How to Get People to Do Stuff

Master the Art and Science of Persuasion and Motivation

Susan M. Weinschenk • How to Get People to Do Stuff: Master the Art and Science of Persuasion and Motivation by Susan M. Weinschenk, PhD. Copyright © 2013, Pearson Education Inc. and New Riders. • 224 pages

Leadership / Motivating People
Social Skills / Persuasion

Take-Aways

- "Seven drives" motivate people to do stuff: "the need to belong, habits, the power of stories, carrots and sticks, instincts, the desire for mastery," and "tricks of the mind."
- People want to belong to in-groups and strive to emulate and identify with their peers.
- By understanding cycles of "cue – routine – reward," you can trigger new habits, reinforce established ones and "anchor" new habits to existing ones.
- People have personas – stories about themselves – which they can learn to "edit."
- You can shape others' behavior with correctly-timed rewards and reinforcements.
- Hard-wired old-brain instincts respond to messages of fear, death, food and sex.
- People naturally seek to acquire skills; to influence people, connect with this wish.
- In the psychological state of flow, a person completely focuses on an immersive task.
- The brain's System 1 thinks more quickly than the processes of contemplative System 2 thinking, but it's error-prone. To persuade, appeal to the correct system in the right way.
- If you "prime" people in advance with correctly structured information, their responses become more predictable.

Recommendation

Behaviorist Susan M. Weinschenk explains how to persuade others to "do stuff" you want done by using the findings of neuroscience and psychology to tap into seven basic human motivational drives: "the need to belong, habits, the power of stories, carrots and sticks, instincts, the desire for mastery," and "tricks of the mind." She cites scientific studies that affirm some aspects of the "folk wisdom" of motivation and overturn many others, triggering a revolution in behaviorism. Though Weinschenk skates over issues of potential manipulation, she packs smart insights into her punchy, unflinchingly practical book. *getAbstract* recommends her guidance to managers, marketers and leaders seeking straightforward, evidence-based strategies for influencing and persuading people.

Summary

Intrinsic Drives and Real Motivations

What drives people to act? What motivates your employees? If you knew, you would get more out of your interactions with them, and so would they, including deeper commitment, clearer communication and greater engagement. You would be able to get them "to do stuff" that you need to get done by working with what they want to achieve. To that end, turn to scientific and psychological studies that reveal useful information about human motivation. Applying psychology to interpersonal relations can make you a better leader and communicator. Start by working with the "seven drives" that motivate people:

1. "The Need to Belong"

Most people yearn to be insiders. Humans evolved to want to interact with each other. Use these strategies to evoke people's "sense of belonging":

- **Build social connection** – Students worked harder on shared tasks when they thought they shared a birthday with others in the group. People care what others think.
- **Use nouns instead of verbs** – The way you phrase a request can strengthen people's sense of group membership. For example, ask someone to become a donor, rather than asking if he or she will donate. Calling someone a donor evokes a "sense of belonging to a group of people who will donate and makes it more likely that they will in fact donate."
- **Let your body and mannerisms talk** – Make sure you subtly copy the other person's mannerisms and body language during your conversation. Mirroring creates emotional "feedback loops" that aid communication. Be aware of body position and hand and facial gestures.
- **Engage in "synchronous activity"** – Being in sync can include laughing together, celebrating and other bonding activities that release oxytocin in the brain, making people more trusting and empathetic. Tone of voice affects synchronous bonding, so enunciate, and don't rush your words.
- **Consider favors** – Give a small gift to ensure a positive response in the future.
- **" Use competition"** – Remember to call on rivalry with care. Men respond to it, but it demotivates women.

- **Look the part** – Dress a level up from those you want to influence; adopt the same wardrobe as your organization's in-group. People respond to those they find attractive.
- **Get the first word** – To convey group leadership, speak first and with enthusiasm.

2. "Habits"

To become more efficient, transform a useful action into an automatic behavior. Productive habits help focus overly busy brains. You don't spend valuable time and thought carrying out automatic actions. A cycle of "cue – routine – reward" triggers and reinforces habits. Use this cycle to understand and influence others' habits and to "attach" new habits to existing ones:

- **Cue and reward** – For example, influence the members of your staff to keep their desks tidy by asking them a question at the same time each day (the cue) so they respond by tidying their desks (routine) and then letting them go home early when they're done (reward).
- **Break it up** – Bring people along in small stages. The "Couch to 5K" jogging app cues you to get moving, guides you through an exercise routine and rewards you with a progress chart. By setting out simple, thought-free incremental steps and providing progress feedback, this exercise app prompts a virtuous, habit-forming loop.
- **Engage autopilot** – Once cued, the other stages should be routine and decision-free.
- **Attach a new habit to an old, embedded one** – Forming a habit takes 66 days on average. The secret to making it work is "anchoring."
- **Identify possible anchors** – Observe people's routines to isolate a behavior that would work for anchoring a new habit.
- **Go small** – Anchoring works best for subtle change when the existing habit relates strongly to the new one.

3. "The Power of Stories"

Everyone has a self-narrative in mind and a persona that fits that narrative. If you start to believe a different story of yourself, your persona changes. This is "story editing." You can edit your story and influence other people to edit theirs. A polished story has tremendous power.

- **Telling stories** – Turn your requests into compelling stories to get people to respond. Emotional stories engage listeners' empathy; they respond with their feelings.
- **Editing** – People take on varied personas for varied situations. In order to form a new behavior, anchor a persona to one already in place. Edit a persona by gently tweaking it over time.
- **Consistency and persona** – People must be comfortable with persona changes in order to integrate them, since they also seek internal consistency. To start a change process, find and build on a small inconsistency. For example, buying one Apple device could be the wedge that changes you from a "Windows person" to an "Apple person."
- **Engagement matters** – People stick to "public commitments." Get people to endorse your product or service by asking them to give you a review or testimonial. Paying for testimonials doesn't work.
- **Get it in handwriting** – Writing longhand with pen or pencil boosts "memory consolidation" better than typing on a keyboard. It also improves follow-through.

- **Major edits** – Story editing can fix even the most difficult self-stories, such as those involving post-traumatic stress disorder. Sometimes, only a brand new story will work. Once seeded – perhaps by listening to somebody else's story of recovery and renewal – the urge for self-consistency consolidates the new narrative.

4. "Carrots and Sticks"

In his 1890s experiments, Ivan Pavlov made dogs salivate by training them to associate the sound of a ringing bell with the arrival of food. Pavlov named this reflex "classical conditioning." It resembles automatic "stimulus-response" conditioning, which is also effective. B.F. Skinner, who studied "operant conditioning," talked of behavior reinforcement rather than reward. To make use of the carrot and stick, or award-based approach to motivation, find a stimulus for the response you would like to get, then add a new stimulus to make the response automatic. For example, to get people to state their ideas (response) ask them (stimulus), then add a new stimulus like turning to a clean page on your flip chart in anticipation of their idea. If you do this regularly, you will "automate" the response; just flipping the page will make ideas flow. Remember:

- **Timing is everything** – Reward a new behavior every time it happens. Reinforce an established behavior by changing the "reward schedule." Vary the ratio of reward (the number of times you give a reward compared with the number of times you could give it) to get the person to stay with the behavior. Shake up the interval (the time between rewards) to get someone to enact a behavior reliably. Make sure that the reward is correct for that person, and give it right after the behavior.
- **Regular rewards** – Providing rewards on a scheduled basis ("fixed ratio") may boost behavior for a while. The "goal-gradient effect," where people speed up their behavior when a goal is in sight, may help to build the desired behavior into a regular action.
- **"Shaping"** – Use rewards only where behaviors are already in place. Encourage people to focus on their remaining tasks, not just on what they've already done. Shaping behavior is more operant; use it to active new behaviors by carefully using small steps.
- **"Negative reinforcement"** – Reward people by removing something they don't want or dislike. This is an effective negative reinforcement. Punishment is not a negative or a positive reinforcement; it's a short-term fix and seldom effective.

5. "Instincts"

Older parts of your brain identify dangers quickly. That's why you feel fear and why it motivates you. Food, sex, death and fear of losing what's important to you are human instincts that drive how you respond to and remember life situations.

- **Use the fear** – Make people worry they might lose something they value. The prospect of gain motivates, but fear of loss is much more potent. Let people try things, so they value them.
- **Lighten up** – A buoyant mood makes people more adventurous. Comfort and safety are important, so put your clients at ease; don't seat them on the hard chairs.
- **Mood swings** – When people feel adventuresome, they're less likely to stick to what they know. That might be bad for your business. Trigger their fear of losing a familiar product.

- **Choice and control** – Everyone likes to feel in control. Making choices gives you control; having too many options can be confusing and even frightening.
- **Attention grabbing** – Make your messages novel and unpredictable. The desire to have some touted item can provoke the release of the brain chemical dopamine. Food works as an attention stimulator, as does the merest hint of sex. Scarcity fuels curiosity and notice, so limit the amount of information you give out.

6. "The Desire for Mastery"

People seek expertise in skills that matter to them. This desire impels people more than rewards or punishment. To motivate mastery, a skill should be "moderately challenging." For a difficult or long-term project, spur the desire for mastery. Consider these motivators:

- **Simple or complex?** – Always use rewards and reinforcement to get people to do simple tasks.
- **"Elite" and independent** – Self-motivation trumps inducement, so give people freedom to learn and do. Make sure you highlight the prestige of their task to make them part of a masterful elite.
- **Chance to fail** – You may need to increase the level of challenge. If a task is too easy, offers no battleground and has no chance of error, people won't want to master it.
- **"Objective" feedback** – People learn better with the right kind of feedback, timed correctly. Having the intrinsic motivation to master a task is the best driver, so do not interrupt that impetus with unfocused comments. Tell people if they are getting it right.
- **Flow state** – In the immersive, task-focused mental frame of mind known as flow, a person zones in on a task, and everything else fades to the background. Pursuing mastery creates opportunities for flow. Autonomy, safety, good feedback and clear-cut goals also inspire attentive flow.

7. "Tricks of the Mind"

Nobel Economics laureate Daniel Kahneman discusses two distinct aspects of human thinking: System 1 is automatic, and System 2 takes effort. System 1 makes quick judgments and isn't as energy-hungry as System 2. Keep these ideas in mind to use this approach:

- **Quick or considered?** – For fast decisions, use a simple message that engages System 1. To get people to ponder a decision, use a complex message to engage System 2.
- **"Priming"** – System 1 is suggestible; encourage it to react in predictable ways. Primed with thoughts of money, people are less generous. Primed with thoughts of death, they empathize more with their family or in-group and authority sways them more readily.
- **Number anchoring** – You can always use numbers to lure people. For example, a price of $19.95 makes shoppers more likely to purchase than a price of $20. Top your pricelist with an expensive item; System 1 anchors to that and sees the prices below as reasonable.
- **Familiarity and truth** – When you expose people to the same repeated messages, they tend to believe they're true. Chain restaurants and such businesses use this "exposure effect." People overestimate the chance of an event recurring if a similar one happened recently, and vice versa.
- **"Dissonance," "bias" and "schemas"** – The structures you use to group data in your mind are called schemas and they're unique to you. Never assume others have the same schemas, but try to understand

theirs. People fall prey to "confirmation bias" when something confirms their schema; they feel "cognitive dissonance" when it doesn't.

- **Simple tricks** – Use easy-to-remember, easy-to-pronounce names in marketing. Avoid abstractions. Provide regular breaks in the flow of information, putting the most important stuff at the beginning or end. Give people time for "mind wandering," which breeds creativity.
- **Regret** – People avoid making decisions they might rue. Limit opportunities in order to reduce chances for disappointment.

About the Author

Psychologist and behavioral scientist **Susan M. Weinschenk**, PhD, also wrote *100 Things Every Designer Needs to Know About People* and *Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click?*

Did you like this summary?
Buy book or audiobook
http://getab.li/19788