

Business Proposal Writing Made Easy

Write Successful Business and Technical Proposals

Sample pages



Scribe Consulting

Tim North, Scribe Consulting

www.scribe.com.au

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Proposals are not reports

1

It takes time to persuade men to do even what is for their own good.

Thomas Jefferson

Rationale

- There is an obvious self-interest in being able to persuade other people to act or believe as you wish them to. It is thus worthwhile to invest the time needed to learn the skills necessary to write a persuasive proposal.
- Reports and proposals require very different writing styles. Many writers don't realise this and employ a report-writing style when writing a proposal (or vice versa). This lessens their ability to be persuasive.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you'll be able to:

- Explain the key difference between reports and proposals.
- Identify the essential questions that you must ask (and answer) before beginning any report.

1.1 How are reports and proposals different?

Business writing can be divided into two significantly different styles: You can write primarily to serve the needs of your *readers*, or you can write primarily to serve the needs of the *writer*. I contend that you must choose one or the other before you begin.

This is also the essential difference between a report and a proposal:

- You write reports as an act of service in which you seek to satisfy the needs of your readers by answering all their questions. Reports aim primarily to *inform* your readers.
- Proposals start with your own self-interest (or that of your department, company etc.). Proposals aim primarily to *persuade* your readers to do, want or believe something.

Given how different these objectives are, it's not surprising that reports and proposals are written in very different styles that require different writing skills. It's thus *essential* that you decide which type of document you intend to write before you begin planning or writing.

Let's consider an example. Your manager summons you to her office and tells you that she needs you to evaluate products A, B and C in terms of cost, quality and speed, each to be scored out of ten. Once done, you're to send her your findings along with a recommendation regarding which product we should use.

Here's the key question: Should this document be written as a report or a proposal?

If we accept the definitions provided above, this document is clearly a report. Why? Reports are primarily about answering your readers' questions. Here the questions (or *goals* of the report) could be phrased as:

For products A, B and C:

- How does each product rate on cost?
- How does each product rate on quality?
- How does each product rate on speed?

The primary purpose of this document is to answer those questions. Yes, there'll be recommendations at the end and, yes, they may be quite persuasive. The bulk of the document, though, would seem to involve providing (and justifying) answers to the questions above. Once that's done, the recommendations will be obvious; they'll follow naturally.

If, on the other hand, you were trying to convince your manager to change from product A to product B in order to improve profitability, you'd probably write a proposal. In it, you'd be less intent on answering her questions and more intent on providing *benefits* associated with the change or describing the *risks* associated with not changing. It would be a clear attempt at persuasion. Yes, it would also answer questions in an informative way. The bulk of the document, though, would be dedicated to building a persuasive argument.

Phase 1: Preparation

2

I keep six honest serving-men

(They taught me all I knew);

Their names are What and Why and When

And How and Where and Who.

Rudyard Kipling, 'The Elephant's Child', *JUST-SO STORIES*, 1902

Rationale

- Being able to persuade your readers to act as you wish is a difficult skill to master. You need to understand *their* needs in order to persuade them.
- To be most effective, this understanding should be reached *before* you start to write your proposal.
- Without well-researched answers to the questions presented in this chapter, your attempts at persuasion are unlikely to succeed.
- This chapter thus presents you with a series of questions that will help you to decide what to include in your proposal and what not to include.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you'll be able to:

- Describe the essential elements that should be in any proposal.
- Provide good answers to these seven questions:
 1. What is my goal?
 2. What problem or opportunity are my readers faced with?
 3. What results will I deliver?
 4. How will I deliver these results?
 5. Why should my readers believe that I can deliver these results?
 6. How can I justify the cost of these results?
 7. Why should my readers want these results?

2.2 Overview: Seven key questions you must answer

To be successful, you'll have to plan your proposal well. At a minimum, you'll need to answer these seven questions before you start to write:

Table 2.1: These questions need to be answered *before* writing your proposal.

| Question | Element |
|--|--------------|
| 1. What's your goal or objective? | Goal |
| 2. What problem (or opportunity) are your readers faced with? | The problem |
| 3. What results will you deliver? | Deliverables |
| 4. How will you deliver these results? | Solution |
| 5. Why should your readers believe that you can deliver these results? | Experience |
| 6. How can you justify the cost of these results? | Cost |
| 7. Why should your readers want these results? | Benefits |

These elements fit together to yield the following structure for your proposal:



Figure 2.1: Including these elements in your proposal maximises your chance of achieving your goal.

These seven key elements combine to tell a persuasive story:

1. Your proposal starts with you deciding upon a realistic **goal** or **objective**.
2. You find a **problem** (or **opportunity**) in your readers' current situation that you can solve (or exploit).
3. You decide what you'll **deliver** if your readers say 'yes' to your proposal. This can be paper (in the form of reports or strategies), work (such as hiring staff, purchasing equipment, changing a process) or both.
4. You present a **solution** to the readers' problem that has the side effect of satisfying your goal. *You don't directly ask for what you want. Rather, you present your goal as part of your solution to your readers' problem.* Your goal isn't a burden to your readers; quite the contrary — you're solving a problem for them. It should delight them.
5. You describe your **experience** delivering similar solutions. (If you don't have any, you can fall back to describing other people's positive experiences with this type of solution.)
6. You identify the **costs** and justify that they're reasonable.
7. You identify the many **benefits** that the solution will bring to your readers.

Your final proposal can have additional elements, of course, and Chapter 3 discusses these more fully.

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY

The seven key elements should be developed *before* you begin writing up your proposal in Microsoft Word.

2.3 Your goal: What do you want?

The purpose of a proposal is to persuade your readers¹ to satisfy a **goal** or **objective** that you've set for yourself. It's thus essential that you clearly express your goal before you begin planning your proposal.

A well-worded goal should answer at least these three questions:

1. **Who** am I persuading? For example, my CEO, the client's lawyers or the tender committee.
2. **What action** do I want them to take? This requires a verb (a doing word). For example: approve, choose, continue, eliminate, grant, hire, increase or reduce.
3. **What** do I want them to **give** me? This will be one or more nouns (things). For example, authority, equipment, money, permission or time.

Your goal might also include additional elements such as *when* you want the action taken ('next month', 'before the contract expires') or *why* you want it ('to update our software', 'to improve morale').

Here are some examples of clear goals that you might set for yourself:

- I want to persuade the Chairman to continue funding our environmental program.
(WHO: the Chairman. THEIR ACTION: continue. YOU WANT: funds.)
- I want my manager to approve money and time so that I can attend a conference.
(WHO: my manager. THEIR ACTION: approve. YOU WANT: money and time.
WHY: to attend a conference)
- I want the CEO to grant my department a 15% budget increase so that I can upgrade our IT equipment.
(WHO: the CEO. THEIR ACTION: increase. YOU WANT: money. WHY: to upgrade equipment)
- I want the government to select our submission as the winning tender response.
(WHO: the government. THEIR ACTION: select. YOU WANT: money.)
- I want my manager to let me replace the old generator with two new ones.
(WHO: my manager. THEIR ACTION: replace. YOU WANT: new equipment.)

¹ Throughout this work I refer to *readers* (plural) because a proposal is frequently assessed by more than one person, often a board or committee. Such groups are usually made up of diverse individuals with different needs and priorities, all of whom must be satisfied. It pays to keep this in mind, hence the plural.

Large, expensive or risky projects may benefit by the inclusion of a trial run phase:

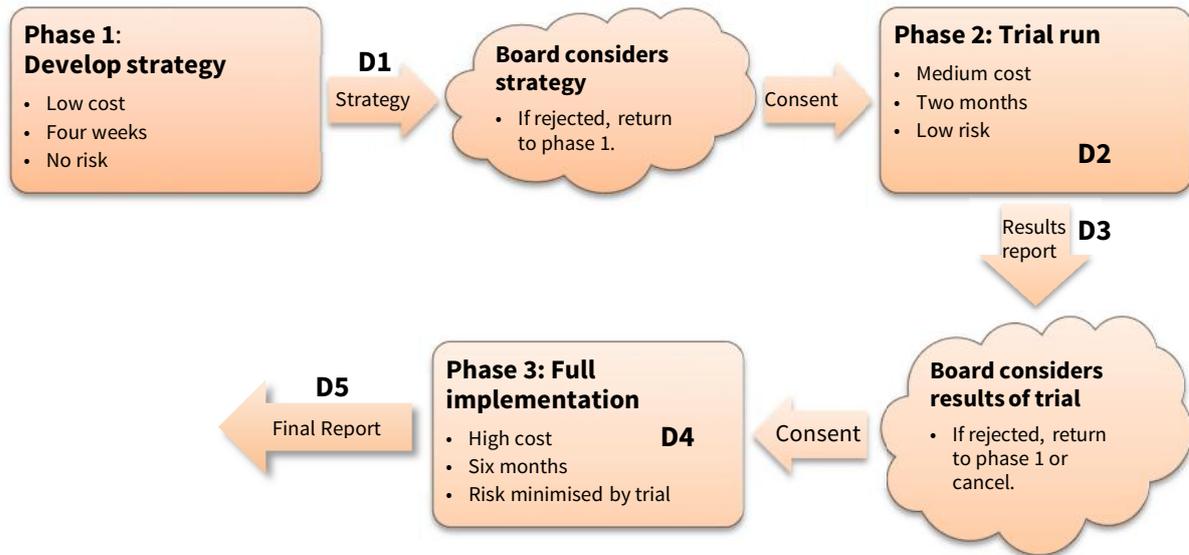


Figure 2.6: For large projects, including a trial run can minimise risks further. (Deliverables are marked D1 ... D5.)

In the example above, the deliverables are as follows:

- Deliverable #1 (paper): a strategy document.
- Deliverable #2 (work): the implementation of the trial-run phase.
- Deliverable #3 (paper): a report on the success or failure of the trial run.
- Deliverable #4 (work): the full implementation phase.
- Deliverable #5 (paper): a final report on the success or failure of the full implementation.

Diagrams like this can be an excellent inclusion in your executive summary.

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY

- Clearly identify **what** you're going to deliver to your reader **and in what order**.
- A diagram can help to do this.

Discussion

Have your past proposals used phases to minimise your readers' exposure to risk?

Exercises

1. Can you divide your proposal into two or more phases? If so, can you structure it so that the earlier phase (or phases) have relatively low costs and low risks?
2. Provide a diagram like the one above that summarise the phases and deliverables of your proposal.

2.6 Solution: *What will you do, how will this help and why this way?*

This will require hard work and creativity



Figure 2.7: Your solution explains to your readers how you'll solve their problem (or exploit their opportunity) in order to deliver their desired results and their associated benefits.

This section of your proposal will probably be the most time consuming. It's relatively easy to identify your goals and your reader's problems; but finding a practical, cost-effective solution that satisfies both will require hard work and creativity.

When describing your solution, you must clearly answer three major questions:

1. *What* are the details of my solution to my readers' problem (or opportunity)?
2. *How* will I reduce the risk of failure?
3. *Why* am I solving the problem this way, not some other way?

It may take several false starts before you hit upon a fully detailed solution that answers all three of these questions satisfactorily. Also, you may start work on a solution then realise that it wasn't as good as you'd hoped or that there's a better one. This is likely to be a time consuming and iterative process. As with most creative activities, arriving at your final solution may require a mix of both logic and creativity.

Let's look at these three questions in more detail.

Q1. *What are the details of your solution?*

Let's work through an example:

The problem: Your manager is unsure if a newly identified site is viable for a cost-effective mining development.

Your solution: You're planning to submit a proposal asking for time, money, people and resources to do the work needed to evaluate the suitability of the new site.

The deliverable: You'll deliver a yes-or-no decision (a viability report).

It's not enough to just tell your manager that you'll 'do the work needed to evaluate the suitability of the new site'. That's not persuasive because it lacks sufficient detail. Your manager will want answers to specific questions such as:

2.10 Summary of the pre-writing process



Figure 2.13: Including these six elements in your proposal maximises the chance of achieving your goal.

1. Identify your goal.
2. Express your readers' current situation as a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be exploited. Be sure to phrase this so that it concentrates on what your *readers* need, not what you need.
3. Decide if your deliverable results will be paper, work or both. With this in mind, list the specific results that you're going to deliver.
4. Clearly describe your solution or the process that you will use to develop it. Remember to say *what* it is you're proposing, *how* you'll reduce the risk of failure, and *why* you're doing it this way, not some other way.
5. Describe your experience with similar situations. This section should answer the question: Why should the reader believe that I can deliver the results I've promised? Be brief and relevant.
6. Describe and justify the costs associated with your proposal.
7. Identify the further benefits that your proposal provides to your readers. Be sure not to over-promise.

This chapter has argued that you should thoroughly all of these elements *before* you begin to write your proposal.

The next chapter describes the elements that are commonly found in written proposals. If you've already answered the questions described in this chapter then writing your proposal should be straightforward.

 Exercises

1. When writing a proposal, the readers' situation is often described as a _____ to be solved or an _____ to be exploited.
2. There are two main types of results that you can deliver to your readers:
 - You can offer to deliver _____ (_____ or _____).
 - You can offer to deliver _____ (the implementation of an existing _____).
3. You can minimise your readers' perception of the risks associated with your proposal by presenting it in two or more _____.
4. Preparing a *detailed* step-by-step description of your solution has many advantages:
 - You'll have a better idea of how much it will _____.
 - You'll have a better idea about how long _____.
 - You have a better idea about the _____ and _____ that will need to be involved.
5. Providing a detailed spreadsheet that identifies all of your proposal's costs, quantities and other assumptions has several advantages:
 - The reader isn't being asked to accept a total _____ without any explanation.
 - You (the writer) seem more _____.
 - By explaining and justifying your costs, your readers' perception of the _____ associated with your proposal may be lowered.

Phase 2: Writing

3

The secret is to always let the other man have your way.

Claiborne Pell, US Senator 1961–97.

Rationale

- During phase 1 of the proposal-writing process, you will have made decisions about what to include (and not include) in your proposal. Phase 2 involves assembling this material into a well-written proposal and fleshing it out with additional material.
- Proposals are expected to conform to certain structural conventions. If they don't, they may be rejected by your readers and/or viewed as amateurish.
- Conversely, proposals that conform to people's expectations are more likely to be described as 'professional' and will be taken more seriously.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you'll be able to:

- Write a covering letter that quickly establishes context for the attached proposal.
- Begin your persuading with a well-chosen title.
- Explain why the executive summary is vital to the success of your proposal.
- Write an executive summary that includes the essential structural elements.
- Write a background section that provides the necessary context so that readers will understand why your proposal is necessary.
- Include cost information in a format that is accessible to both accountants and non-accountants.
- Identify what other sections should be considered essential in any proposal and which are optional.
- Employ a modular format that easily enables you to add additional sections, as needed, on such topics as risks, schedules, training, equipment and legal issues.

3.2 Titles should be informative

When used

Any proposal long enough or formal enough to have a covering letter should also have a title page. Memos or emails can use a well-chosen subject line in place of the title.

Purpose

A good title can help to make a good first impression. Here then are some guidelines:

Guideline one: Include your major benefit and your solution in the title

While good detective novels will often keep the reader in suspense right up to the end, proposals should make themselves clear as early as possible, and you can't get any earlier than the title. Look at these two proposal titles:

'A proposal for XYZ Mining from Scribe Consulting' *Boring*
'Lowering accidents rates by providing better safety training' *Informative*

The first employs a bland and uninformative title. The second contains a clear statement of the major benefit of solving the readers' problem (lower accident rates). It also identifies the solution to the readers' problem (safety training). It makes a good first impression, particularly when compared to the other one. Here's another:

'Improving yield by reducing waste'

The formula here is a simple one: [Biggest benefit] by [solution].

Guideline two: Add detail (if needed) with a subtitle

If you find the titles generated by this formula lacking in detail, you can add a subtitle:

'Lowering accidents rates by providing better safety training:
A response to tender T236 from Scribe Consulting'

Guideline three: Keep it short

Short titles are more memorable and have greater impact. Where possible, remove unnecessary words like 'an', 'of' and 'the'. For example:

'An improvement to customer relations through the provision of better training'

This would be better if shortened to:

'Improved customer relations through better training'

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY

'[Biggest benefit] by [solution]' is a great formula for a proposal's title.

Exercise

Choose a title for your proposal that includes your major benefit and your solution.

3.3 Executive summary

Most guides to writing an executive summary miss the key point: The job of the executive summary [of a proposal] is to sell, not to describe.

blog.guykawasaki.com/2006/04/the_art_of_the_.html

When used

All proposals should include an executive summary.

Purpose and structure

The executive summary is arguably the most important component of your proposal. *You should write it as if the success of the entire document rests upon it.* Why? Consider:

- If your proposal is one of many (or if the reader is busy), a poor executive summary may mean that it's tossed into the reject pile with the remainder unread. *The quality of your executive summary can determine if your proposal is even read.*
- Some readers may lack the technical knowledge to understand the body of your proposal. Others may simply not care about the subject. In either case, your executive summary will be all they'll read. *This will be your one opportunity to convey your major points to them.*
- Most readers won't be prepared to say yes to your proposal after reading just the executive summary, but many may be prepared to say no on this alone.

Given how important your executive summary, here are some guidelines for writing it.



Figure 3.1: Most (or perhaps all) of the structural elements of your proposal should appear in your executive summary.

Your executive summary should include a *brief* coverage of most of the structural elements of your proposal:

1. Briefly describe the **problem** or **opportunity** facing your readers. (See Section 2.4.)
2. Briefly describe the **consequences** of not acting promptly. (See Section 2.4.)
3. Briefly describe your **solution** and its **deliverables**. (See Sections 2.6 and 2.5.)
4. Briefly describe the **costs** associated with the proposal. (See Section 2.8.)
5. Briefly describe the major **benefits** for your readers. (See Section 2.9.)

In view of the length limitations of an executive summary, you may choose to omit coverage of your experience at this point. Of course, if you feel that your experience is a major selling point of your proposal, feel free to briefly describe it here.

It can also be helpful to include links to further information in the executive summary as these can encourage readers who intended to read the executive summary only to read additional material. For example:

The risks associated with ignoring these mechanical failures are described on page 6.

The new advertising campaign is likely to cost an additional \$15,000 per month. Details of this expenditure are provided in Chapter 4 (page 17).

The increase in customer satisfaction will lead to a projected 15% growth in sales in the first twelve months and a 1% growth in market share. These and other benefits are outlined in Section 3.5 (page 12).

Length

It's called a *summary* for a reason. Don't try to trick people into reading more than they intended by being long winded. A reasonable rule of thumb is as follows:

| Total length | Executive Summary |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Up to 50 pages | 1 to 2 pages |
| 51 to 100 pages | 2 or 3 pages |
| Over 100 pages | 3 pages |

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY

- The executive summary is the most important element of any proposal. Don't omit it.
- It should concisely identify the **problem** and its **consequences**, your **solution** and **deliverables**, the **costs** and the **benefits**.
- It should enthuse people to want to read at least some of what follows.

Exercises

1. Briefly describe the **problem** or **opportunity** facing your readers.
2. Describe the possible **consequences** of not solving the problem or taking the opportunity.
3. Describe your **solution** and identify its **deliverables** (that is, what the reader will receive).
4. Describe the **costs** associated with the proposal.
5. Describe the major **benefits** for the reader.

If you feel that your experience is a major selling point, feel free to briefly describe it. Remember, though, the length of your executive summary will usually be no more than one or two pages. Keep the detail for later; concentrate on describing the big picture.

He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now ... his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes.

William Shakespeare, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (Act 2, Scene 3), 1598

Rationale

- Much of today's writing is so complex or awkwardly phrased that it is difficult for its intended audience to understand.
- This can make it harder to persuade readers of the correctness and worth of your ideas.
- Clearer writing can lead to greater comprehension and an increased likelihood that your document brings about your desired goals.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you'll be able to:

- Define plain English.
- Use short phrases instead of wordy ones.
- Use simple language in place of pompous, pretentious language.
- Limit your use of jargon to situations where it will be understood by the entire audience.
- Avoid buzzwords if at all possible.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Use the active voice in preference to the passive voice.
- Set an appropriate tone in your writing.
- Avoid the use of Latin abbreviations such as *i.e.* and *e.g.*

4.1 What is plain English?

So what *is* plain English? These sources provide helpful definitions:

We define plain English as something that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. Plain English takes into account design and layout as well as language.

www.plainenglish.co.uk/introduction.html

Let's get rid of some myths first. It's not baby-language, and it's not language that is abrupt, rude or ugly. Nor is it language that puts grammatical perfection ahead of clarity. It doesn't involve over-simplifying or 'dumbing down' the message so that it loses precision, force or effect.

It's any message, written with the reader in mind, that gets its meaning across clearly and concisely.

www.wordcentre.co.uk/page8.htm

Here are some examples of long-winded writing rewritten in plain English:⁸

Before

If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.

After

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ring.

Before

It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to the Council by way of the envelope provided.

After

Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form. Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

Before

High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process in children.

After

Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.

⁸ Adapted from examples provided with the kind permission of www.plainenglish.co.uk.

Using fewer acronyms

A commonly followed practice is to spell out an acronym (a word formed from the initial letters of other words) in full the first time it's used then to use the acronym in all subsequent usage. For example:

The TPS (training practices survey) contains 40 questions. Please complete the TPS by Friday. It is important that you complete the TPS fully. If you have any questions about the TPS please contact HR. Thanks for participating in the TPS.

While common, this practice may not be sensible as each time you use an acronym, you set a memory test for your reader. Consider the following anecdote:

The abbreviations¹³ to avoid are the ones you think it is necessary to explain in brackets the first time you use them. Each time you do this you set a memory test for your reader.

We have tested this by asking ten managers to read a two-page memo with two abbreviations explained on the first page. When they turned the page and read the abbreviations, we asked them what they stood for. Only one person correctly stated what one stood for — a 95% failure rate.

tinyurl.com/2faumlw

While only anecdotal, this comment suggests (probably rightly) that readers frequently don't remember what acronyms stand for. What then should we do? Should we always spell acronyms out in full? Clearly, that seems a bit excessive. What we need is a middle-of-the-road approach. For example, with a bit of creative rewriting, I can avoid the repeated use of the acronym TPS in the previous example:

The **training practices survey** contains 40 questions. Please complete **the survey** by Friday. It is important that you complete **the survey** fully. If you have any questions about **the survey** please contact HR. Thanks for participating in the **training practices survey**.

Here I have initially used the full phrase *training practices survey*. The next few times I've used just the final word of this phrase (*survey*) as a shorter alternative. Alternating between the full phrase and a one-word shorter form has allowed me to avoid using the acronym TPS. In this way, I can remove most acronyms from most documents. Let's call this the **long-short-short technique**.

I've retained the acronym HR in this example to illustrate that we don't have to be fanatical about removing *all* acronyms. A reasonable goal, though, might be to remove two-thirds of the acronyms from typical documents. Here are some further examples:

¹³ This quote uses the term *abbreviations* several times. I'm assuming they meant *acronyms*.

The politics of persuasion

5

*Who speaks to the instincts speaks to the deepest in mankind,
and finds the readiest response.*

Amos Bronson Alcott, American Educator, 1799–1888

Rationale

- There is an obvious self-interest in being able to persuade other people to act or believe as you wish them to. It is thus worthwhile to invest the time needed to learn the skills necessary to write a persuasive proposal.
- Researchers have found that there are six key human tendencies that we can tap into to make people more likely to say yes to our requests.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you'll be able to:

- Employ highly effective persuasion strategies suggested by research in the field of social psychology.
- Engage in effective lobbying behaviour that predisposes your readers to be amenable to your written proposal.

5.1 The six tendencies that lead to ‘yes’

Researchers in the field of social psychology have investigated factors that cause a specific form of behaviour change: complying with a request. They’ve found that there are six key tendencies that we can tap into to make people more likely to say yes to our requests — be they proposals or anything else.¹⁴

This chapter argues that much of the success or failure of your proposal is predetermined. As much as what you write, your political skills (that is, your ability to influence people) will determine the success of your proposal.

This is supported by the following quotation from the fourth-century-BC Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu in his classic text *THE ART OF WAR*:

A victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle. An army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning.

The following quote from a public-sector worker seems to echo this sentiment:

It has been my experience that support for projects does not come from written documents but through lobbying, drinking coffee and enlisting support from anyone you can find who could possibly be helpful.

Then the supporting case is just there to document the case that has already been negotiated.

This chapter will provide you with persuasive techniques that you can use to prepare the ground before ‘going into battle’ with your proposal.

THINGS TO TAKE AWAY

Persuasion requires good people skills and a working knowledge of psychology. Presenting the facts may not be enough.

Discussion

Do you agree with the sentiment expressed by these quotations?

5.2 Reciprocity

Summary

Most people subscribe to a norm that obliges them to repay in kind a favour that they’ve received.

¹⁴ This chapter is based on the article *The Science of Persuasion* by Robert B Cialdini that appeared in the 2003 special edition of *Scientific American Mind* magazine.

showed that when a door-knocking fund-raiser showed homeowners a list of neighbours who had donated, contributions went up significantly. The longer the list, the greater the effect.

Marketers use this effect when they tell us that a product is 'best selling' or 'the fastest growing'. Similarly TV ads show shoppers just like you rushing into stores to buy the goods and services being sold. Why? Monkey see, monkey do.

Anti-drug campaigns aimed at teenagers used to stress how terribly high the rates of drug abuse were among teenagers. What happened after these campaigns? You guessed it: drug use went *up*. Why? Because the campaigns very effectively disseminated the message that everyone else was doing it. The same problems apply to anti-sex and anti-suicide messages.

Discussion

1. Can you recall instances in business life where you observed herd behaviour being used to influence a decision?
2. How can we use this when trying to increase compliance with written proposals?

5.5 Friendship

The persuasion of a friend is a strong thing.

Homer, c. 850 BC



Summary

People prefer to say yes to people they like.

Real-life examples of liking

Consider the worldwide success of Tupperware and other sell-to-your-friends programs. This success demonstrates that people are more likely to buy from a friend (someone they like) than a stranger.¹⁶

In practice, an appeal to friendship can be very useful. In a noteworthy study,¹⁷ people in a workplace were divided into two groups. The first group was asked to fill out a survey that was mailed to them. The second group was presented with the same request, but a *hand-written* Post-It note was also attached to the survey. The note used the name of both the sender and the recipient.

¹⁶ This strategy has been so successful that the Tupperware web site reports that a party starts somewhere in the world *every two seconds*.

¹⁷ Cialdini, Robert B. 2008, *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive*, pp. 50–51.

The Post-It note more than *doubled* the response rate (from 36% to 75%).

Why? People felt that the Post-It note indicated ‘extra effort and a personal touch’, and this created a sense of obligation. They felt the need to *reciprocate* this *friendly* touch.

How do we apply this in practice? Hand deliver your proposal. Avoid generic proposals by personalising all information for your client (or manager’s) specific situation. And when mailing things, add a Post-It note.

Physically attractive people also benefit from this liking effect. A 1997 study showed that ‘good looking’ fundraisers generated nearly *twice* as many donations. Similarly, a study of voters in Canadian elections showed that ‘physically attractive’ candidates received *several times* as many votes as unattractive ones.¹⁸

Despite these clear statistics, voters insist that they would *never* be influenced by such superficial characteristics as appearance. The important lesson is that *people often don’t understand the forces that motivate them to action*.

Similarity can also lead to liking. Salespeople often seek out (or invent) similarities with their customers; for example, ‘Hey, I’m from there too!’ or ‘Yeah, I went to the same school’. Research shows that such claims (whether true or not) *do* influence us. A 1994 study put fundraisers in a university campus. When the fund raisers added the line ‘I’m a student too’ to their sales spiel, their receipts more than *doubled*.

Cooperation can engender similar beneficial effects. A common scenario in car dealerships is for the sales people to portray the sales manager as an ogre who dislikes giving discounts. They portray themselves as ‘doing battle’ on the customer’s behalf. The strategy increases the customer’s liking of the sales person and, in turn, increases sales.

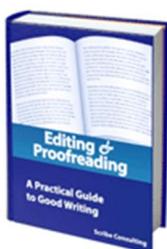
Discussion

1. Think back on your career. Do you think that there might be instances where physical attractiveness has been a factor that has worked for (or against) someone you’ve worked with?
2. How can we take advantage of being liked (in a way that is appropriate to government) to improve our managers’ compliance with our proposals?

¹⁸ Millions of years of natural selection predisposes us to seek out sexual partners who are physically attractive. Attractive individuals are demonstrating that they are genetically a cut above less attractive individuals and are thus more likely to be superior sources of genes for healthy and successful offspring.

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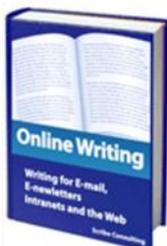
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