

5

GET A REAL ENDORSEMENT

People may like a particular piece of music, but then the additional testimonial that goes along with it from others can do a lot to help that decision.

—Psychologist Terry Pettijohn

Just about everyone who has studied persuasion for any period of time has heard of Social Proof. For those who haven't, social proof simply says that we are more likely to do something that we see others doing. When social proof (someone else doing it) exists, our decision is much easier. Everyone likes making good decisions; fewer people like to be the first person to try something. We even have great sayings that support not going first: "You can always tell the pioneers; they are the ones with the arrows in their backs."

Getting others to endorse your work, your ideas, your business, or you personally is another example of social proof. The most effective persuaders today all make very liberal use of very powerful testimonials.

The biggest argument I hear for not having and using powerful testimonials is that people don't understand how to get endorsements from people who might be able to offer them great credibility in the eyes of their target audience. Those who often do get a testimonial don't get a testimonial that is really usable for their persuasion endeavor.

Social proof is a very powerful subliminal persuader because even if people recognize the overt attempt at compliance that a testimonial makes, they are moved by the person giving the testimonial. This is increasingly true the higher the stature of the person delivering the testimonial. When persuading the masses, the key is to have a good number of well-developed testimonials that span a number of personality styles and backgrounds. Your testimonials should also include a good mix of men and women so as to appeal to everyone.

Endorsements by organizations or heads of organizations carry additional persuasive power. When an endorsement comes from a company or company head, you are getting not only the endorsement of the person who gives it, but the transfer of power and credibility from the organization itself. When faced with a conflict about whether to assign credibility or trust to an endorsement, the audience will often fall back on the idea that "ten thousand people who are part of this organization can't be wrong." There is a belief that a company or group like them wouldn't endorse something that isn't good for them.

THE COMPONENTS OF A SUBLIMINALLY PERSUASIVE ENDORSEMENT

1. The endorser should have high credibility, either as a user of your product or adopter of your idea.
2. The endorser should have high credibility with your audience or a subsection of that audience.
3. The content of the endorsement should be clearly focused on one or two ideas at most. It should consist of demonstrations of how the product, service, or idea has been used and the specific results of the use.
4. If in writing or audio, the endorsement must clearly identify who the person is who is giving the endorsement. Endorsements are most effective in the following order:
 - Live and in person
 - Video
 - Audio
 - Read by a supportive third party
 - Written

In an age of technology, it is becoming easier and easier to get live endorsements and video endorsements. Be sure to collect as many as you can.

It is important that you do not assume that endorsers understand how to endorse you properly. To create the most impactful endorsement, you should feel very comfortable asking for specifically what you need from them and even directing them to the extent necessary to get the outcome you need.

You should always have a means of collecting an available endorsement whenever you are working with people who may be in a position to give you one. The tool I find most convenient is the Canon Powershot SD series camera. The Canon SD1000 is the latest and best in the series as I put these words to paper. It allows you to record 30 to 60 fps (frames per second) video with the touch of a button. What makes this my preferred tool for collecting endorsements is that it captures digital video, which I can then edit with simple video editing software, which allows me to put the person's name on the video and include any other information I want. It also allows me to rip the audio out of the video and use that in other applications, like radio ads, for example.

When you present an endorsement in two modalities, for example, video and later in audio, an impression of that person is created as having had a lot more to say and feels even more strongly about your offering. One of the things that I do regularly when I have only a written endorsement is to display a photo of the person who gave the testimonial along with the text and ask a third party to read the endorsement. Most people will quickly forget that the person reading the endorsement is not the person who wrote it and you also assume all the power and credibility that the person reading has with the group.

CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE WHO CAN ENDORSE YOU

There are three groups of people who can and will endorse you.

1. People who use your products and services
2. People who know you and like you

3. People who don't know you but who see value in what you are providing

In the case of people who use your products and services, it really is as simple as asking them to share their experience and then shaping their story to fit your needs.

The best way to get the endorsement is to tell the person that you need their endorsement and ask them to provide it. It is always best to coach them through exactly what it is that you need them to say for the endorsement to be most effective. Most people willing to endorse you are also willing to take some direction. The important keys are to get them to say the most supportive things about your product and to use the most emotionally evocative language possible. It is often easy to couch your criticism and coaching in questions. By simply asking something like, "Did you mean _____ when you said _____?" Their answer will often be yes, and you can then say, "Do you think it would be easier for a layman to understand what you said if you said _____; would you mind?" By taking the approach of asking questions, it doesn't seem as if you are being critical and it allows you to get what you need.

Not having to pay money for endorsements is the ideal situation, because paid endorsements in most cases need to be revealed. You can, however, give the endorsers special access, preferred service, and so forth, as a result of their endorsement and even to position them to give you the endorsement. Targeting people you hope to induce to provide an endorsement with a higher level of service or with special incentives is a very powerful technique. The only downside is that you condition those people to expect to always be treated in a preferential way.

You need to be sure that the continued level of treatment is justified by the endorsement.

People who know and like you are also great candidates for very powerful endorsements. They are, in many ways, superior candidates, because they will say whatever you need them to say and they will often be reflecting their care and concern for you as much as their commitment to your offering, and that care and concern for you will often come across as a deep commitment to the offering.

Because of the flexibility of the people who know you and like you, you can many times get action endorsements, that is, endorsements of them actually using your product. These kinds of endorsements are incredibly persuasive, because they allow people to actually see what the person is describing and they can put themselves in the picture and easily imagine a similar result.

The great news about the first two groups is that you hopefully don't have to look very far to find them. The third group presents a slightly more difficult challenge for some people but it needn't.

There are many people who don't know you but who will see value in what you do and who will endorse you because of it. These endorsements can be straightforward and free. For example, I don't pay for the endorsements of my book; even from people I don't know but whose work I respect and who are well recognized. Endorsements can also be paid endorsements. This is most often seen in consumer goods, particularly when creating influence strategies for hard-to-reach groups like teens or senior citizens, who tend to be more skeptical.

There is an old belief that we are separated from any other person on earth by only six others, and by leveraging those

connections, we can get connected with anyone. One of the major weekly news shows did a live experiment with the idea and proved that it actually did work . . . with regular people as well as with people whom you wouldn't expect, for example, a random kid in New York.

The point for our purpose is not whether you can reach someone in six connections but whether you will reach out and ask for the endorsement. I was speaking with Ben Mack, author of *Think Two Products Ahead* (Wiley, 2007) while writing this chapter. Ben is exceptional at connecting with people he'd seemingly have no business connecting with, and getting them to promote him and endorse him in all kinds of ways. When I asked him how he did it, his initial answer was simple; he said, "I just call them and ask them." But as I dug deeper, I found that he had a very specific strategy for getting people to say yes to him. First, he got to know something about the person. He researched them online, read their work, became familiar with their beliefs. Then, he looked for a connection, someone who could introduce him either directly or who could introduce him to someone who could. He would then ask for the introduction. Once the introduction is made, Ben finds some commonalities and explores them. He rarely asks for anything up front; in fact, he is more curious about what he can do for the other person, curious to the extent that they often feel compelled (law of reciprocation) to offer to do something in return and that is when Ben strikes. But the one thing that I noticed that I think makes Ben more successful than others who have a similar process, is his intense interest in the person. He asks very penetrating questions to learn about him, his values, his beliefs, his passions . . . and he listens intensely to

the answers. They have been subliminally persuaded without even knowing what they'll be saying yes to shortly.

It is truly amazing to me how many people say yes to Ben . . . and I'm confident you'll be just as amazed at how many people will say yes to you, too, if you follow Ben's strategy.

The key to getting the yes in asking for people who have high credibility but who do not know you is to present your request in a way that has reciprocal value. They need to see that by giving you their endorsement, there is something in it for them as well. It may be that their endorsement might make them visible to a new market or it might make them personally more visible. Never underestimate the power of exposure and perceived celebrity in getting agreements to give an endorsement.

When you get an endorsement from someone you don't know who doesn't use your product or service, it is important to help her completely understand what she is endorsing. If you can give her a sample, a trial, or an experience, it is even better, because she'll then be responding out of her own experience. If not, it is best to tell her the most important and powerful things that she might want to use or say in her endorsement. Like all of the other endorsers, it is important to coach her, but the time to do it is right up front, as you may not get a second shot at having her give you her endorsement. The key is to make the process as simple as possible for her with as little time commitment as necessary.

INDIRECT ENDORSEMENTS

Indirect endorsements are those endorsements that are implied endorsements. For example, if an athlete wears your custom-made hats, it is an implied endorsement by that person even

if he doesn't endorse the product outright. While it is okay to identify who your customers are, you need to weigh the value of disclosing your customers to gain an indirect endorsement compared to having the person as a customer.

There are many other forms of indirect endorsement, and they include:

- *Sponsorships*—When you sponsor an event, the organizers feel compelled to endorse you. While this seems transparent as an attempt to persuade, it also creates a bond of sorts with the true believers at the event.
- *Product reviews*—Independent product reviews, when positive, are an indirect endorsement of the reviewer and the outlet it was reviewed for.
- *Donations*—Donation of products or services that are given away by credible third parties, for example, a charity. These giveaways often result in a planned or spontaneous endorsement of the product. This is also a great time to ask for an outright endorsement from someone you don't know who has high credibility.
- *Acceptance of products or services by social organizations or charities*—Be sure that you understand how you can use their name before you leverage the indirect endorsement.
- *Street teams and paid endorsers working events*—This is becoming more and more common. The pretty girl who recommends a particular CD or movie very well may be a paid endorser even though she appears to be an unbiased person just making a friendly recommendation. One company that has created a huge base of endorsers

who are not paid cash but who can earn perks, gifts, and so on, is Bzzagent.com. They specialize in creating word-of-mouth marketing by getting their “agents” (you can be one, too) to review and endorse your product or service. Agents earn points by the kinds of endorsements that they give and where.

There are many other forms of, and ways to get, indirect endorsements. The key is to spend some time thinking creatively about how you can get a third party to expose your offering to her audience in a way that appears that she is endorsing it.

Product placement is also another form of indirect endorsement that can have a great impact. Placement becomes more and more effective, depending on how well used and integrated the product becomes in the movie, television program, book, play, or other public performance. If you remember the reality television show hosted by Donald Trump called “The Apprentice,” you saw that a regular fixture was a Marquis Jet. Trump’s properties were regularly placed in the show along with his events. These kinds of placement imply an endorsement of the company being showcased.

When products move into the background in a public presentation like a movie or television show they can still have a tremendous impact. People who see the performance and later see the product may recall that they first saw it in a program that they really enjoyed and attribute to it a certain kind of respect or acceptance that in a moment of ambiguity would cause you to be the clear winner. There is also the added benefit of them not consciously recalling the product but having a sense or feeling that they’ve experienced it before in a way that was positive. One of the most effective companies specializing in product

placement for persuaders is Hero Product Placement (heroproductplacement.com). Visit their site to learn more about the dynamics of product placement.

Whenever I promote a new book, I always send a copy to the CEOs of the Fortune 100, not because I think they'll read it but because many of their managers and gatekeepers will see the personally inscribed book and assume that if the boss is reading it, they should be, too. I'll be adding key business organizations to the mailing for this book because it is effective.

The more time you spend gathering direct and indirect endorsements, the more you will sell. Endorsements are highly subliminally persuasive because they come from trusted sources or appear in trusted places. The result is that when faced with a decision between a product or service offered by someone the buyer doesn't know, he'll most often make the decision to go with the product that is endorsed by someone like himself. If there isn't someone like the buyer doing the endorsing, then a product that seems to be endorsed by a person or company that is trusted is the second best choice.

There is no real reason to actively sell your products when you can let your endorsements do much of the selling for you.

Implementation Is Everything

Money Follows Action

Before you read the next chapter, take the following actions:

- List three customers that you should get an endorsement from right now.

(continued)

(continued)

- List at least three people you know and have a personal relationship with who could and will endorse you, your product, or your service.
- Make a list of your top 10 targets for endorsements by people you don't know but who have high credibility. Begin studying those people and making connections to get an introduction to them.

ESSENTIAL FURTHER STUDY

Books

Never Eat Alone—Keith Ferrazzi (Currency, 2005)

Applebee's America—Douglas Sosnik, Matthew Dowd, and Ron Fournier (Simon & Schuster, 2006)

Movies

Any James Bond movie (count the number of placements)

Transformers movie (Dreamworks, 2007)