

4

CONTROL THE EMOTION AND THE CONTENT

*The emotions aren't always immediately subject to reason,
but they are always immediately subject to action.*

— James Joyce

Emotions nearly always play a significant role in achieving persuasion. In sales, it is often said that people buy emotionally and justify rationally.

One of the biggest mistakes that I see people making that causes resistance to persuasion or outright failure of the attempt is the misunderstanding of emotions and emotional content.

One of my most vivid memories of an in-home sales presentation was for Vulcan fire alarms. I'm not even sure if they are still in existence. But I'll never forget the salesman who came to sell the alarm.

The salesman arrived and began to explain the value of having fire alarms. When we decided not to buy, he attempted to engage our emotions. He said to my mom, “Imagine how you’ll feel looking at the burned dead bodies of your sons knowing that for just a few dollars a month, you could have saved their lives.”

Rather than being emotionally overcome, my mom just laughed and said, “I can promise you, if my sons die in a house fire I’m in, I won’t be alive to see their dead bodies; I’ll have perished trying to get them out.” In one sentence, my mom defeated his “closes ’em every time” technique for harnessing emotion.

Emotions by their very definition are feelings that spring outward in response to some stimulus. To be subliminally persuasive, you must understand which emotions you are appealing to and attempting to get a reaction from.

The pressure of having to pay for fire detectors with money we didn’t have evoked a much stronger emotional reaction in my mom than an idea that seemed highly unlikely to her, that someone in the house wouldn’t wake up and get everyone out in the event of a fire. The salesman also activated a second emotion in my mom, which was the feeling of being disrespected by assuming that she’d fall for such an obvious ploy.

The key emotions that most persuaders should concern themselves with are:

Desire—A sense of intense want or a feeling of identifying what is missing and wanting that.

Lust—An intense desire or craving for something (including sex). It is often not physically tangible, like power.

Loss—The anticipation of not having something that they could or already have.

Shame—A feeling of doing something dishonorable. In the case of sales, marketing, and persuasion, the emotion of shame is often associated with not taking action when you know you should. For example, forgoing health insurance to buy a new car.

Pleasure—Pleasure is not technically an emotion, but rather a grouping of emotions to create an experience referred to as pleasure. It includes happiness, pride, and other subsets of emotions. The anticipation of good and desirable feelings from actions you take or things you acquire.

Anticipated Pain—Pain is often incorrectly referred to as an emotion. According to Dr. Antonio Damasio, “Pain is the perception of a sensory representation of local living-tissue dysfunction. . . . In other words, the organism is designed to respond to the actual or threatened loss of integrity of its tissue with a particular type of signaling.” Anticipation of pain is one of the most powerful emotional sets that you can leverage. It is the self-inflicted feeling of what an experience will be like for the person if something within her control occurs because she doesn’t take an action. It is also often a very visceral reaction to a problem she is currently experiencing.

Fear—Forms a persuasion perspective closely associated with loss. It is a sense of a lack of safety or anticipation of loss.

Flattery—A feeling of being somehow special and desirable.

Pity—This is most often induced to raise funds for charities, and so forth. It is a transposition of a very unfortunate

person or incident on to yourself and feeling how you imagine you'd feel in a similar situation, and wanting to make a difference now.

Consequences—Cause and effect. It is the sense of what could happen by not taking action or not making a decision.

Status or Celebrity—Keeping up with the Joneses, a positive feeling of being on display or receiving very positive attention for some action. This is one of the most overlooked emotions by professional persuaders. Many people want their 15 minutes of fame so they can leverage it . . . or at least enjoy it.

Approval—A feeling of making a right decision or doing the right thing and receiving positive recognition for it.

Love—Advertising has done a very good job of linking the feeling of love with products, particularly food. A sense of well-being, connectedness, and unconditional acceptance.

Hate—Virulent dislike, revulsion. A very effective emotion to evoke when making comparisons or setting up us-versus-them scenarios.

To create an emotional reaction to your message, you must create a powerful appeal that encourages people to feel the correct emotion. Overt appeals are rarely as effective as subliminal appeals. In the case of the Vulcan salesman, his appeal was so overt, that, for my mom, it had virtually no impact.

Many of the techniques we've already explored precondition, or set up, the appeal, and any interaction has the person already feeling a certain emotion. Persuasion occurs when you fulfill the emotional desire that your efforts have created.

SETTING UP THE APPEAL

You must know what emotions you are hoping to engage so you can properly set up an appeal. It is imperative that you understand generally what your audience will respond to or is seeking.

One of the best ways to effectively set up an appeal is through effective questioning, getting people to express what it is that they desire most. But that isn't the end; you need to ask questions around what is important about that desire. Once you know what is important to the person or the group, you can then set up the emotional appeal.

Let's look at my three-year-old daughter as an example. I was recently shopping for some educational toys that would help her learn better or more efficiently. I particularly wanted things that would help her begin to learn to see patterns, something I was not taught in my youth.

The store clerk greeted me and asked me what I was looking for. I told him that I was looking for toys for my daughter that would help her learn more about pattern recognition. He proceeded to show me several toys and suggested that the best toy was one of the most expensive. He went on to talk to me about the quality of the toy and the research that went into it. Those were important things to me, but not the most important. Had he received the education you are receiving right now, he might have asked a series of questions that would have gone something like this:

Salesman: Welcome to My Toy Store, is there something specific you are looking for?

Me: Yes, educational toys that help children learn pattern recognition.

Salesman: Let me show you what we have. What is important in learning pattern recognition for you?

Me: I believe that it allows children to learn more easily when they are able to recognize the patterns in language and math and so forth.

Salesman: Interesting. . . . Did you learn pattern recognition when you were young?

Me: No, education was not a priority when I was a child, so no one really taught me how to learn (strong emotional content around loss and shame). But all the really smart people I know (emotional content around acceptance by a certain group of people) understand how to recognize and interpret patterns in information and their surroundings, so I learned later in life (emotional content around pride).

Salesman: We have a wide variety of toys that help children learn patterns, but the ones that are recommended by some of the top learning institutions like Harvard will help your child have the advantage you didn't much earlier. Is earlier mastery important to you? (Encouraging me to engage my emotional content around wanting my daughter to be smart and not feel the same shame I did around what I perceived as a deficient education.)

Me: Absolutely!

Salesman: Wonderful. These are the top two toys for early mastery. Why don't we let your daughter look at them with you and see which ones appeal more to her? (Encourages me to get involved in the teaching, learning, and selection process with my daughter, firing off many emotions around being connecting, loving, and so forth.)

Me: Perfect.

Salesman: It looks like she likes this one the best. Is there anything else you need in addition to this toy? It is wonderful to see you taking an active role in your daughter's learning. So many people don't and children are left to learn on their own. (Testing to be sure that the emotional content was correct and validating my beliefs.) It must feel terrific to be able to give your daughter this gift of advancement early in life. (Reflecting my emotional content.) I can only imagine how wonderful it will feel for you to see her graduate from a top college and be able to look back and know that little decisions like this one set the course of her life in ways yours couldn't have been.

Here are the steps for setting up emotional appeal:

1. Identify the emotions you are appealing to.
2. Create vivid word pictures that point to the emotions.
3. Ask powerful questions that get the audience to put themselves in the picture and experience what they are or would be feeling. Questions are your secret weapon to leading people into an experience.
4. Suggest what they are feeling and acknowledge it.
5. Encourage them to feel more of that emotion, and if it is an emotion they'd like less of, link to your product, service, or idea and demonstrate how it will lessen the feeling.

When your audience is in an emotional state, they are not focused on critical thinking; they are caught up in the feelings that the emotions create.

Words contain great emotional content. By choosing your words carefully, you can create very powerful emotional connectedness. All too often, persuaders fall in love with the language that is comfortable for them to use, not the representational language of their clients.

One of the best places to begin learning more about your clients is online. There are tremendous resources now available where people actively share their thoughts, emotions, and even personal content. Start out by looking at social networking sites like Facebook.com, LinkedIn.com, Tbd.com, and Multiply.com.

These sites are chock full of great information, typically in people's own words about how they think, consider, emote, and feel. They give you tremendous insight into the markets you hope to influence. Go one step deeper, look at the groups that form around your focus area on those sites and actively peruse the content. When you begin to consume this information, you'll begin to see commonalities, hot buttons, and emotional content that you can leverage to be seen as a savior, or at minimum, a realistic solution in the market.

Watching blogs that focus on your industry is another great way to understand the emotion of your market. Read what impassioned writers are talking about so that you can carefully craft your message to reach the market.

You should also study the media releases of your competitors and others in noncompetitive companies in the same market. Understand what emotional message they are sending your market. Once you understand the emotions that your competitors focus on, you can make a determination as to their effectiveness. You may find many openings that you can exploit in

your competition just by listening to what they are saying and comparing it with the emotional content of your audience.

Subliminal Selling Secret

Craft your story to include the dominant emotions that your clients are likely to be experiencing and show them how you overcame the challenge that initiated the emotion.

You can lead with the emotion in ads or even in person. Your word pictures can create the sense of the emotion they are feeling while either heightening it or leading them to a solution.

The more engaged in the emotion you get the audience, the more likely they are to accept your presentation of support of their emotions or in supporting them to move past the emotions they are currently feeling.

You may use a combination of graphics and words expressing emotional content in print and television ads. In radio, it can be done with words and voice inflection. Work on making every statement emotionally impactful and your persuasiveness will increase dramatically.

RITUALS AND EMOTIONS

Rituals are highly emotionally charged events. One of the fastest ways to engage emotion is to center the ritual around your product or service . . . and if you can't identify one, create it.

The drink absinthe was outlawed in the early years of the twentieth century in many parts of Europe, and in the United States in 1912. Even during the period of illegality, absinthe maintained a cultlike following for its apparent ability to create extreme creativity in some people (Vincent van Gogh, Edgar

Allan Poe, and Ernest Hemingway were absinthe drinkers). One of the big appeals in addition to the purported hallucinogenic effect of absinthe was the ritual of drinking it. Absinthe was dropped one drop at a time through a sugar cube into a glass before being served. The waiting created anticipation for the effect. There is a sense of doing something forbidden for people who still drink it. Absinthe is no longer outlawed in the United States and has a very significant cult following, even though it has been declared safe and not a hallucinogen.

When you identify emotions that people are feeling and begin to predict correctly what will happen next, it usually will. This is a version of the placebo effect.

Most people have buying rituals that they follow and those rituals lead to an experience of feeling confident and making a purchase or not feeling confident and avoiding the purchase. These rituals are highly charged emotionally. If you understand the ritual, you are able to help them recreate it and activate positive persuasive compliance emotions. You can also use it to set up an us-versus-them situation with your competitors. In the us-versus-them scenario, you demonstrate and have them go through the positive buying ritual and point out which emotional pieces are missing in your competitor's business. Rituals are highly subliminally persuasive because there is a presumption of an outcome implicit in participating in a ritual.

Pay particular attention to the processes that people go through in advance of buying your products and services. Once you've identified their ritual, engage them in it earlier. The sooner you engage their emotions, the faster persuasive

compliance occurs. Here is an example of how understanding a ritual can become highly persuasive.

One ritual for buying for a large subset of buyers is getting a good deal. They enter the store and search through rack after rack of merchandise looking for hidden bargains and celebrate their successes with their friends. So the ritual is: Go to the store, look through many items, find the best deals, celebrate with friends.

If you know that this particular subset of buyers is important to your business, you may identify them and mark them out. You may create an event that allows them to come in early one or two days a month so they and another small group like them are in the store. Everyone is going through a very similar ritual and they are bonded because they were selected to be there, based on their ritual and their label (savvy shopper, frugal shopper, and so forth). The result is that they tell all their friends who are like them to come to the store with them in times that they are not invited in for the special day in hopes that their friends, too, will be selected.

Let me give you another example. In the early 1990s, I owned one of the nation's first used-personal-computers-only stores. I sold large volumes of PCs and associated components. I was very focused on getting in used equipment, bagging it in static bags and putting it in bins on the shelves so that it could be easily found by me and customers. One day, I got in late and a shipment of used parts and components had arrived. Because of the uniqueness of the store, it was not uncommon to have a line of people waiting at the door when I opened. This day was no exception. I couldn't get everything put away before

I opened and there was too much to put it all in the back. So, with no choice, I let people in and they went absolutely crazy. They dug through boxes with great intensity looking for exactly what they wanted. Nothing was priced, so they were offering me what they thought was fair for the products and to my shock it was nearly always at least 25 percent more than I'd have charged for it, and often double.

I realized in that moment that there was a buying ritual that I had missed . . . actually I'd seen it repeated dozens of times at garage sales and auctions, but I assumed that it wouldn't apply to my business. Boy, was I wrong. From that moment on, everything went in boxes, on the floor, and on the shelves; there were no prices in most cases, and the lines and crowds got bigger, and I sold nearly three times as much the year I discovered the ritual as the year before.

What was interesting was the number of people who eagerly and happily brought their friends to shop with them, people who were just like them. People who purchased a lot of products.

All of those customers shared many similar emotions: elation at finding a good deal, fear of losing out on a good deal, pride in finding one, lust for the most expensive computers in the store, and a very real sense of loss when they missed a deal, which was buoyed by a fierce determination not to let it happen again.

Based on observing the most ardent participants of the ritual, I was able to sell an early morning membership whereby once a week when my main new stock came in, people who spent the most with me got to come in half an hour before anyone else. Those people were willing to pay \$250 a year to be able to participate.

Shared Emotions Bond People

Groups most often exhibit shared emotions. If you want to persuade the masses more effectively, you simply present them with an opportunity to share their emotions with others who feel the same way. One of the most powerful subliminal persuasion tools you can use is the creation of a group with shared ideas and emotional commitments and attachments. You don't have to do a lot of work once the group is formed; you simply need to persuade the influencers and leaders in the group and present them with the ideas you want them to promote or support, and they will.

People who are truly emotionally engaged are typically much more capable of raising the emotional level of an event than someone from the front of the room who has less emotional intensity or commitment. Simply direct the emotional content of the group to reap the benefit and implant your idea or message or to gain persuasive compliance.

Focus on emotions. The person most in control of the emotions of the audience owns them.

Implementation Is Everything

Money Follows Action

Before you go any further in this book, I want you to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the dominant emotion that my audience must feel for them to make a decision or accept my idea?
- What emotions are they experiencing when they initially engage with me?

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- What rituals does my audience go through in the buying or acceptance process?
- What patterns of behavior do they demonstrate during their buying process?
- What is the most important thing I can do to appeal to the dominant emotion they need to feel to accept my idea or make a decision?
- How do I preemptively engage a feeling of negative emotions related to the processes of my competitors?

Work on developing a question set that you can use in your one-on-one persuasive endeavors or power questions that lead to emotion and link to you, your products, or ideas in your ads.

ESSENTIAL FURTHER STUDY

Books

The Feeling of What Happens—Antonio Damasio (Harcourt, 1999)

Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice—Catherine Bell (Oxford, 1992)

The Stuff of Thought—Steven Pinker (Viking, 2007)

Audio Interview

discoverthecode.com: interview with Clotaire Rapaille on the culture code and emotional imprints as they relate to product decision processes.