



## **STRATEGIC ACCELERATION MEDIA**

### **Perception Matters! (Even if it's not the truth)**

By Tony Jeary

With most of the world falling into an emotional funk about the economy, it's time for leaders to stop focusing on problems and start thinking about solutions. Ultimately, the free market will have to provide the permanent solutions for our economic challenges. Until that happens, we are going to have to create strategies for ourselves and our businesses that will allow us to weather the storm and thrive! Because the economy can't be changed by any single person or organization, it creates a lot of individual and organizational fear and concern. We tend to feel helpless in the face of such huge challenges that seem beyond our control. A huge part of our individual success will hinge on the perceptions we have about our ability to be successful, in spite of hard times. Perception is reality, even if its not the truth and our perceptions are the engine of our action and the results we get. That is why perception matters!

Organizational perceptions about the economy may become the most strategic factor in how well any business will respond to the economic downturn. Companies that are able to move beyond the obvious problems and move toward positive solutions and identify new opportunities are going to have a competitive advantage over businesses frozen in fear about the future. Every leader should understand that the organizational perceptions of their team must be addressed. Leaders must proactively involve themselves in communication strategies that promote healthy perceptions about their businesses, their products and their future. Simply put, leaders have to take on the challenge of persuading their teams that the world is not coming to an end and that opportunity continues to exist, even in the worst of times.

There are three strategic elements about persuasion that every leader should understand and practice. These elements represent not only *why and what* you communicate, but they also reflect the *effect* of that communication. So, let's take a look at the three elements of effective persuasion.

#### **Persuasion Element 1: Communicate at the Belief Level and Explain the "Why"**

The goal of persuasion is to influence others in a way that will produce voluntary change in their attitudes and behavior. To produce this kind of voluntary change, you must impact people at the level of belief because people only become willing to change voluntarily when they change what they believe. Nothing has a greater impact on what people believe than the perception that they are being told the truth. Explaining 'why' supports the perception of truth telling.

Communicating at the level of belief involves heavy dose of "why" being constantly explained. "Why" is communicated by explaining value and purpose, the very items we so diligently pursue in the process of gaining clarity about the vision we have for our products and services. The same characteristics that cause us to believe in our vision will cause *others* to believe in it also. Communicate to the "why" to create buy-in.

### **Persuasion Element 2: Set A Powerful Example By Your Own Behavior**

Have you ever heard the expression, "What you do speaks so loud I can't hear what you say!" That remark is a famous quote of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American essayist, philosopher, and poet who lived in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Emerson's observation was true in 1850, and it remains true today. Only 7% of communication and persuasion is oral. The other 93% is the result of what people see and sense based on tone and other non-verbal clues. So, if you hope to persuade others it will be important that you make a practice of exceeding expectations yourself! Nothing persuades more effectively than a leader who sets the right example for his team, children, associates, and colleagues to follow

### **Persuasion Element 3: Demonstrate Confidence in What You Say and Do**

The ability to present yourself, your requests, and even your vision with confidence is another non-verbal piece of the persuasion formula. Why? Well, it's because of the perception that confident people know what they are doing and can be trusted. Confidence is a natural by-product of certainty. You transmit confidence by being confident and allowing it to be heard in the words you use.

It is difficult for many people to do, but having the ability to *speak with authority* about the things you want to persuade others to do is a strong confidence builder. People will read a lot of meaning into the things you say as well as the things you *don't* say. You may be frequently tempted to give a less-than-assertive opinion for the purpose of not appearing arrogant, or because you are concerned that you will be perceived to be lacking in humility. When you want to persuade people to do something that involves their making a voluntary change in their behavior, confidence is more powerful perception than humility. When you say things like, "I still have a lot to learn about this," or "You probably know more about this than I do," you are unwittingly sabotaging your own perceived confidence. People want a confident leader who knows what they are doing.

Remember, persuasion is a strategic function of leadership and your ability to persuade others will directly impact their perceptions of the future. Their perceptions will control their actions and the results they produce.