



Understand Your Way to Buy-In

When it comes to affecting the behavior of others, if all you need is to make them act in a certain way, coercive authority may be sufficient. From a position of relative power, you can force people to do things your way and punish them if they don't. But you can't make them like it. When you want to influence people's attitudes as well as their actions—for instance, to get them to buy your products, agree to your proposals, endorse your vision—you need to get their understanding and commitment: their buy-in.

Establish the “Why”

When you undertake to persuade someone to accept and commit to action in support of a person, policy, product, service, idea, etc., it's essential to have a good answer to the inevitable question, “*Why should I do that?*”

- f* **Understand what matters to them.** Study their concerns. Ask questions. Learn what the issues look like from their perspective.
- f* **Frame your goals on common ground.** Describe the **shared benefits** of your position in tangible terms. The better you understand their concerns and priorities, the better you can identify benefits that will be meaningful to them.
- f* **No benefits? No buy-in.** If there really are no benefits to someone taking your position, and they know it, you're in a tough spot. You may want to reconsider either your position, or your effort to persuade.

Map the Emotional Ground

Buy-in is an emotional state. While a well-reasoned argument may be persuasive to some, attention to the emotional landscape will help you more than logic alone.

- f* **Know the history.** If you understand how people have interpreted past events, you can get a sense how they are likely to interpret your proposal. You don't want to dredge up old grievances or hit a sore spot by accident. Conversely, you may be able to take advantage of favorable associations if you are aware of them.

- f* **Understand resistance, and prepare for it.**

Even if your idea involves change of the most trivial sort, people may feel threatened by it, and dig in their heels against it. Perceived dangers may include:

- f* **Loss of a comfortable status quo.** They see no reason to change in ways that might reduce their income or alter established patterns of social interaction.
- f* **Loss of a sense of competence.** They fear feeling incompetent and unable to perform as required in the post-change environment.
- f* **Loss of security** due to uncertainty about the future. They fear (or misunderstand) the consequences of a proposed change.
- f* **Loss to allies.** They fear the consequences for others they care about or are beholden to.
- f* **Threats to self-defining values.** They believe that change will result in a culture that does not honor their traditional notions of what is valuable, and that rewards behaviors contrary to their self-image

If you know what people are worried about, you will be better able to present your case in a way that is reassuring, not scary.

- f* **Adjust your emotional tone** to match the audience's ability to receive your message. There's a time to be dry, a time to be rousing, a time to be supportive, a time to be confrontational. Know how to read the cues and take the right approach at the right time.

Tell a Good Story

People think in pictures and narrative. A strategic story that projects a positive future takes advantage of this to build buy-in. Establish a clear storyline—the central message and theme of the story. Then develop it in more detail. A 3-part approach that addresses in turn the audience's needs, wants, and future goals has a natural narrative power. Finish with a call to action. If you've read the audience right, their buy-in should be your reward.