The Power of Sincere Persuasion

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As communicators in the wide world of communication, we have every word in every language at our disposal, yet still, we have a tough time being heard and understood.
This is the ASWB mission statement. All social work regulators have the same mission. We are committed to protecting the public. Who benefits from that? Obviously, the public. Do they know it? Probably not.

Simple, so we’ll tell them about it and why it matters.

But there’s a problem.

People don’t want to read a bunch of stuff they didn't ask for.
They glaze over.

And even if we do a good job and they do read and they do listen, they will, very shortly, unfortunately, forget.

That’s reality. And we need to know why it is that way.
George Bernard Shaw said
“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

Why hasn't it taken place? Because either we didn't do our job as communicators, or the recipient of our message just wasn't interested—which, by the way, is also because we didn't do our job, as you'll see.
So, how can you break through with your messages and actually communicate, influence your audience, and be remembered? That's what I'll talk briefly about today.
The first thing I'll talk about are easy and powerful tips designed to make your communications more persuasive.

Then I'll give you five proven persuasion power words and tell you the reason behind their power.

Last, I'll tell you about a resource you might not know you already have.
Communication isn’t about the transmission of your messages, it’s about how they are received. It’s about how much you care about making your message understood and remembered—not just sent.

Example. You’re married. Your objective is to somehow get your significant other (or SO) to watch the cooking show on television.
If you were simply transmitting this message, you might say...

“Honey, I’m already sitting down, I’m holding the TV remote, and I would like you to watch the cooking show with me. You can sit there.”

Does that fulfill your objective? The point was made, the facts are out, but was your S.O. blown away by your sincerity or persuaded about the benefits of watching the show?
Delivering this message with the recipient’s interest in mind, you might have said this...

“Honey, wouldn’t it be great if we could add 10 years to our lives? Doctors say eating healthy can help us do that. And there’s this great new cooking show on TV right now. Let’s watch!”
Sincerity, knowing your specific audience, and caring to customize your message for them are persuasive tools.

Why be so specific about your audience? Because when you use the shotgun approach--one message for everyone--for a strategic communication--designed to motivate your audience to take a certain action--it is guaranteed that different people will react in different ways…
and sometimes that can cause problems for them or for us.

I consider **persuasion** as a key communication tool. After all, we’re wrapped up in persuasion every day. It is a natural and common tool to get what we want.
Each day we encounter hundreds of small-scale, low-stakes persuasive messages designed to influence our attitudes and behaviors.

"Would you like fries with that?"

“Three-family yard sale 8 a.m.—no early birds”

“Should I stop by now, or is after five better?”

“You’re not really going to buy that, are you?”

“Do I look fat in this?”
You and I send out our own persuasive messages, too.

- We persuade our partner to see the cooking show, or go to the Italian restaurant instead of sushi.
- Or persuade the auto mechanic to complete repairs at a certain time.
- We even persuade ourselves—one more cookie is okay because I walked out to the mailbox—twice.

Persuasion is a natural part of life. It’s one way we achieve goals.

So, persuasion is a normal part of life. So it only makes sense that by releasing your persuasive self you become more successful at achieving your communication goals.
But remember: we use persuasion for good, not evil.

I'm not talking about sleazy persuasive tactics like "Act now or the puppy dies!" That might persuade someone, but it doesn’t convince them that you are looking out for their best interests.
So if you examine any communications process, you'll find four key elements.
The communicator or source for the story
The message itself, what you want to say and the result you desire
The audience, who receives your message and what you want them to do
The medium of delivery to your audience.
I'll take a quick look at each of the four elements and show you little ways to add a bit more persuasion that could make all the difference.
What does a persuasive communicator need to be?

**Credible.** The audience trusts your credentials and believes what you say and trusts your past performance.
For instance, if you fell off a bar stool, who would be more credible telling you that you had no broken bones, your doctor or your fifth-grader?

**Knowledgeable** about the topic at hand. Your expertise must be perceived as relevant to the setting and topic.
Would your doctor's expertise be relevant when buying a new car? Not so much.

**Familiar to the audience.** This way, they can relate to you on their terms.
Examples of that would be
- politicians campaigning door to door in neighborhoods will have jackets off and sleeves rolled up, relating to their audience.
- advertisers marketing vitamins will use attractive, healthy-looking spokespeople.
Your message is one thing, one idea. How you frame it and to whom makes all the difference.

For example, you need to send an authoritative fund-raising email to everyone in town because parkland grass is dying and you need money to save it. What’s the best approach to persuade the residents about the importance of this effort and get them to open their wallets?

Here’s an example of a transmission style email:

“Dear Mr. Smith,

At our organization we are committed to working hard each and every day to make certain there is enough green space for our equally hardworking citizens. To accomplish that takes us a great deal of time, effort, and capital. Sometimes that is not enough in the face of the unexpected, such as the problem with the parklands. Two years ago…” and so on.

Would you have read past the first sentence? I even had a hard time WRITING past the first sentence. And the reader still doesn’t know why we are contacting them, how they should feel about the message, and they certainly see no benefit for them.

The first job of a persuasive message is to get the audience’s attention and engage them. Not convince them or inform them, but earn their interest.

You do this by making it about them, not you. So this is the receiver style email:

“Hello Mr. Smith.

Did you know that right now a kakuyu grass blight threatens to wipe out 30% our town’s family green space? It’s a fact. That’s why today we’re all asking for your help, because we consider this a citywide crisis that needs us to quickly pull together. Your donation would be…” etc.

There, the readers learn immediately why we are writing, why they are already involved, how they can benefit, and what we would like them to do.
2. The Message
Other ways to optimize persuasion

- Repetition
- Benefits
- Value
- Endorsement
- Urgency
- Call to Action

How else can you optimize your messages?

-- Repeat your core point. Not in an annoying way, in a reinforcing way.
Research reveals that the more often a message is repeated, the more readily it is believed, especially if it is coordinated consistently across several different and credible sources...such as your organization's website, Facebook page, LinkedIn profile, press release, advertisement, your board chair.

-- Convey benefits. What's in it for them?
Physical safety (protection from bad guys)
Psychological security (confidence, self-esteem, peace of mind)
Food or drink (Come to our fund-raiser picnic to save the grass!)
Abstract attributes, such as helpfulness, or fairness ("Your participation ensures justice will be done.")
-- Tell the low cost.—no money down, saves time, less effort, less worry.
-- Endorsement. (Opinion leader, prominent person)
-- Urgency. (Don’t wait until it is too late)

Lastly, don’t forget to ask what you want the audience to do with a clear, simple action step or call-to-action. "Vote tomorrow for Representative Smith" "Eat at Joe's" "Send your five dollars today."
Get to know your audience the best you can, what kind of people they are, their current opinion and its basis, where they get their information, what are their needs and interests.

Then, to get their attention, start with what’s of interest to them. What will help persuade them? Facts, figures, food?

If your audience is the public at-large, you’d be smart to know what they do not know about your topic, then figure out how people in general will benefit. This will also help you if you decide to segment the general audience.
What is the best and most persuasive way to deliver your message?

There is no better way to bond with and influence an audience than face-to-face, eye contact, speaking sincerely, and being available and accessible.

Next best would be conversing on the telephone or Skype. It’s real time and live and your sincerity is audible.

Broadcast media is another near-personal format. This includes social media, podcasts, YouTube, TV, radio

When that's not possible, written communications become important and necessary. They can reach many more people, have a longer visibility life, can have many various formats and mediums, and can be personalized, which people love. Posters, brochures, press releases are good vehicles.

How can you put it all into practice?
THINKING POINTS: Pencil these in. If you can’t decide right now, put in a couple of choices.

Choose your communicator

Choose your audiences
- Legislators
- The public
- Social workers
- Board members

What is your issue?

How do you want your issue to resolve?

What do you want your audience to do?

How do you turn that into a message?

What are the best mediums for your messages?

How will you know if you are successful?
PLANNING POINTS. These are the decisions you make that will go into your marketing campaign or rollout.

Communicator: you
Audience: social workers
Issue: too many noncompliant renewals
Desired result: reduce noncompliant renewals
Audience action: (social workers) learn more and go to website
Message: Do you know your CE requirements for license renewal?
Medium: press release, Facebook, Twitter

Now you’re ready to develop the materials for your campaign, put them to schedule, and execute.
Now, as promised, I am about to reveal 5 proven persuasive power words and some surprising reasons that they have that power. Please use them sparingly.
#1 New.
A terrific, classic word of power, right? Maybe.

Paradoxically, neuroimaging research shows us that we actually respond more favorably to recognized brands, and can have a hefty amount of disdain for any drastic changes. (Remember New Coke? Or the new and disastrous logo for the Gap?)

On the other hand, it’s long been known that novelty plays an incredibly important role in activating our brain’s reward center and in keeping us content with the products and services we love.

So focus on new fixes to old problems, new features and improvements, a fresh new design, rather than all-new or radical directions.
#2. You

This is a tried and true essential pronoun for every communicator. But there’s something even better.

Even though people do respond well to the word “you,” research into brain activity makes it a no-brainer that people love reading their own name much more.

So if you do email campaigns, names matter. It’s a fact that people will gladly pay more for personalization, so you’ll certainly get their attention if you address them by name.

The inclusive “we” is also a word of power in this category.
3. Instantly

We want things yesterday! This is true today more than ever.

Several MRI studies have shown just how fired up our mid-brain gets when we envision instant rewards.

Build excitement and energy with words like “instant,” “immediately,” or even ”fast.” All are triggers for flipping the switch on that mid-brain activity.

Reminding your audience that they will receive something quickly (or someone will get in touch with them ASAP) can go a long way to persuading them to see things your way.
#4. Free

Everybody loves free.

People love free stuff so much they’ll actually make conflicting choices.

Here’s an interesting study by Dan Ariely. He examined a very unusual “battle” between high quality Lindt chocolate truffles and milk chocolate Hershey Kisses.

To test the power of the word “free” in relation to concrete value, the study first asked people to choose between a 1 cent Hershey Kiss or a Lindt truffle at 15 cents (which is about half its normal price).

73% of the people bought Lindt
27% bought Hersey

In other words, tastes were found to be very much in favor of the truffle. I mean, who’s going to pass up a half-off deal, right? And perhaps the 1 cent price actually devalued the quality of the Hersey Kiss.

Then, the study tried something else that revealed that when the price was reduced by one cent for both brands (meaning the Kiss was now free), people altered their choices drastically.

With the new prices, here were the results:
31% bought Lindt
69% bought opted for Hersey

Ariely thinks it is due to loss aversion (our disdain for losing out on opportunities) and our natural instinct to go after “low hanging fruit” as the reasons why we are so susceptible to snatching up free stuff.
#5. Because

Buckle your seat belts for this one.

In a study Robert Cialdini did for his book Influence, a series of tests were conducted on requests from a person in a hurry to use an in-office copy machine. The tests examined how different requests might affect people’s willingness to allow this person to “cut” in line.

In the first test, the participant approached the people at the copy machine and simply stated:
"Excuse me, I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine?"

What percent of people do you think allowed him to cut in line?
In this scenario, 60% of people allowed him to cut in line and use the machine first.

Next, the request was slightly tweaked. This time the participant said:
"I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine--because I am in a rush"

The request was barely changed the “because” reason was barely a reason at all!
94% of the people allowed him to cut in line this time!

Oh no, we’re not done. Check out the 3rd and final test. He said:
"Excuse me, I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine--because I have to make copies"

That’s right. Now we went from having a barely passable reason to having absolutely no reason at all for letting the man cut.

93% of people let him cut on this third trial, only a 1% drop from when he had a weak reason ("I’m in a rush") and a 33% improvement vs. the first test.

Apparently, the reason, any reason, will have virtually no impact on behavior. Rather it was the use of the word “because” that triggered an automatic response in the subject. And there is science behind that.

The lesson here to remember is that when you are focusing on writing persuasive copy, it all comes down to answering your customer’s #1 question:
What’s in it for me? Why do I need this? Because...you do.

Even giving weak reasons have been shown to be more persuasive than giving no reason at all.
Everything I’ve spoken about this morning contributes to the cure for passive communications.

Adding a pinch of strategic persuasion to your communications gives them a spark of value without sounding like a sales pitch—because it clearly expresses that you are sincerely committed to your message and you care about who you are reaching out to.
Each time we get together--regulators, educators, social workers, students--we talk about sharing among ourselves, and, at events like this we do.

After this event, we’ll each go home and sit in our local jurisdictions, craft our messages for our various local needs.

The fact is that all jurisdictions pursue the same mission, for the same reasons, under the same guiding principles.

Let's look at the big picture.
Together, all of us possess what I call the marketing magic bullet—a unified, unwavering message, our mission of public protection.

How powerful would it be if, someday, we all shared the same message at the same time, coordinated a campaign, and went out there with one compelling message that communicated our value to our audiences.

Promoting social work regulation as a brand, as a global, connected, and growing effort would be a door-opener to our local and overarching goals.

I'm just saying that it is in our mutual interest to work together more, share, collaborate, learn.

ASWB has already taken some action on some of those ideas. Besides, it’s our job. Why? Because it was the regulatory bodies who recognized the need to have an impartial organization to organize and support the boards and develop the licensing exams. That is why ASWB was created. We support you and all social work regulation.

We are a resource for you. Did you ever think of ASWB that way? We offer tools, materials, and services, as well as personal assistance and advice. Just ask.
ASWB can help with both your mission and your message
This year we have launched a new website and a strategic plan with aggressive objectives we are committed to. One of them is to expand our services to our members, you, in a number of ways.

Our website’s member section brims with information, tools, and opportunities to share, collaborate, and generally improve upon what we all do. We need you there, and you will be hearing from us.
We’ll be out at the booth for the next few days, so please come by a chat and look over some of the resources we brought for you.

We’re also filming short videos of your statements about regulation and social work for posting on our website and YouTube. So come on over--maybe you'll go viral.

That’s it for me. I will now turn it over to John. Thank you very much.