

You have the power. But don't use it.

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

15 Oct 2013

Imagine you're at a workshop, and that you're matched with another delegate. Your task is to explain how to buy a Big Mac from a drive-through. The twist in the tale is that you must assume the person is from the 1700s.

What's a car?

It's a lot trickier than it sounds. Firstly, you need to explain the underlying concepts, such as a car (tyres, engine, key to switch it on, and the difference in the emissions from the back of a car compared to a horse). Then you need to explain the window at the side of the building and how a complete meal of food is delivered in minutes - without a gunshot to be heard (the flintlock musket came into use in 1630). The reason the exercise is so difficult is that it requires that you give up your "perceptual position" - you are forced to care about the worldview of the other person. Essentially you are giving up your power.

This perspective, and the remainder of the article, is based on Daniel Pink's book "To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others".

Knowledge is power. Not.

A team of social scientists led by Adam Galinsky from the Kellogg School of Management probed the relationship between perspective-taking and power. They divided participants into two groups, the only difference being what each group experienced immediately prior to the experiment. The first group completed an exercise that gave them feelings of power; the second group a set of exercises that emphasised loss of power. Here's the interesting bit. The participants were asked to draw an E on their forehead, so that the person they were paired with could read it. Those who were primed for power drew an E mostly as an E, making it appear reversed for the reader (and a little more difficult to read). Those who were primed for empathy were three times more likely to draw the E in reverse so that it could be more easily read by the other person. Power, one can assume, erodes empathy. Empathy is necessity for persuasion, and that's important, because advertising is neither art nor science - it is persuasion.

Dinner and a bad move

Say you take out a friend called Toni to dinner. The food is awful; the service is atrocious. The next day you get an email from Toni, "Thanks so much - the meal was great". In an experiment related to the above, participants primed for power interpreted the mail as sarcastic; those with low power found it a simple thank you note. The reality of the situation is that you can't really know. However, the high-power group have made a stand: She's sarcastic, while the low-power group have accepted the fact that Toni might have interpreted the dinner in a very different way from themselves - they were not anchored in their viewpoint. Perhaps Toni was being sarcastic, but there was no actual evidence to support that point of view. Power can distort messages, impairing the ability to take another's perspective.

Ra-Ra is a No-No

In an experiment by Senay, Albarracin, and Noguchi, they gave participants 10 anagrams to solve (for example 'debit card' rearranged, becomes 'bad credit'). Once again, the participants were divided into two groups, each of which was given the same anagram to solve. However, one minute before the exercise, the first group was instructed to ask themselves whether they could solve the problem; the second group to tell themselves that they would solve the problem. The group that posed the question (as opposed to the positive statement) was 50% more successful. A similar result was obtained in another experiment where participants were asked to write either "will I?" or "I will". Same result: Those who posed the question

outperformed the "juice yourself up" declaration that they would succeed.

You have to ask yourself

There are two reasons to explain the above. Firstly, the interrogative self talk, by its very nature, requires an answer relating specifically to the task. Going into a business pitch, you could say to yourself, "I'm the best. This is going to be a breeze," but if you ask yourself "Can I make a great pitch?" research shows that you are more likely to respond with the actual reasons you would be great, "I've done this a zillion times, I know my material." You could also give yourself some tactical advice... "Last time I was a bit rushed - I will take it slower this time".

Secondly, interrogative self talk will give rise to intrinsically motivated reasons to pursue your goal - there's ample research to show that people perform better when the motivation comes from intrinsic choices than merely positive self talk which does not require you to respond.

As Daniel Pink says, Will you succeed? Well, you just have to ask yourself.

Reference: *Daniel H. Pink. "To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others" Riverhead Hardcover, 2012. Kindle Edition.*

ABOUT SID PEIMER

A seasoned and insightful executive with multisector experience in roles as diverse as senior management, strategic planning and copywriting. I am a qualified pharmacist with an MBA from UCT. I am also an accomplished keynote speaker and presenter.

- Is consumer backlash affecting ad creativity? - 13 Feb 2023
- Cancel culture and the destruction of brands - 9 Mar 2022
- The most valuable capital of all: social capital - 24 Feb 2022
- Oh no, what have I done to outbound call centres? - 8 Feb 2019
- If Donald Trump wins, this is why - 25 Oct 2016

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>