9.9: Audience Analysis

To successfully persuade someone to see your point of view you must first either change or reinforce their beliefs. You either change their beliefs to go along with yours or you show them how their beliefs already are consistent with your point of view. In either case, you need to better understand your audience and what beliefs they currently hold.

Audience analysis is a planning technique you can use to determine the characteristics of your audience and what motivates them. This information is used to decide the best way to present information and persuade the audience to the action you want them to do, or belief you want them to hold. I frequently wanted a new computer, but my wife was not so enthusiastic. But I knew that she would do anything to help our children succeed in school. Using this analysis, I would make the argument that getting a new computer would help our children succeed in school. And just like that, we had a new computer.

Your audience is where it all begins. The more you know about your audience, the better you can “target” your remarks to reflect their specific interests and concerns. When I refer to audience, I don’t necessarily mean a large crowd. Your audience might just be one person from a member of your family to your boss. Your audience will respond as you want them to only if you can convince them that they will benefit from the action you’re proposing. As you prepare your persuasion, make sure you base your plans on an understanding of your audience. Focus on what matters most to them, how they will react, and what will help you lead them to your goal.

Any number of factors can affect how your audience will react. These can include their experience, education, job or professional background, age, gender, ethnic background, cultural differences, and more. Knowing your audience helps you to shape your message in a way that’s most likely to gain their acceptance. The following will help a good advocate target his or her audience.

- Know the attitudes and biases of your audience.
- Know how the audience already feels about the subject of your persuasion.
• As much as possible, know what motivates your audience.
• Never talk down to your audience.
• Talk to the interests of your audience.
• Make sure your audience understands the importance to them of the goal of your persuasion.
• Make sure you stay consistent.
• Be clear.

You’re sitting at home on a hot summer day, thinking about how thirsty you are. A 30-second spot for Coca-Cola plays on the television. You respond to the ad by going to the refrigerator and taking out a can of Coke or you drive to a store and buy a Coke. Either way, a cause/effect relationship exists between your behavior and the advertisement. Corporate Coca-Cola loves you, but does not expect its ad to have that kind of effect on everyone.

The more likely response to the ad is that the next time you are purchasing soda at the store, you will recognize the Coca-Cola label, you remember the taste, and many pleasant memories—both your own and those given you in ads—are recalled. Maybe, whenever you see a Coke logo or anytime you are thirsty, you think about those pleasant memories. Now Coca-Cola is part of your daily life; Coca-Cola product and memories shape your thinking. In fact, Coke is such a part of your life that you do not even have to consciously think about it. When Coca-Cola achieves such a level of acceptance, as it has within our culture, its efforts at persuasion through the mass media have been successful.

The word persuasion itself is very misunderstood. For many, it conjures up images and feelings of making someone do something that he might not want to do. This is very far from how persuasion techniques really work.

The main purpose of persuasion to convince someone to think, act, or feel a certain way. The goal of persuasion is to get someone to do something you want them to do that they are not currently doing and this includes thinking about a subject as you would like them to think about that subject. Persuasion involves modifying the attitudes of a target audience in such a way as to alter their behavior in the manner the advocate wants that behavior altered. We use persuasion to motivate people to change.