

# **The Art of Influencing Anyone**

**Make People Do Whatever You Want**

**Niall Cassidy**

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Reprint Edition

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Email: [niallcassidy2013@gmail.com](mailto:niallcassidy2013@gmail.com)

Blog: [niallcassidy.blogspot.com](http://niallcassidy.blogspot.com)

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# **1. A Miracle at Kyle's**

## **A Miracle in a Start-up Boutique**

Mr. Kyle Thomson was a retired fashion designer. In an attempt to avoid retirement boredom, he started a small retail fashion shop called Kyle's Boutique. However, since it was his first time ever doing business, he lacked the experience to manage his shop properly, and thus it had been losing money every month since its opening.

Needless to say, it was not a very encouraging result, and Mr. Thomson was extremely disappointed. However, just when he was about to give it up altogether, a miracle suddenly happened in the shop.

One day, when Mr. Thomson checked his business ledger, he was totally surprised. The sales had more than doubled in just a few weeks. In addition to that, he even found that some of the most expensive items, which had never been sold, had disappeared from the shelf as well.

Mr. Thomson was very perplexed. What had happened? Had his shop caught the attention of a very wealthy customer who liked his clothes a lot? Or had someone written a very positive recommendation in a local newspaper column? Or was it the eventual success of his indefatigable comment-writing about his shop on various websites and online forums?

Later, he found out that it was none of the above. There were no particularly rich customers who had stumbled upon his shop. No magazines or newspapers had written about it. Nor was it related to all his anonymous recommendations on the Internet. All these were caused by an accident of hiring the right person.

## **Super Salesgirl**

Scarlett was a university student who had just started to work part-time in Mr. Thomson's boutique. She had never been employed as a full-time salesperson before, nor ever participated in any related training courses. When Mr. Thomson hired her, he thought she was just another ordinary university girl who wanted to earn some extra income while studying.

Despite that, just in the first month of work, she had already sold much more things than anyone could imagine. For every 10 transactions completed in the shop, five or six of them would be contributed by Scarlett. All the other people working in the shop were stunned by her performance, and they all saw her as a godsend for the business.

Of course, Mr. Thomson was delighted by Scarlett, but at the same time, he was also extremely curious about how she could achieve that, so he personally invited her for coffee and a chat in a nearby café. After they had settled down, Mr. Thomson told her:

“Scarlett, I am extremely grateful for your contribution to my shop. As an encouragement to keep up your good work, I will give you a bonus equal to 50 per cent of your salary this month, and I will raise your salary permanently if you can maintain your amazing feat.”

“I am very grateful,” said Scarlett, “It is very important for me because I am from a very poor family. It will be great if I can afford to live on my own without spending a quid from my family.”

“I am glad that I can help,” said Mr. Thomson. “Naturally, I am very curious how you could achieve your result. Would you mind telling me more about the secret of your success?”

“There is no secret at all,” laughed Scarlett, “It is just that I am able to speak to the customers better than other people in the shop.”

“And what do you mean by speaking better than others?” asked Mr. Thomson.

“It means...”

“Scarlett!”

A voice behind them interrupted their conversation.

## **A Horrible Customer**

When Mr. Thomson looked back and tried to identify the interrupter, he was surprised to find someone whom he did not want to see.

The voice came from Mrs. McKinsey, a hideously troublesome old widow. She was a very cagey and stingy customer who always haggled whenever she wanted to buy something, and always complained about any imperfection she saw, no matter how trivial it was. It was such a pain to do business with her that there were a couple of times when Mr. Thomson was tempted to tell her not to come back to his shop again.

Despite that, Mr. Thomson had to be polite, so he greeted Mrs. McKinsey:

“Mrs. McKinsey, good afternoon! It's very fine weather, isn't it?”

“Indeed, Mr. Thomson,” said Mrs. McKinsey. “And how is it going, Scarlett?”

“All going well,” said Scarlett. “Did your daughter like the black blazer that you bought her last week?”

“Yes, she did!” said Mrs. McKinsey. “Thanks very much for your suggestions. She liked it a lot!”

“Hold on a minute,” said Mr. Thomson. “Was it that elegant slimfit jacket in black that went last week?”

“Exactly that one,” said Scarlett.

Mr. Thomson was perplexed. That jacket was one of the most expensive items in his shop, but Mrs. McKinsey only ever went after the cheapest ones. It was breaking news indeed. Had she mutated into a completely different person?

After Mrs. McKinsey went away, Mr. Thomson asked Scarlett:

“How on earth did you manage to get her to buy that blazer?”

“Well, she was actually very reluctant to buy anything at first, but having talked to her a few times before, I was able to understand what she liked most, and I started working there.”

“How exactly did your conversation go?” asked Mr. Thomson. He was very eager to know.

Scarlett began to recount exactly what had happened on that day, and explained how she had got the old woman to buy the blazer. Mr. Thomson realised that the way she spoke to the customers was very different from that of the other people.

## **It Is Good, So Do It.**

People often feel helpless when they have to persuade someone to do something. On one hand, we are all social animals who cannot avoid interaction with other people. No matter you are a salesman with a target to meet, a parent trying to teach your kids to behave, or a manager trying to improve your team's performance, you always want others to listen to you. It makes your life easier.

However, many of us do not find it easy to get people to listen to us. It is not all that unusual for your customers to reject you, your kids to disobey you, or people at work to ignore your ideas. At the same time, perhaps you find it impossible to understand how a particular person can manage to become a top salesman, have kids who always behave, and get the attention of everyone in the office whenever he has an idea.

So why can some people become better persuaders than most others? It certainly does not depend on their having a higher level of intelligence than the rest of us –

in fact, it is more often the more “intelligent” people who have trouble communicating with others, because they may be prone to believing that others are too stupid to understand them. Instead, what stands between the good and bad persuaders is often the right methods and techniques.

When most people try to persuade others, they often follow a monotonic formula which is known as: “It Is Good, So Do It.” For example, when an insurance agent tries to persuade someone to buy a life insurance policy from him, he usually says something like this:

“Insurance is not only a protection for yourself, but also for your loved ones. I once had a client who bought an insurance policy from me fifteen years ago. His family consisted of a full-time housewife and three little children. Five years ago, he was killed in an accident. If he had not bought insurance, then not only would his wife have been forced to work again, but his children could also have been forced out of school. Luckily, with the indemnity they were able to continue to live comfortably.”

Basically, the agent is giving evidence that buying insurance is useful, and his prospect is able to

understand the logic of what he is trying to illustrate. However, to the prospect, it is just like watching a tragic film in a cinema. He will probably think, “I can’t argue against you, but I have been without any life insurance for many years, and I am still fine. In addition, I know that you are telling me this just because you want to sell me insurance, so I will take it with a pinch of salt.”

Even if you are not a salesman, you might encounter a similar situation. For example, when a father wants his son to study hard, he can tell him:

“Son, it is important to work hard and get good grades. According to a latest survey by the BBC, those who do not have a degree are paid at a level close to the minimum wage. It means that you are going to end up with a nasty job like your dad if you don’t work hard.”

In the above example, the father points out the horrible consequences of not studying hard, supported by the latest statistics – but do you think the son will listen to him and start to work hard immediately?

Very unlikely that he will, because even though what the father says is correct, the son will still find

excuses not to study. At first, he may in some way appreciate that his father is right. However, after two or three times, he will find his father very annoying, and start to rationalise to himself: “There are many successful people in the world, like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, who never got a university degree. Having a degree does not mean everything.” Later, he may even think: “Being rich does not mean everything. It is more important to live happily when I am alive.”

In other words, we all like to convince others by using logic, but logic alone is hardly enough to change people. If it were, then there would not be millions of people smoking every day, despite the proven hazards of such a habit; or anyone risking his whole fortune on the gambling table, despite the overwhelming odds against his winning. Therefore, logical reasons should never be the first things to pursue when trying to persuade someone. So, what should you do instead to persuade people?

## Character over Content

In communication, there is a saying that what you say is not as important as how you say it. While this is certainly true, it is worth pointing out that how you say it is still not as important as who says it. No matter who you are speaking to, people often place more emphasis on the identity of the speaker than the content of his speech.

Here is a simple example. A doodle from a child is regarded as a piece of cheap rubbish, but a similar work from Picasso is considered a work of art, which carries an astronomical price. To the untrained eye, the two do not look very different, but if people know that it is painted by a famous artist, then their perception will change immediately, and they will think: “Oh, if it is from Picasso, it must be good. If I fail to understand it, it must be my problem.”

To further illustrate this point, let us revisit a famous hoax in academia. For those who are not familiar with this world, researchers often publish their essays and reports in academic journals in order to

exchange findings and ideas. However, since there are so many researchers from different universities and institutions, a journal cannot possibly publish every submission received. So how do the editors choose?

In principle, the editors select the most innovative and insightful papers, but the number of submissions is so overwhelming that they simply do not have time to go through every one. So they use a simpler method: they first look at those by the more famous and renowned researchers – on the basis that if an author is well regarded in the field, then his papers are unlikely to be too bad.

This is where the aforementioned hoax comes in. In 1996, Professor Alan Sokal of New York University submitted an article to an academic journal, *Social Text*. The article was of very poor quality, and, as the author put it, consisted of “fawning references, grandiose quotations, and outright nonsense”, and was “structured around the silliest quotations he could find about mathematics and physics.”

Nevertheless, Sokal’s article was accepted and published, proving that even an “intellectually rigorous” academic journal could be fooled into

printing an article “liberally salted with nonsense” if written by someone who worked in a university, and had a PhD.

Later, this result was replicated in a more formal experiment by sociologist Robb Willer. University students were randomly separated into two groups to study Sokal’s hoax article. The first group was informed that the author was a famous expert, while the second group was told that the article had been written by a student. Consistent with the earlier story, the result was that the “expert” group made more positive comments about the article than the “student” group.

All the above results demonstrate that the identity of the speaker is more important than what he actually says. If you do not have the respect and trust of your audience, then no matter how brilliant your speech is, they will still refuse to believe you. On the other hand, if you can establish authority in the eyes of your audience, then no matter how mediocre your speech is, people will still listen to you. By the way, never underestimate the power of authority, because – as you will see in the following experiment – an authority

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