



The art of persuasion



Take a few minutes for a quick, practical refresher on the art of persuasion. It is for audit leaders and auditors alike. We all find ourselves needing to persuade others: audit clients, managers - the list goes on. The techniques and tips to achieve your goal are the same even when the players change.

Persuasion gives ideas traction. It is a critical skill for auditors at all stages of their career, which is why it is part of the Institute's competency framework.

Read on to see why it is important...

Why is this important to me?

The ability to convince others of your perspective is essential. The most insightful audit findings are worthless if no-one takes them on board.

Persuasion is a positive process. It is subtle and has nothing to do with coercion or manipulation. It is about finding the right combination of hooks to engage and encourage an open mind to willingly change direction, to see things differently.

The ability to persuade is powerful. It directs action. It facilitates change. It makes a difference.

Is this not the role of internal audit?

Can internal audit protect the organisation without being able to effect change in governance, risk

Top 10 tips

We have consolidated the tips most relevant for internal auditors from a range of coaches and psychology experts worldwide thanks to the internet.

1. **Make the topic:** be involved in the detail. Find a way to engage your audit client with the issue and use their language and key phrases.
2. **Create a story:** visualise the future change - logic itself is not always enough. Personalise and build the story to explain the logic of your case - aim to let the other person work it out for themselves.
3. **Demonstrate the benefits of the alternative way of thinking:** particularly personal ones in addition to those that are more focused on the organisation - answer the question 'what's in it for me?' without it being asked.
4. **Exhibit confidence in your:** convey your sense of certainty about the facts/findings as this can be more persuasive than the words you say.
5. **People respond well to making a choice:** take time to understand their perspective. It is always their decision. Articulate the consequences of the options.
6. **Pick your moment:** persuasion requires the other person's mind to be open or openable, to have time to engage and reflect.
7. **Be gracious and respectful of others opinions:** when an audit client cannot see your point of view, it can be useful to ask them to articulate why you should change your perspective to theirs. This gives you specific points to counter and they may even see your point of view more clearly.
8. **Concede graciously on minor points in order to gain:** subconsciously we need to give back when people do something for us - an early perceived loss leading to greater gain.
9. **Use empathy to rationalise a point of difference:** for example, 'I used to think that too then I heard about...' or 'one of my other clients used to do that until...'
10. **Aim to infuse rather than drain the other person of energy:** motivate them to act: use eye contact, humour, physical movement and active listening.

You may have others that work for you. Please share them with us.

Three ways to persuade

Over 2000 years ago Aristotle said, "character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion." He identified the three ways that we persuade others using ethos, logos and pathos.

Ethos

This type of persuasion is based on ethics and reputation.

Convincing someone to change their opinion means that your opinion must be credible. The objectivity and integrity associated with internal audit is a major plus point. Be sure to uphold it and use it wisely.

An effective persuasion technique can be to confront hard truths, the difficult facts that others are unwilling to raise. Trust is required to engage in such conversations. Trust that internal audit is non-judgemental and

without personal agenda.

Logos

This type of persuasion is based on logic.

Auditors are often most comfortable with this, using statistics, evidence and facts to define a case. As a persuasive technique care must be taken as it is also a push approach using the weight of evidence to force change. Use only sufficient logic to allow your proposal to be seen as reasonable, reserve additional detail as back up if needed.

Pathos

This type of persuasion is based on emotion and empathy.

Pathos can be used to draw people towards something, compelling them to a particular point of view by describing the benefits. It can also be used to dissuade them away from a course of action by emphasising negative consequences. This is a pull technique latching on to personal need and offering resolution.

An element of all three approaches can be found in internal audit findings:

- The situation/issue (builds ethos, credibility of knowing the subject matter)
- The problem (demonstrates logos, the rational logic of evidence)
- The consequences (creates pathos, benefits or disadvantages, the risks involved)

And all three types of persuasion interweave as people first take time to listen to you (ethos), then to your recommendation (logos) and lastly connect with the concept and commit (pathos).

Have you ever thought about persuasion in this way?

When you read your audit findings can you now see the different approaches?

In summary

Hopefully you can now see why persuasion is one of the building blocks in the Institutes competency framework. It is a skill to be practiced and developed rather than assumed and taken for granted. Successful auditors are those who can persuade at any level and on any topic.

Additional support

- Classroom course – **Agreeing findings and actions – a collaborative approach**

This course provides a clear structure for approaching this task and contains tips that will help to ensure success

1 day, 7 CPE points

- Online training course – **Introduction to negotiations**

In this course we clarify what negotiation is and provide frameworks and techniques for carrying out negotiations

2hrs, 2 CPE points