favor. Or your goal might be to help some executives understand why your schedule slipped and how that was a good thing.

You can also have multiple goals (not too many!). For example, "I’d like to get out of this meeting alive." That’s a reasonable additional goal if you have some bad news.
Persuasion Tip #2: Use stories, not just facts

The story so far...

Stories are the best and easiest way to make that emotional connection you must have to be persuasive.

We’ve all heard over and over again that humans love stories. They are a valuable currency in persuasion. People who are better at telling stories are usually more successful.

I can’t fit a lesson on how to tell better stories in this little book — but check out my storytelling guide: 3 Simple Steps To Make Your Customer Stories 10x Better.
**Persuasion Tip #3: Pre-handle objections**

One of the most basic persuasion techniques is putting yourself in your audience’s shoes, understanding what they’re concerned about, and addressing it proactively.

Good persuaders know what the objections will be in advance. And then, instead of waiting for them to come up via questions, or not come up, and just remain in peoples’ heads, you address them head-on in your presentation. This puts your audience at ease and makes them more receptive to your pitch.

Check out my article on pre-handling objections for more guidance.
Persuasion Tip #4: Use conversational language

The brain has a filter against new information. But because human brains crave conversation with other humans, conversational language slips through the filter much more easily than academic or technical language. It’s just the way we’re wired.

The rules of thumb for conversational language include:

- Ask questions, especially open-ended questions.
- Use the word "you." This is another "keyword" for our brains.

See this article for more.
Persuasion Tip #5: Map out the path and the obstacles

Help your audience envision the journey to success, including the hazards and how you’ll get around or over them.

The path is the set of steps that the user or audience will have to go through to achieve the benefits of the information you’re sharing.

As for the obstacles, your audience is always worried about the dangers of a new idea, even if they don’t know what those dangers are. By sharing the actual risks, you reduce their scariness, and if you explain how people can get through them, it reduces their fear even more.
Persuasion Tip #6: Practice. Out loud

One of the best ways to make your message more persuasive is to practice, out loud, in your own voice - and listen to what you’re saying. The more you sound like a human, the more persuasive you’ll be.

Even one practice session will have a big positive impact on your persuasiveness:

- You’ll find problems (that you can fix)
- You’ll become smoother, more relaxed, and more confident
- It will help you anticipate objections
I’ve been privileged over my career to have good training — as well as lots of on-the-job experience — in persuasion and other critical business soft skills.

Helping others to be more effective in work and life by sharing those skills back is one of my core values. I do that via my blog and my book, both called The Secret Product Manager Handbook, plus workshops and online courses, and of course ebooks like this one.

Please consider scheduling a free 1/2 hour coaching call with me. I love to meet new people.

I give away much of my material for free. But if you want to get deeper, I’m available for longer-term coaching and workshops, for both you and your team. And keep an eye out for my online training courses, coming soon in Q2 2019. (And there’s always my book, available on Amazon.)

Connect with Me

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