

# PERSUADE ME!

*This article is the first of a series addressing the topic of persuasion and building effective messages for public and private communications programs. You may be familiar with some of what we cover from your own communications activities. As we proceed we'll explain and give examples of our Motivation Research approach, and we'll introduce the Motivation Assessment Program (MAP), a program of research and analysis to extract new knowledge on communications, and techniques for building effective messages.*

*The essence of persuasion is the delivery of a message that is memorable, is meaningful, and that stirs people to act. Most of us aren't trying to persuade people to take actions quite as consequential as those championed by Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg. However, we do lead communications or marketing initiatives that require changing the minds and behaviors of large numbers of people. Motivation Research fosters deep understanding of an audience's approach to specific decisions and is fueled by means-end theory. It helps leaders build persuasive messages that stimulate action.*

## Persuasion: Motivate People to Act

Someone smart once said that behavior is a science but persuasion is an art. Fair enough. Motivation, then, is the combination of art and science. Motivating consumers, customers, supporters or voters to act requires a feat of persuasion that combines the rational and repeatable building blocks of behavior with the emotional and visceral appeals to our core nature. It's not easy. In fact, it's easy to mess up. But it's the necessary task of marketers and advertisers the world over.



When we think about any initiative to get people to act in desirable ways – buy, support, vote – there usually are many ingredients in the process. If the initiative relates to a product or service, the tangible value of the product/service attributes and the support behind them are obviously important.

If the desired change relates to an issue, conveying just the tangibles often does not provoke a decision to act. People ultimately need to discern the personal relevance of the decision through some level of persuasion. The essence of persuasion is the delivery of a complete message that connects those tangibles to the personal values that establish relevance.

## Establish Personal Relevance

Great leaders provide some of the most memorable examples of effective persuasion. We'll go into business and organizational examples later, but since this is the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address, let's first revisit Abraham Lincoln's impressive act of persuasion.



One hundred fifty years ago, Abraham Lincoln was struggling to hold the United States together. He had armies scattered across the country inflicting and taking huge casualties in a near-stalemate. He needed to persuade the people in the Union to stick together and provide support for the dreadful struggle. He needed to persuade foreign governments to stay out of the conflict. And he needed to persuade the soldiers doing the fighting that it was worth continuing.

The Gettysburg Address was barely two minutes in length, an add-on to the longer speeches of the day. Yet Lincoln's short speech remains a symbol of a powerfully persuasive message that motivated people to take the necessary actions to end the conflict.

When we read the Gettysburg Address, we can see the elements that give it force. Lincoln anchored the speech in a reference to the specific event of the battle and the circumstance of the many deaths – the concrete details of the moment and the context in which decisions about going forward would be made. Lincoln linked concrete details to his central theme of democracy and created an additional link by asserting the role that the Civil War played in reinforcing American principles.

Lincoln inspired millions of people to act by articulating a mission and establishing the personal relevance of the decisions he was asking them to make. It was a feat of persuasion sufficiently noteworthy to be carved in stone.

What's the personal relevance of this story to you? Most of us aren't trying to persuade people to take actions quite as consequential as those Abraham Lincoln undertook. Moreover, most of us are more Fords than Lincolns. Yet, as marketing and communication strategists, we are required to use effective persuasion to change the minds and behaviors of large numbers of people. Let's look at how that can happen.

## Embrace the Formal Approach to Persuasion

If you were to ask an array of marketers to describe the ingredients of effective persuasion, most would acknowledge the combination of science and art. Many might talk about finding a unique selling point (USP) through careful research and strategic thinking. Others might credit the creative spark. Interestingly, most marketers rely on their professional experience to describe effective persuasion because there are few formal theories.

However, there is a specific, research-based approach that provides a uniquely powerful basis for building persuasive messages. Rooted in the means-end theory of decision making, selected leading marketers and communicators have used this approach for over 50 years to build powerfully persuasive programs. At Artemis Strategy Group, we scientifically blend rational and emotional dimensions in a thinking structure that supports the creative process. The essence of the means-end theory is the point Lincoln internalized: People act when something has been made personally relevant to them. Persuasion is more about the audience than the organization or issue about which you're communicating. More precisely, it's about their personal values.

### Know Personal Values

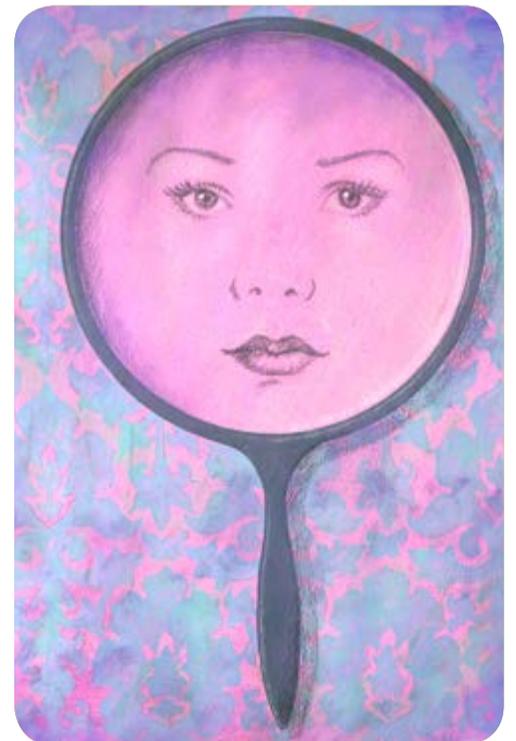


Personal values are the big ideas and aspirations that underpin what people look for in their lives. They are culturally derived; people develop them beginning in childhood. While there are common global threads, values differ across societies. Milton Rokeach, one of the early and most prolific students of personal values, mapped out about 20 important personal values most prominent among Americans. Security, freedom, self-respect and happiness are four values that top Rokeach's list. An example of the underlying value that drives many individual decisions in such diverse sectors as finances, healthcare and auto safety is the desire for a sense of personal security.

### Understand What "Emotions" Really Are

The greatest persuasive power derives from communicating in a manner that evokes the personal values that are most closely associated with the specific decision at issue. Within the framework of the means-end theory, Artemis Strategy Group taps into these values by making a rational-emotional connection. We define the thought paths that people take as they internalize the implications of a specific decision, working through the steps that help them attain an outcome that reinforces a specific personal value.

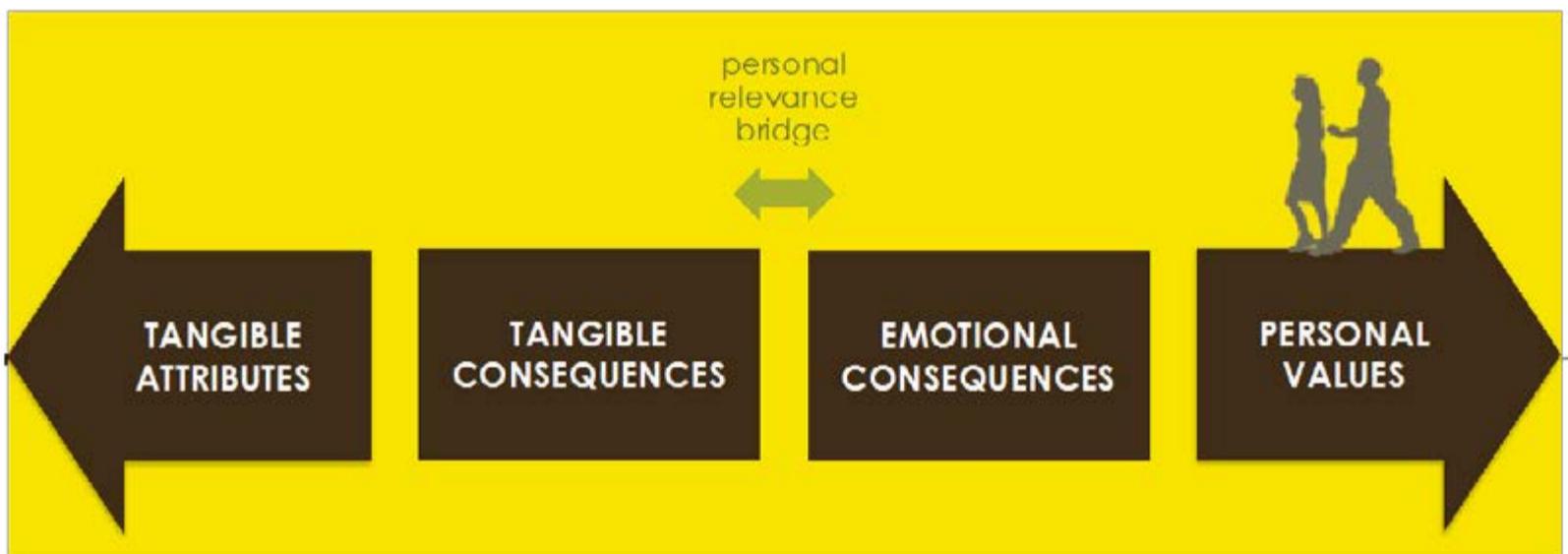
Emotions in this context are the feelings triggered by attaining a specific outcome such as "I get a feeling of control" or "it makes me feel like I'm taking care of my family." Those emotional outcomes are part of the "reason why" someone would choose to do something, and they contribute to the attainment of their guiding personal values.



The term “emotions” can be misleading. Emotions are not simply the flip side of rationality. One amusing but inappropriate characterization of the decision process was captured by Jack Nicholson playing the role of a novelist who wrote for women in the movie *As Good as It Gets*. Asked by a pestering fan how he writes for women, the crusty writer responds, “I think of a man and then I take away all rationality...” A recent book on brand approaches, *Emotional Branding*, has a subhead “Tapping the irrational.” That’s also not the idea. Partly to address this potential misunderstanding, means-end theorists use the term “psychosocial outcomes” to describe feelings triggered by attaining a specific outcome.

### Put Theory into Practice: Motivation Research

Means-end theory provides a structure for thinking about communications. It is brought to life through a research approach that gathers the right combination of rational and emotional components, and an analytical process that makes that information meaningful. The Artemis Strategy Group team has spent over 20 years using and refining the approach called Motivation Research to help public and private organizations develop more compelling messages.



Motivation Research informs communications. It provides information in a form that populates that means-end structure and fosters deep understanding of an audience’s approach to specific decisions. It helps leaders, marketers and communicators build persuasive messages that stimulate action.

Next Up – Persuasion: Positioning an Organization

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