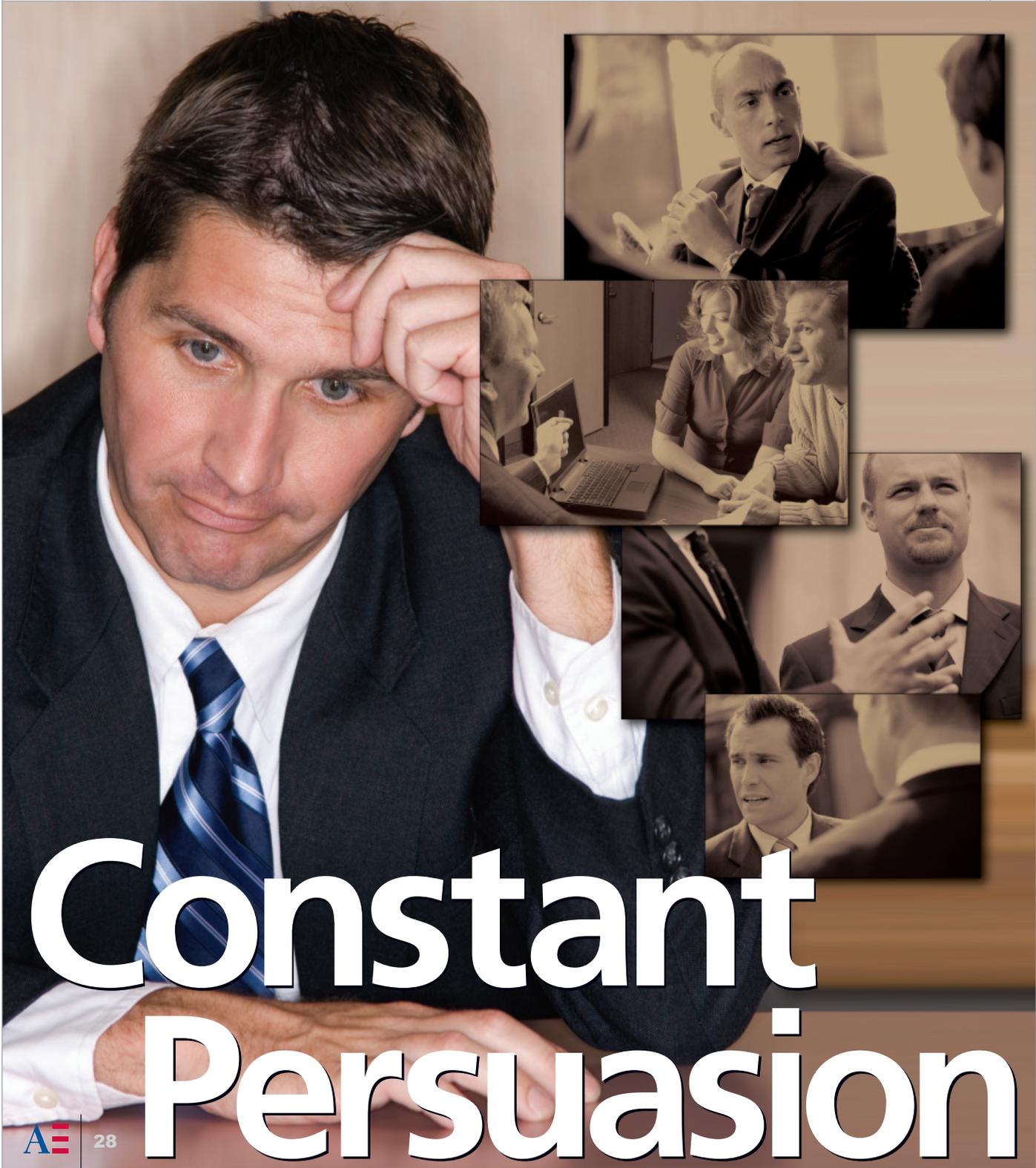


Author Jim Thomas says understanding the difference between persuasion and negotiation is essential to getting people to do what you want.



Constant Persuasion

There are two ways to get people to voluntarily do something. You can persuade them to do it, or you can negotiate with them to do it. Often used interchangeably, persuasion and negotiation are actually very different processes.

Persuasion is the process of getting someone to do something by convincing him/her that it's the logical and reasonable thing to do. We persuade each other constantly—vastly more often than we negotiate with each other. Many of our most familiar activities (convincing, requesting, arguing, flirting, coaxing, advertising, debating, buying, selling, nagging, flattering, and criticizing) are rooted in persuasion. Since infancy, we've persuaded, and been persuaded, countless times. It's second nature to us.

Persuasion isn't very complicated: you give someone a bunch of reasons why they should do something; if they're convinced, they'll do it.

You: Here's my position. Here are facts and reasons supporting it. So, do we have a deal, or what?

Them: Sure!

To be fair, persuasion doesn't always work quite so effortlessly. The other side may have an objection, or lots of objections, to your argument—objections that you overcome with more logic and reason.

Them: But the price is too high!

You: I understand your concern, and you're wrong. Here are facts and reasons that prove my product would be cheap at twice the price. Now, do we have a deal, or what?

Them: Sure!

Persuasion usually works. Sometimes it works quickly. Sometimes—impeded by objections—it works more slowly. But sometimes it doesn't work at all.

Not persuaded

Let's change the scenario. What if the other side's response to your incontrovertible argument is less enthusiastic?

You: So, do we have a deal, or what?

Them: Nope.

What if they aren't persuaded? What're you going to do now? I'll bet you a zillion dollars what you're going to do: you're going to repeat your argument.

You: Let's go over this again. I'll go more slowly. Okay, here's my position. Remember it from before? And here are my reasons. Remember them? Still with me? Now, do we have a deal, or what?

Them: Nope.

Can we all agree that, in this case, persuasion probably won't work? The other side has heard, considered, and firmly rejected your argument. Twice. What're you going to do now? Of course—repeat your argument!

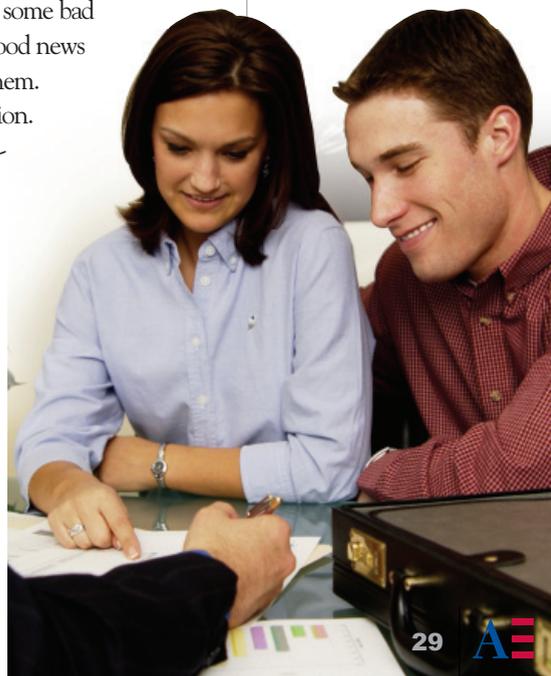
There's an old Chinese proverb that says insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. But once we start persuading, it's hard for us to stop. We're fools for logic. We've all succumbed to persuasion's seductive, pernicious fallacy: understanding must beget agreement.

From this delusion flow such familiar laments as "If only I could make them understand!" and "I'm just not getting through to them!" The idea is that the other side doesn't agree with us simply because they don't understand us—we haven't "gotten through" to them. We must explain ourselves again, unmistakably, this time, and without delay.

I have some good news and some bad news for you on this. The good news is that you got through to them. They understand your position. You can stop repeating yourself. The bad news is that they don't agree with it, and they never will.

Sometimes persuasion doesn't work. Understanding may (and often does) beget agreement, but it certainly doesn't have to. It can also beget rejection. Humans are entirely capable of understanding something

When you can't win the other side's agreement with the compelling power of your argument, you can usually buy it with concessions.





perfectly while, at the same time, disagreeing with it vehemently. Not only capable, but proficient.

If your argument failed to persuade the other side the first few times you trotted it out (at the pinnacle of its novelty and vigor) might it suddenly succeed on the fourth, or 10th, or 50th repetition? Trust me on this: it won't. After the first couple of repetitions, your argument has very little chance of success. By then, the other side won't even be listening any more. They'll just be waiting for you to shut up so they can repeat their argument, the one that you aren't listening to any more.

When persuasion works, it usually works pretty quickly. After one good, solid presentation (and an encore for insurance), the other side will almost certainly understand your argument. If they haven't been convinced by then, they'll probably never be convinced. If you continue to argue your position thereafter, you won't just be wasting time, you'll be annoying the bejeezus out of the other side. Each repetition will only crank up the volume on an already unmistakable message: you think your counterpart is obtuse, weak-willed, or both. While you're still on speaking terms, stop persuading and start negotiating.

Persuasion:

United States: You must resign. Your regime is cruel and your people are suffering.

Dictator: Who let you in here? Guards!

Negotiation:

United States: You must resign. Your regime is cruel and your people are suffering. If you'll go into

exile, we'll let you keep your ill-gotten billions and give you the keys to a magnificent Swiss château where, at our expense, you and your family can live out your days in obscene luxury.

Dictator: Now you're talking! Throw in a case of Macanudos, and you've got yourself a deal!

The difference between persuasion and negotiation is concessions. Negotiating is the process of getting someone to do something, even if they disagree with it, by giving them enough concessions to make it worth their while. When you can't win the other side's agreement with the compelling power of your argument, you can usually buy it with concessions.

Persuaders give reasons. Negotiators give concessions. The other side may or may not like your reasons, but everybody likes concessions. Always persuade first. Persuasion is faster, easier, more comfortable, and, above all, cheaper than negotiation. The agreements you can't win through persuasion you'll have to negotiate with concessions, and concessions are expensive.

Skillful negotiating is knowing how to make the concessions that are required—no more, no less—to reach the agreements you couldn't achieve through persuasion.

Jim Thomas is a professional negotiator, attorney, author, speaker, and trainer. He is the author of Negotiate to Win (HarperCollins, 2005).

His company, Common Ground, is one of the top-rated negotiation training organizations in the US. He can be contacted at (703) 287-8753 or via commongroundseminars.com.