# The Risks of Persuasion

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## You Persuade All the Time

Please take a moment and think back to the last time you tried to convince someone to do something that you wanted them to do. It might have been trying to convince your child to brush her teeth and put on her pajamas. It might have been trying to convince your co-worker to go where you wanted for lunch. Perhaps you recently tried to convince a member of management of the importance of engaging in a risk identification interview or workshop.

My guess is that each of us can point to multiple times in the last week where we tried to persuade someone to do something. Not all of these are high-stakes situations (where jobs or lives are on the line). Not all of them involve ERM decisions where the fate of a company or organization hinges on the ability of you persuading a key stakeholder to engage in robust risk management thinking. But, all of them can end badly (i.e., you do convince a business leader about the benefits of proactive risk thinking—a company eventually fails in response to a persuasive opportunity gone wrong). Luckily, for us, there is a vast literature on persuasion and how we can all become better at sharing our ideas with other people.

## The Elements of Persuasion

Monroe's Motivated Sequence outlines five clear steps that can lead to more effective persuasion: (1) attention, (2) need, (3) satisfaction, (4) visualization, and (5) call to action. Let's walk through each step individually.

### 1. Get their Attention

First, to have any chance of persuading effectively you have to get the audience's attention—you have to overcome the desire for a listener to be apathetic and tune you out. In the digital and mobile environment in which we live, you have to convince someone that you have something that is worth listening to. Among the options that capture an audience's attention effectively, some of the best include telling a quick (and relevant) story, share a startling statistic or fact, or providing some engaging conclusion from data. This may be a simple as sharing information about a disastrous handling of a risk event affecting management at another company.

### 2. Demonstrate a Need

Second, you must demonstrate a need in the audience. This need must be relevant and quantifiable in some way. Demonstrating a need involves evoking an emotion in the audience—for example, effective emotions to evoke include urgency, excitement, and/or curiosity. This step, of demonstrating a need and evoking an emotional response in your audience, opens the door to being able to persuade them to see the world the way you do; demonstrating a need illustrates the relevance of what you are saying to the audience and makes it likely they will listen to what you have to say. Perhaps a simple "what if" question about how prepared they are to handle a particular risk event should it occur in their area of responsibility.

### 3. Satisfy the Need

In the third step, you provide a way to satisfy the need you created in the audience. This continues the persuasive process—step 1 gets their attention, step 2 demonstrates your relevance, and this step proves that you are the person who can help address the need you've identified. To effectively convince the audience that you can help to solve their problem (or help them capitalize on an opportunity) you need data—you need data on the audience, you need data on the solution, and you need data regarding the costs and implementation of the proposed solution. For the audience, you need data on their needs, wants, as well as capabilities and limitations. For the solution, you need to know—prior to the interaction—what the response to the solution will be. Thus, you need to have clear evidence that (a) the solution will work, and (b) the solution is desirable by the audience and/or a stakeholder that is important enough to be influential to the audience. Specific information on the solution is also needed. Often, a short implementation timeline is an ef-

fective tool to demonstrate that you've done your homework. Maybe this step involves your sharing "quick wins" of others across the organization who have engaged in more robust risk thinking.

### 4. Visualize the World the Way You See It

The fourth step of Monroe's Motivated Sequence is to enable to audience to visualize the world the way that you see it—they get to visualize the future world that could exist if they do what you want. Here, let them see the world through your eyes. This is, in short, a thought exercise where the audience gets to compare the status quo—which you've asserted is non-optimal—to the future in which you've gotten their support and taken action. The more specific you can be the better. Are there more satisfied customers in the future, and maybe more revenue? Are there fewer instances of downtime related to technology? Perhaps better corporate governance? Maybe decreased risk to financial assets? Are there fewer customer complaints, and fewer product returns? Fewer workplace injuries? Fewer lawsuits filed against the company? The visualization can be anything that the audience will find compelling about a future state in which their needs are addressed effectively. Maybe it is as simple as saying that engaging in proactive risk management might help them sleep better at night!

### 5. Provide a Call to Action

The fifth, and final, step is to provide a call to action. It is here where you ask them to do what you want them to do—make it as specific as possible, and make it as easy as possible for them to say yes. It is typical to frame your ask by offering a "SMART" action plan (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Results-Focused, and Time-Bound). Put differently, make sure that your ask is clear, can be confirmed, is possible, takes a positive step, and is time-limited. Too often interpersonal interactions end and the presenter simply says: "Thanks for your time, can I answer any questions?" That is ineffective—rather, provide a conclusion that states clearly what you want the audience to do and outline how, exactly, they can do it. In ERM, keeping things simple is critical – don't over-complicate the process when something simple gets us to the same spot.

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[1] For more information about passion and preparedness, as well as the data and context of this premise, see the following two articles.

Nagy, B. N., Pollack, J. M., Rutheford, M. W., & Lohrke, F. (2012). The influence of entrepreneurs' credentials and impression management behaviors on perceptions of new venture legitimacy. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36, 941-965.

Pollack, J. M., Rutherford, M. W., & Nagy, B. (2012). Preparedness and cognitive legitimacy as antecedents to new venture funding in televised business pitches. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36, 915-939.

### The Special Sauce

Following the persuasive steps of Monroe's Motivated Sequence is often necessary for effective persuasion—but it is not wholly sufficient. Solid empirical data suggest that two additional elements can assist the audience in seeing the world the way you do: (1) preparedness and (2) passion. To the degree that the audience sees you as prepared (e.g., citing facts and data, demonstrating your credentials), as well as passionate (e.g., you care deeply about the opportunity), it is more likely that they will provide you the support desired. Overall, although the persuasive process can be daunting, following the steps of Monroe's Motivated Sequence can decrease some of the risk that the audience will not listen to you or see what you present as valuable.

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### Recommended Viewing

Simon Sinek TED Talk- How great leaders inspire action.

### Recommend Reading

Lewis, M. (2016). *The undoing project: A friendship that changed the world*. London: Penguin.

Micciche, T., Pryor, B., & Butler, J. (2000). A test of Monroe's Motivated Sequence for its effects on ratings of message organization and attitude change. *Psychological Reports*, 86, 1135-1138.

Nagy, B. N., Pollack, J. M., Rutherford, M. W., & Lohrke, F. (2012). The influence of entrepreneurs' credentials and impression management behaviors on perceptions of new venture legitimacy. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36, 941-965.

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