

ADR bulletin

The monthly newsletter on dispute resolution

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Special issue: Persuasion Part II

Introduction

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Hugh Selby, Graeme Blank and Dr Mark Nolan

Advocacy is often regarded as the pinnacle of persuasion. Yet persuasion is exercised in all facets of life. Do the techniques that make an advocate persuasive apply in those other areas? Do other disciplines use different principles and apply different techniques?

The convenors (two barristers who teach advocacy and a legally qualified social psychologist) wondered whether we could draw on those other disciplines to enhance our own knowledge, and at the same time provide an opportunity of real multidisciplinary value.

Thirty-five persuasion practitioners took the gamble with us that a workshop would be useful rather than useless. They gathered on a cold Canberra July weekend to discuss a baker's dozen of their approaches. Thankfully the outcomes were useful.

Common themes quickly emerged: some expected, some less so. Knowing your audience was the most oft repeated. Too many persuaders carelessly think that we can paint a persuasive picture for audiences with little or no understanding of, or attention to, audience preferences and dislikes.

Broad assumptions and generalisations are not enough. How can you achieve your desired outcomes if you haven't found the way to connect with those who will make those outcomes occur? Why does a Canberra newspaper need to report the West Australian AFL results? Why does a preacher need to distinguish between the repeat attendee and the chance arrival?

The persuader and the audience must connect. Being a member of the same crowd, the 'in-group', even if temporarily, induces a sense of belonging which brings audience trust and acceptance of the persuader.

We also create that connection through how we communicate.

Once accepted as a 'credible messenger' we must show the audience the path to follow, moving step by step, revealing the argument and the story, but leaving them to fill in the punch line. We persuade by letting them persuade themselves.

Isn't that what we persuaders all desire? To have our audience accept our facts, our interpretation, our conclusion through *our* technical and creative skill and yet think *they* did it themselves? To get there more quickly, enjoy the articles that follow in this the second and final part of our special issue on persuasion. ●

Hugh Selby, advocacy and witness trainer;

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Dr Mark Nolan, lawyer and social psychologist.