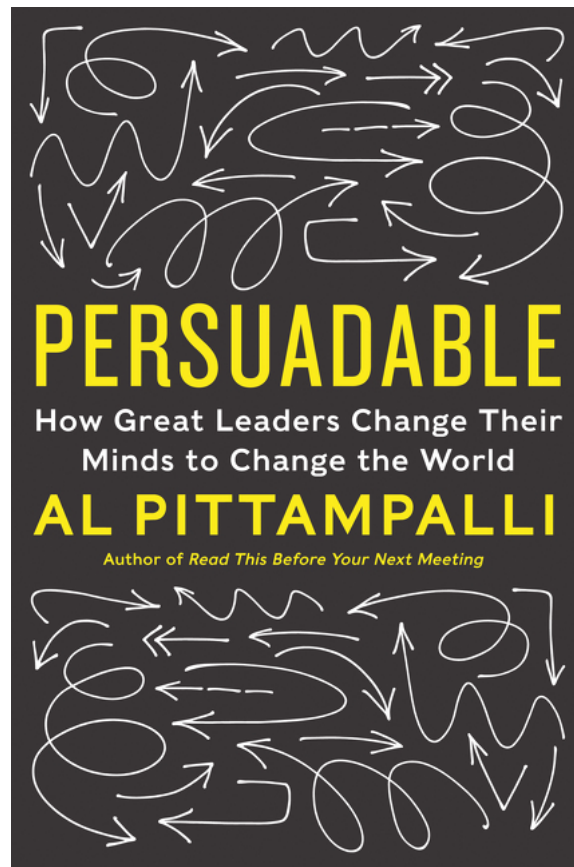


THE PERSUADABLE ACTION GUIDE

a supplement to



Welcome.

Hello and congratulations on finishing the book. I'm so glad you're here.

There's no exact formula for being optimally persuadable. Every leader has to go through their own process of trial and error to determine how and when they should be persuadable. But this document promises concrete steps to help guide you.

Below you'll see five lessons. You can think of each as an experiment that you should try. See how it works for you. If it doesn't, adjust until you get the desired results.

By the way, before you dive in, I recommend taking the quick assessment at AreYouPersuadable.com to find out how persuadable you really are.

Finally, if you have any questions or need any help, feel free to reach out to me directly at al.pittampalli@gmail.com. I'd love to hear from you. We offer training and executive coaching that can help you turn Persuadable from concept to reality in your organization.

Sincerely,

Al Pittampalli

Lesson 1: How to Distrust your gut

Everyone's always talking about the virtue of trusting our gut. But what's actually much more difficult, and more valuable to persuadable leaders, is the ability to distrust our gut.

We've all had the experience of feeling absolutely certain in the correctness of our opinion. As rational human beings, we assume we've come to feel this way only after evaluating the reasons. But as neuroscientist Robert Burton points out, our "[feeling of knowing](#)" arises out of "involuntary brain mechanisms that function independently of reason." We don't choose to have this feeling any more than we choose to fall in love. It happens to us. Once it does, we either become blatantly unpersuadable and refuse to consider other opinions, or we think we're being open-minded, but are heavily biased in favor of evidence that supports our original position.

Unfortunately, we can't prevent the feeling of knowing from arising, but we can and must do is learn to distrust it. How do we do that? By recalling what I refer to as a moment of opacity.

Everyone knows what a moment of clarity is. It's an experience that causes a profound understanding of the world. It's as if, for a moment, you can see the world completely unobstructed. A moment of opacity is the opposite. It's an experience when something you were so sure was right, turned out to be wrong, causing you to realize that you *don't* understand the world as much as you think. Can you remember such a time? For a brief amount of time, it probably became apparent to you how unreliable the feeling of knowing can be. But a moment later, you forgot.

Persuadable leaders make sure that they never forget. They remind themselves of their moment of opacity whenever they're feeling a little too confident. This allows them to realize that no matter how sure they feel about a particular path, they -- like they have been in the past -- could be wrong. This motivates them to consider other points of view.

So now let's put these ideas into action, shall we?

Here's what I want you to do. Right now, I want you to identify your own moment of opacity. Think back and try to remember a time when you were so

incredibly sure of the correctness of an opinion (so sure that you felt it in your bones) but that turned out to be wrong.

For some of you, the moment will be obvious. For others you may need to search your memory a little bit longer.

Got it?

Great. Now write down a sentence or phrase that describes your moment of opacity. For example: "That time I thought the packers were going to win the Super Bowl, and they didn't."

Good. Now this week, I want you to try to notice when the feeling of knowing arises. It happens a lot, so don't feel like you need to catch it every single time, but try to identify at least a few times per day.

Each time you identify it, say to yourself the sentence you used to describe your moment of opacity. This should remind you that that intuition, as strong as it may be, could very well be wrong.

The goal here is to start relating to your feeling of knowing as a feeling, and not the truth. And soon, if you continue to practice this habit, you'll begin to start distrusting your gut. Which is good news, because this is one of the foundational elements of being persuadable.

Note: This article was adapted from an article I wrote for Harvard Business Review. You can find the original at HBR.com.

For additional information on this topic watch this training video entitled: [How to Distrust Your Gut](#). If the hyperlink doesn't work, paste the youtube link below into the browser.

Link = <https://youtu.be/vlG2WxM-iOw>

Lesson 2: Argue With Your Hand on the Dial, Not on the Gun

There is no better way to get closer to the truth than to argue with people who are willing to disagree with you. But usually, when we argue, our focus is on defending our positions. It's as if we're skeet shooting, and we have our hand on our shotgun at all times. Every point the other person makes against our opinion is like a clay target flung into the air, that we instinctively try to shoot down, by dismissing, counter-arguing, or rationalizing.

One of the reasons we're so obsessively concerned with shooting down every single point, is that we're prone to black and white dichotomous thinking. We believe our decision has to be either 100% right or 100% wrong. And the logic goes, if our position isn't perfectly defended, well then, we must be wrong. This is dangerous reasoning.

The world is amazingly complex and uncertain. We can never be sure in the correctness of any theory, belief, or opinion. The best we can do is make judgments based on imperfect probabilities.

So, if you want to argue like a persuadable, instead of having your hand on a shotgun, imagine you have your hand on a dial. The dial represents the confidence you have in your opinion. All the way to the right means absolute confidence and all the way to the left signifies zero confidence. Every time your debating partner makes a good point, turn the dial slightly to the left. When new evidence surfaces that supports your position, turn the dial a bit to the right.

Instead of spending all your conscious energy preparing to fire, focus instead on deciding whether to turn the dial, and if so by how much.

So are you ready to put these ideas into action?

Right now, pick a person to argue with. Maybe it's your spouse, your colleague, or your boss. Pick an issue that is important, but not something so important like a religious belief or a political position you're passionate about that you'll have an impossible time staying objective. Baby steps folks.

Now, try to articulate your opinion in a sentence. For example, I believe that letting our son play football doesn't pose any serious danger to his health. Next,

ask yourself the question: in percentage terms how confident am I exactly? Maybe for example you feel 90% confident.

Now, argue with your partner. But as they make their points resist that instinct to shoot them down right away. Actively try to listen to them and most importantly, understand the points that they're making. Be as charitable as possible.

Note that this is going to be difficult and you're going to mess up, I do all the time. So don't get frustrated, that's why we're practicing.

As you're listening to their reasons, try to determine whether or not they're legitimate or not. And if they are, visualize yourself turning your confidence dial.

The obvious question is how much do I turn the dial? This isn't an easy question to answer. Even people with advanced statistics degrees can find themselves stumped. But use your best judgment. The whole point of this exercise isn't to update our beliefs perfectly, the point is to avoid the biggest error of all, which is not updating our beliefs at all.

After you've finished arguing take some time and ask yourself, what is my confidence now? If your confidence is different now then it was at the start, congratulations, you've learned something.

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For additional information on this topic watch this training video entitled: [How to Argue Like a Persuadable](#). If the hyperlink doesn't work, paste the youtube link below into the browser.

Link = <https://youtu.be/YmSSMrSpXB4>

Lesson 3: Prepare to Kill Your Darlings

Writers are a neurotic bunch. We get attached to every chapter, page, paragraph, even sentence that we write. So attached, in fact, that our words can be like our babies and we lose all sense of objectivity. When an editor points out that a particular part of our writing needs to go, we automatically balk because we don't want to abandon our offspring.

This is a somewhat pathetic state of affairs. Every writer who's worth her salt knows that editing is a critical part of the writing process. It's only by letting go of old ideas, that we can make room for new ones. After all, as Ernest Hemingway said, "the only kind of writing is rewriting." So, the quicker we're willing to abandon bad ideas, the quicker we can invent better ideas to take their place, improving both the work and the writer.

That's why for decades, writers have been given this piece of wisdom: kill your darling. Instead of reluctantly letting our editor drag our darlings away from us as tears run down our cheeks, authors should grab the knife, and do the damn thing ourselves. It's a twisted metaphor, I know, but it's empowering, because it puts writers in control.

Killing your darlings isn't just good advice for writers, it's important for every kind of leader, from teachers, to politicians, to dentists. Every day we cling to bad ideas that stand in the way of personal growth, for fear of hurting our self-concept or short term self-interest. We shouldn't wait for evidence that will disprove our favored beliefs, we should take an active role, lean in to the discomfort, and seek out the information. This habit of searching for evidence that threatens favored beliefs ignites a powerful feedback loop that leads to extraordinary improvement.

But that's easier said than done. One of the reasons why killing our darlings is so difficult is that we tend to catastrophize. We're unwittingly led to invent horrific images in our mind that are wholly detached from reality. A writer, for example, might envision that trashing a paragraph will make the entire book worthless. A presidential hopeful might believe losing may cause his family to leave him. A product manager might think that pulling the plug on his product may result in becoming homeless, or even worse *dead*. While in actuality, no marketing manager (that I know of) has ever been killed for a poor performing product, our mind has a funny way of making us feel like it's a real possibility.

So what can we do to stop catastrophizing and manage our anxiety? Ask yourself two questions: What's really the worst that might happen? And is that so bad?

These questions may sound pretty unremarkable, but they're incredibly potent. These questions force you to rationally examine the *real* worst case scenario. Once you do, you're bound to realize that, as bad as the scenario might be (and believe me it might be bad) it's not nearly as bad as the catastrophe scenario. Coming to this realization, some of the anxiety will subside, and you'll be ready to kill your darlings.

So, ready to practice?

Pick an issue that you suspect you might be wrong about.

Now ask yourself the question: if I killed my darlings, what's the worst that will *actually* happen? Really think through the scenario in detail. Walk through the consequences and visualize them as vividly as you can. Then ask yourself, how would I cope if this scenario really did come true?

If you've done this exercise correctly, then two things will probably happen. One, you'll realize that killing your darlings might be bad. But the second thing you'll realize is that it won't be infinitely bad. It won't be fatal, or as catastrophic as your unconscious mind is leading you to believe.

The anxiety probably won't completely disappear, but you'll probably find it subsiding a bit.

And now you're ready to kill your darlings.

Note: This article was adapted from a manifesto I wrote for 1-800-CEO-Read. You can find the original at ChangeThis.com

Lesson 4: How to Communicate Your Decision Without Looking Unpersuadable

Updating your beliefs is important, but at some point leaders need to terminate evaluation and make a decision. But regardless of whether you've chosen to stay the course or change course, you have to communicate the decision to others in a way that makes them feel like you've been open-minded. This isn't always easy.

Have you ever asked someone for advice, only to find them upset when you didn't ultimately follow it? While you probably assumed they were ticked off with your decision, their gripe may have been with the process.

Research from the field of procedural justice has shown the process by which you reach a decision often has as much (or more) to do with whether people think it's fair or not, than the outcome itself. When people believe there is a clear and fair process, they're more likely to respect an outcome even if it's not the one they wanted.

But when we ask people for their input, we often fail to clearly communicate our decision making process. And so they assume they get a vote, when really, what we're giving them, is a voice.

Before you invite others to challenge your thinking, tell them where they fit in the process. For example, "first I'm going to hold a meeting to get feedback from you and several others. Then, after considering everyone's feedback, I'm going to make my final decision."

The key word here is "I". By setting the expectation in advance that they'll have input, but in the end, you'll be the one making the decision, they're less likely to balk if it doesn't go their way. This ensures that, regardless of whether or not you've ultimately been persuaded, they see you as having been persuadable.

Ready to practice?

Pick an area in which you'd like some feedback. Maybe it's a decision you're thinking about making, or maybe you're looking to make a new years resolution and you're looking for some help picking one that will give you the most bang for your buck.

Now, think about your decision making process. This can sound scary, but really you just need to answer two questions. What steps will need to take place before a decision can be made? Who is ultimately making the decision?

As we alluded to earlier, the process can be as simple as two steps: Step one, you solicit feedback from others. And step two, you make the decision.

Now, send a note to the person from whom you want feedback. Before you ask them for the feedback, set the right expectation. Be clear on what your decision making process is and how they fit in it. Then, ideally in person, get their feedback

You might find that they're much more cooperative during the process, even if you ultimately don't follow their advice.

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For additional information on this topic watch this training video entitled: [Communicate Your Decision Without Looking Unpersuadable](#). If the hyperlink doesn't work, paste the youtube link below into the browser.
Link = <https://youtu.be/HjIDvyhCibY>

Lesson 5: Getting Outside the Bubble

We all know that in order to be persuadable, we need to expose ourselves to counter-attitudinal information, information that conflicts with what we currently believe. The problem is our world is now setup in a way that virtually guarantees the opposite.

On Facebook, your friends are likely to believe in the same kinds of things that you believe. Therefore so much of the media they post are likely to reflect those beliefs.

Netflix and Amazon's recommendation engines suggest for you products, music, and documentaries similar to the ones you've liked in the past.

At work, conversations and agendas for meetings all are likely to revolve around pro-attitudinal topics that you're more inclined to agree with.

This creates an echo chamber with some pretty harmful consequences. Not only does it ensure that you'll continue to hold beliefs even when they're wrong, it can result in polarization. Your views get amplified, making them even more extreme. So how do we make sure we're exposing ourselves to counter-attitudinal information more often?

A less than ideal solution is to rely on our willpower. Instead, we need to create some reliable habits to make sure we're getting a steady diet of feedback.

For example, maybe you could sign up for a blog that is critical of your industry. Perhaps hire an outside consultant or coach that is going to give you honest feedback from a completely different perspective. How about following people who you disagree with on twitter? Or maybe sign up for a conference centered around an issue that you disagree with.

So let's stop the theory and get practical.

Think about an area right now, in which you imagine you could be in a bubble.

Now, think of one commitment you can make, that will allow you to regularly expose yourself to counter-attitudinal information in that area, without you

having to rely on willpower. Now make that commitment. Subscribe to that newsletter, register for that event, or follow that author on twitter.

Congratulations on your commitment to staying out of the bubble.

Thank You.

I hope this guide has helped, but remember, if you have any questions or need any additional assistance, feel free to reach out to me directly at al.pittampalli@gmail.com. We offer training and executive coaching that can help you turn Persuadable from concept to reality in your organization.

Best of luck.

Al Pittampalli