

Lead more persuasively to get buy in for your best ideas

June 2026 Leadership Brief



Persuasion is an essential leadership skill that most of us get wrong.

As a leader, you know firsthand that a great idea, by itself, does not compel action from your colleagues. And a clearly laid out plan is not enough to drive needed transformation.

To motivate your team to adopt a new process or persuade your board to consider a new service model, you need an effective strategy, or strategies. The key is to meet people where they are and share information that matters to them, in a way that gets them on board. So, what does that mean?

The Big Takeaway



Deliver the right message, the right way, to the right audience to lead more persuasively.

What you say matters, but so does how you say it. Leaders tend to lean too heavily on data and information when making a case for change. While sound data and convincing facts matter, make sure you spend time on the stuff that compels people. Make an [emotional](#) or purpose-driven connection through [storytelling](#) and [compelling delivery](#).

Make the case people want and need. The most persuasive leaders tailor their approach to meet people where they are. Focusing on the kind of information that [matters to a person](#) helps them [make a decision](#) they feel good about. Trust (established before, during, and between your change efforts) is also critical for gain buy in.

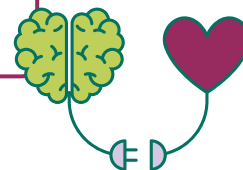
Talk less. Leading persuasively requires a strong filter. People can only take in so much information, and there is a lot of evidence showing how little people [actually listen](#), read, and retain. [Come with an arsenal of information](#) and stories, but select just a few key points to make your case. [Tell people what's most important to pay attention to](#), then stop. They'll let you know if they want more, and you'll have your backup facts and information ready for them.



Zoom In: Applying the Skills as an IDD Sector Leader



What you say matters, but so does how you say it.



To hone your delivery, practice these skills and techniques:

Make people feel something. When people connect emotionally with an idea, they are more likely to buy in. So, if you share a cost savings that comes with your idea, also remind people why those cost savings matter (e.g., how they create a happier workplace, contribute to the leadership team's legacy, or make someone's life better).

Become a better storyteller. Stories take our ideas from theoretical to tangible. They help people connect the dots between the problem and your proposed solution. So, when you are trying to persuade your colleagues, tell the story they need to hear. You can follow this model from a change management expert:

1. Remind them of the challenge, why change is needed, and what making the change will accomplish (identify the need and strategic objective)
2. Help them understand the key elements of your idea (lay out your approach and implementation strategy)
3. Show them how your idea or solution is the game changer you know it is (describe the specific benefits).

Practice your delivery. Attention spans are small, and it's hard to convince others that your idea is the one if you don't seem like you believe it yourself. Practice your pitch (do it in front of a mirror or record yourself if you're feeling brave), but focus less on the words you say, and more on your tone, body language, and approach.

It turns out, there is truth behind the old saying that more than 90% of communication does not happen through words. A calm but confident tone and open and relaxed body position can go a long way (whatever that looks, sounds, and feels like for you). Word of caution: this strategy usually has ableist undertones (e.g., eye contact is not always something that many people with disabilities do).

The key is to figure out how you best portray confidence and ease, and to practice the things that show confidence while reducing the things that show discomfort.

Make the case people want and need



To meet people where they are, practice these skills and techniques:

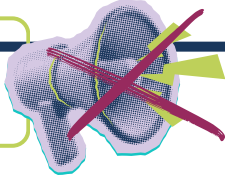
Study your audience. Learn what they care about, the day-to-day challenges they face, and how they feel about the idea you are championing, and connect your appeal with those. A board of directors and a group of advocates rarely have the same pain points. While a board is responsible for an organization's fiscal sustainability, a group of advocates focuses on human rights. To convince both groups that your idea is sound, the story you share needs to be different for each.

Have at least five approaches up your sleeve. Researchers have found that the type of decision maker someone is drives the information and delivery they need to get on board. A study of more than 1600 executives yielded five types of decision makers and the approaches that are most likely to persuade them:

- *Charismatics* make up about ¼ of leaders. They tend to move quickly and get excited about new and big ideas. Convincing them requires you to focus your pitch on results and then get out of the way so they can generate excitement for the idea themselves.
- *Thinkers* make up about 10% of leaders. They are usually the toughest to persuade because they want a LOT of information before they decide. Convincing them requires you to come overprepared with data and information, a plan to address ambiguity and unknowns, and readiness to answer question after question after question.
- *Skeptics* make up about 20% of leaders. Their approach can be aggressive, and they rely more on reputation and gut instinct than others. Convincing them requires credibility; so, if you don't have it yet, finding a champion they trust to make your case is often more impactful.
- *Followers* make up just over 1/3 of leaders. They look to the past to inform their future, focusing on tried-and-true methods. Convincing them is more effective when you reference similar ideas or approaches that have worked in the past, share testimonials or stories of impact from other trusted leaders, and show how your idea is similar to those that have worked before.
- *Controllers* make up about 10% of leaders. They appreciate certainty and see ambiguity as a threat. They tend to champion ideas they feel a sense of ownership over. Convincing them is a balancing act between providing solid data, facts, and answers and staying out of their way so they feel they come to the decision themselves.



Talk less.



To present a concise and to-the-point argument, practice these skills and techniques:

Hone your pitch. Some experts recommend keeping your presentations to 20 minutes or less, while others say 10 minutes max. Either way, a key strategy in persuasion is learning to say the important stuff and leaving the rest.

However, saying less is not the goal in and of itself. You also want to organize the information in a way that gets people engaged and helps them clearly follow and buy into your idea. One model from [Axios](#) uses *Smart Brevity*. They suggest:

- Start with a compelling headline to grab people's attention.
- Pick the most vital information to answer the questions:
 - *What's new/ what is it (what is your idea)?*
 - *Why does it matter (how it is relevant to your audience)?*
- Share your pitch in plain language that feels conversational, so people stick with you.

Prepare short and long versions of your pitch. Most people will want the short version, but preparing a longer version is helpful for those with follow-up questions or who want to learn more. Preparing a short version of your pitch forces you to focus first on what is most important. It also gives you flexibility to share additional information as people ask for it, giving them more autonomy and authority in how they buy in.

Have a question or need help accessing a resource referenced in this leadership brief?

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