

# AN ART OF PERSUASION

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MASTERING INFLUENTIAL  
COMMUNICATION



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“Gentleman,” he said,  
“I don’t need your organization,”

“I’ve shined your shoes,  
I’ve moved your mountains,  
and I’ve marked your cards.”

—Bob Dylan

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# 1

## A Dilemma

I was comparing two similar dishwashers at a Sears store, evaluating the utility of features relative to price. The salesman patiently waited to field my questions and attend to any of my objections. He was carefully observing my concerns in order to influence the sale of either dishwasher because he received a commission on either. If I left the store to shop at a competitor's outlet, he would lose that commission. So, he first outlined the advantage of purchasing at Sears (Sears name, guarantees, numerous outlets, reputation for quality, etc.), then he concentrated on the particular units. This was a calculated sales situation and he was very good.

The installation fee was approximately 30 per cent of the price of the dishwasher but installing it didn't appear complex. Yet, the installation issue could make or break the sale. I was just some guy in a suit and tie; he had no idea of my competency in appliance installation. When I asked "Is the installation difficult?" I was presenting him with more than a minor problem. Oh yes. It showed in his body language; he became a little more tense and more erect. I had confronted him with a classic *dilemma* and he had one of two choices of response, neither of them optimally desirable. He was caught on "the horns of a dilemma!"

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Of the two choices he faced, if he said “Yes!” I could raise numerous issues that might challenge his credibility and the relationship that was producing this sale. I could point to the standard size of all the dishwashers, knowing they would fit into the same space as the one I was intending to remove. I could point to the two hoses and one electric plug as not very threatening, and so on. “Yes!” might become a dangerous answer.

If he said “No!, I might attempt to make the installation myself and cost him further commission (he received a commission on the installation fees). Worse, I might attempt the installation and boggle it, then complain to Sears that he misled me by saying the installation was simple, cancel the sale, and tell them to come and pick up their dishwasher. Remember, he had no knowledge of my skill here and therefore “No!” could prove to be as troublesome as “Yes!”

He was in a dilemma all right. He appeared to have only two choices and each represented potential danger and loss. What to do? What to do?

His response was brilliant. “I wouldn’t do it!”

“What?”

“I wouldn’t do it!”

“Why not?”

“It’s messy, time consuming, and you have to get rid of the old one.”

He placed into my mind some very negative thoughts about the installation. I decided right then that I didn’t want to attempt it. At that moment, he sold me! Wham! I was sold! Hook, line and sinker. I bought a dishwasher and the installation.

So?

The important thing to notice here is this: *he never answered the question!* He completely nullified objections I might have brought up with the installation issue. He side-stepped the

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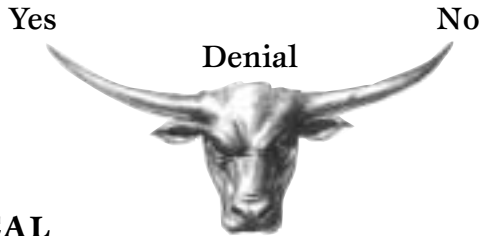
bad checks previously and continue to do so. Either way that you answer, you are impaled on a horn. These responses are *logical response*, verifiable with evidence or through reasoning. In other words, there exists supportable or documentable “proof” for either answer.

What we have looks like this:

**Yes****No**

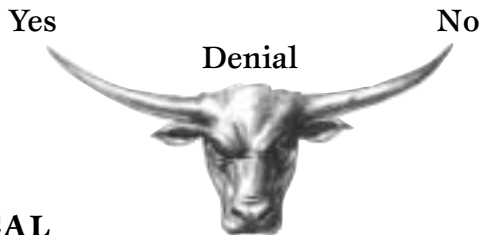
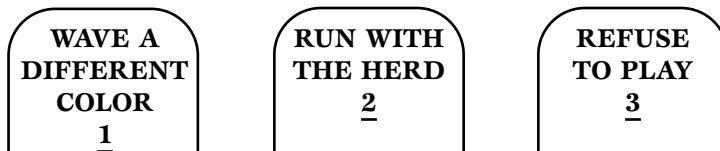
Those trained in rhetoric also know that there is a third answer to the classic dilemma: you can deny that the horns offer the only choice and go between the horns and *logically* show that this is not a “yes”/“no” situation. Attorneys know this and try to avoid it, especially in front of a jury, so the situation being addressed appears black and white. For example, we can elaborate that there never were any bad checks, and request proof to the contrary. Or reply that the account was mistakenly overdrawn only once two years ago, and the situation has not reoccurred or the evidence is inconclusive. Here again, proof can be obtained, and that is why these are referred to *logical responses*. (Shown at the top of page 39).

Supportable answers might not resolve the dilemma problem. There are situations where logical answers might not be of much help. In fact, they might cause greater damage. The bull

*Trained in Rhetoric***LOGICAL**

metaphor provides us with options quickly, because people trained in rhetoric also know that there are *illogical* methods to answering a dilemma. These methods are *illogical* because they are not verifiable or are not logically relevant to the question. These can be referred to as half-truths. They appear to “make sense,” but they can’t be proven or they do not address the question. This is what makes them *illogical*.

With our visual metaphor, we have three *illogical* choices from which to select: 1. Wave a different color; 2. Run with the herd; 3. Refuse to play.

**LOGICAL****ILLOGICAL**

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**ILLOGICAL****1. WAVE A DIFFERENT COLOR**

The Bull expects to charge at red. Throw him off balance by showing him yellow, green, blue. The Bull looks for a customary picture; paint him a new one. Confuse and obfuscate with lots of colors and detail, cloud the original issue with irrelevant factors. “I broke my hand and couldn’t write. The person entrusted with writing those checks for me cheated both of us and ruined my reputation.” Or, “I’ve spoken to the manager at the bank who is investigating this. There may be a problem with

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*Trained in Rhetoric*

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the printing on my deposit slips. This could be the fault of the printing company.” You are trying to defuse the issue and divert attention toward another direction.

This method presented properly makes the response appear relevant and can be very effective. Think of the Sears salesman I encountered. He never answered the question. He painted me a new picture with different colors, and that was what I saw. But in reality, his answer was not logically related to my question. He effectively diverted my attention to another issue. This method is like a fast curve ball; the batter sees it coming, believes he can hit it, and it just disappears over the plate, leaving the batter swinging at air.

The pencil salesman: pure color! He speaks of what the pencil can do, not what it is. Attention has been cleverly diverted away from the true characteristics of the pencil.

If one accepts the first premise, i.e., the new color, or validates the new picture, huge arguments can be built that are quite logical to the first premise, but are unrelated to the question. For example, an unarmed man is murdered, and the accused murderer is caught with the “smoking gun” and the victim’s wallet. There is no doubt about the fact that a person is dead, and the accused pulled the trigger. Logical responses? Forget those! They’ll make the accused look more guilty. The defense instead presents the murderer’s abused childhood, low self-image, poor schooling, unemployment, and juvenile police record. “He needed help, cried out for it, but was turned down by society. Is he not a victim? I say that society is really the murderer here.” The bull is now staring at a totally different picture. This argument is pure color and is unrelated to the factual event that an unarmed person was murdered, and the accused did the killing.



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It is useful to remember here that a person can convincingly rely on the integrity of his or her position to validate the picture they paint. However, good rhetoricians know that the speaker's position or expertise is pure color and has no bearing to the truth the speaker addresses. Because the stockbroker says "This stock will soar!" does not make this so. Anyone can make a prediction. President Bill Clinton used the Presidency as a backdrop when he said, "I did not ask anyone to lie!" Ken Lay used his position as CEO of Enron Corp. telling employees at a meeting that the company was financially sound and urged employees to buy stock in the company. Meanwhile he was selling over \$70 million of his own Enron stock back to the company. Positions and titles are capes of different colors and are not relevant to the truth of the issue. If this were not so, we wouldn't be advised to "get a second opinion" from doctors, architects, plumbers, mechanics, financial advisors, and tax attorneys.

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**ILLOGICAL****2. RUN WITH THE HERD**

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Rather than appear as an adversary or opponent, appear to join forces. Explain that you have little knowledge of this and “could sure use a little help,” that you would like to bow to greater knowledge and experience, and that the bull’s assistance here would be mutually beneficial. “I wasn’t aware that the checks were bad. I might have a serious bookkeeping error. Tell me how you found this out so that I can correct this.”

This places you and the bull on the same side of the arena, and may well offer a great advantage to you. The bull may know less than he portrays, or may perceive the issue much differently than you were aware. You might get a lot of sympathy. The bull might stop the charge and look for a new target. In many instances, you can at least buy some time. If we return to the earlier example involving the colors green and blue, it’s fairly easy to see that logical approaches will invoke logical responses and descend into a negative downward spiral. But by “Running with the Herd”, you have the potential to discover where the issue is crucial and avoid stepping into that trap.

“Blue is the best color!”

“You don’t say. I guess I’ve been color blind here. Can you tell me more?”

“Yeah. Blue is the best color for convertibles and pickups!

Or, the customer says, “The price is too high.!”

Concerned, you repeat, “The price is too high?” In effect, you are seeking the customer’s advice, running with the herd, trying to find out where they are headed. The question is now back upon him, forcing a response.

“Yeah. I can get a smaller one for less money!”

A word of warning: avoid direct questions. Direct questions can be viewed as threatening or antagonistic. You want to appear supportive and in need of assistance. Repeating the question is not viewed as threatening, but as informative. Responding with

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“*You* think the price is too high?” would probably be viewed as a challenge and as something requiring defense. Your real mission here is to gather information and make the customer feel comfortable so that you blend in with the herd. Phrase your questions with soft, indirect methods and cloak yourself in innocence. You will get more sympathy.

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### ILLOGICAL



### 3. REFUSE TO PLAY

Do not commit to any response, and let it go at that. “I have nothing to say.” “I have been advised by counsel that all questions should be referred to his office.” Or, “Our market research shows that green is the fashionable color for this product and it is what management is committed to.” Or, “Our prices reflect fair market value, especially considering our services and guarantees.”

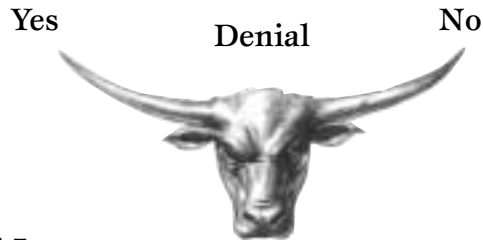
In negotiations, arguments, conversations, and sales, a person typically enumerates the features of his or her position, and

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continues with the benefits. In the technique of “Refuse to Play,” simply repeat these and let the other party decide what to do. You are neither agreeing or disagreeing, but simply refusing to become more involved. This response can prevent further damage by avoiding escalation, especially to a weak position. You are not providing more evidence or creating greater mistrust. In effect, you are denying them more ammunition. A direct response may prove to be very valuable. It smacks of honesty, integrity, no “beating around the bush!” This can be valuable for future transactions.

Our schematic now looks like this:



**LOGICAL**

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**ILLOGICAL**

