

The Push Pull Model - Effective Influence & Persuasion

Styles of Persuasion

A common complaint from people who want to make an impact is simply “I failed to persuade them. They wouldn’t accept my results, proposals or recommendations.”

Sometimes that is down to not considering how we can persuade this audience. The most effective persuaders adapt their style of persuasion to suit the situation they face. Research shows two distinct behavioural styles. We call them Push and Pull. In essence the way to distinguish is to ask yourself “**whose agenda am I on**”. In my experience, most of us have been educated to use push – that is putting forward our ideas and seeking to add weight to them (through logical arguments. Examples, evidence from others).

This article will help you to build flexibility in style and develop skills in knowing when and how to use different styles.

What do we mean by push and pull?

The easiest way to spot this is to consider a situation where someone was trying to influence you and notice what they did, the impact and how it felt for you.

As the person being influenced: “**Am I being taken forward in my thinking, in steps which make sense to me, using MY LOGIC (PULL), or am I being invited to agree with THE OTHER PERSON’S LOGIC? (PUSH)**”

Huthwaite Research Group conducted a study of the behaviour of 130 successful persuaders to identify which of our 11 behaviour categories contributed most significantly to their success. This was developed into a framework for effective interactions called Behaviour Analysis.

Two clusters of three behaviours were highlighted by the study. The **relative** use of these clusters represents the distinct styles of persuasion as shown in the diagram below

For down to earth explanations and how to apply Huthwaite’s research, read “**Utter Confidence – how what you say and do influences your effectiveness in business**” by Ally Yates

<i>PUSH STYLE</i>	<i>BEHAVIOUR</i>	<i>PULL STYLE</i>
HIGH	Proposing* Giving Information* Shutting Out*	LOW
LOW	Seeking Information* Testing Understanding* Building*	HIGH

*For definitions and examples, see the short descriptions at the end of this article.

Push Style

A push-style is characterised by the low level of involvement from the person being persuaded. The speaker is more focused on their ideas and getting the other person to agree with them. The persuader uses Shutting Out behaviour (typically by interrupting or preventing someone from contributing) and puts forward their argument through giving Information and Proposing.

For example:

"I want you to move into Ken's office, Sue. I don't want to talk about it. I need to free up your office to make room for the new equipment. I realise you'd rather stay where you are, but I've made my decision. Somebody had to go, and your office is the best location for the equipment."

TIP: People often assume that push-style persuasion is always aggressive. This is not the case. It can be aggressively delivered, but, as in the example above, it can be delivered quietly and assertively.

Pull Style

A pull-style is characterised by the high level of involvement from the person being persuaded. The person is more interested in the other person's thoughts, ideas and reasons than pushing their own. The persuader uses questioning behaviour to invite the other party to consider the issues and generate solutions. The persuader then uses Building behaviour to develop the other party's solutions so that they match their desired outcome.

To use the example, they will use questions such as:

- How do you feel about your office at the moment?
- Are you happy with where it's situated?
- Does it cause problems in terms of access to people/equipment?
- Do you waste much time moving between offices?
- Would you like to be closer to people/equipment?
- How would that improve things for you?



EYE 2 EYE DEVELOPMENT

- Have you got any ideas how we could make things more efficient?
- But would that be big enough for the new equipment that's coming?
- I like the idea of creating a central room for all the equipment, but the only room that's big enough and central enough is yours, isn't it?
- If we were to use your room as the equipment room, where would you want to move to?

TIP: People often assume that pull-style persuasion is always soft. This is not the case. Pull-style is certainly less direct than push, but that does make it soft. Sometimes a tough line of questioning is necessary to get someone to admit that the present is less than ideal, or that change is desirable:

e.g.:
"Sue, are you really telling me that you don't waste time walking to the photocopier and back twenty times a day?"

Using push pull

Effective persuaders

- are adept at using both push and pull styles of persuasion
- choose which style to use depending on the specific nature of the situation and person
- stick to a style once they have chosen it. They don't switch or mix styles within the same persuasive interaction.

TIP: This last point does not mean that a persuader using pull-style will never Give Information, Propose or Shut Out. They may have to use these behaviours - BUT their dominant behavioural style during that persuasion will be pull.

Selecting push or pull

A key aspect of effective persuasion is selecting the appropriate style for a given situation. The summary on the next page will help you to decide whether to use push or pull.

How to work out whether to use push or pull

Question to ask yourself	Use push style...	Use pull style...
Who has the power in the situation: you, or the person you are persuading?	If you have power/ status/ are seen as an expert or authority	The person you are persuading has more power
Does it matter if you are seen to fail?	If it doesn't – push is high risk because you reveal what you want	You want to hold back on your outcome/ what you want
Do you need to gain commitment for your idea to be implemented successfully?	When you don't need high commitment/ involvement. Compliance is OK	When you want commitment. Pull strategy creates high involvement and engagement
Does it matter if the other person feels they've lost the argument? <i>(if they do, they will be more aggressive next time!)</i>	It is OK to get a win/lose outcome	You want to create win/win – both feel OK about the outcome
Have you got the resources to enforce a solution that has been reluctantly accepted?	When you are OK to have to enforce/ chase/ follow up	When you want buy-in. You won't need to police/ check up in the same way
Do you need a long-term relationship with the other person?	Works best for short term relationships	Builds respect, collaboration and trust – so better for long term relationships
How much time to you have to execute?	Requires less time (initially!)	Needs time to plan and takes longer to execute
Has a decision been taken? Is it a given?	Gives clarity and doesn't cause as much resentment. Use this if there is genuinely no room for manoeuvre.	Leads to frustration, resentment and feels manipulative. Don't use this!

TIP: People often react to the push/pull input by assuming that pull is appropriate to every persuasion situation. By answering the questions in the table above, you will probably find that this is not the case and, because of the time issue alone, a significant number of your persuasions will require a push-style.

And finally...Push and Pull Styles... not quite so black and white

Seen in a narrow behavioural light, the difference between Push and Pull styles of operating appears to be whether you ask questions or whether you put forward arguments.

The truth is slightly more complex. Although this is the normal behavioural evidence of each style in action, the real question - from the client's perspective - is:

“Am I being taken forward in my thinking, in steps which make sense to me, using MY LOGIC, or am I being invited to agree with THE OTHER PERSON'S LOGIC?”

This is the true essence of Push and Pull: whose logic is being used to drive this interaction? It is an issue of principle which transcends the medium used (formal or informal, face to face or not, verbal or written). To Pull means to respect and use the client's logic, to Push means to impose your own, however gently.

To put it another way, it is possible to ask questions in a way which does not leave the other person in any doubt that it is your logic at work. For example:

“Don't you think it would be a good idea at this point to invest in.....?”

or

“But surely you'd agree that the market is just undergoing a temporary blip?”

There's no doubt that to the other person this would feel like Push.

You can take up a good deal of airtime whilst leading the person through a process which definitely feels like Pull. There are a number of ways in which this can be achieved - the creative use of rhetorical questions, for example, or a process of *“I imagine from your perspective, these are the kind of questions which need to be asked”*, backed up with plenty of *“...is that about right?”* questions.

The acid test of whether Push or Pull style selling is being practised is not ultimately which behaviours are being observed, but whose logic is being followed. (Well, actually, I think the real acid test is how the 'buyer' or person being persuaded feels. Whose logic do *they* think is being used?)

Definitions and examples of Push/ Pull behaviours – what you say

Proposing

In essence telling someone your ideas/ solutions/ options (something that can be acted on).
"I think we ought to seek an advance of 60%"

Giving information

Stating your thoughts, facts, opinions or reasons.
"it will reduce our risk if we get money upfront"

Seeking proposals

Asking someone for their thoughts, opinions, ideas, views and reasons.
"How do you think we should reduce risk?"

Testing understanding

Checking-out an assumption or checking whether something earlier has been correctly understood.
"so, you are concerned that they will say know if they have to pay up front. Is that right?"

Building

Adding to someone else's idea/proposal (without changing it!).
"Right, so ask for 40% up front and let's get it paid in local currency to avoid exchange rate risk"

Based on an original article by Robbie MacPherson (MacPherson Associates)

For more practical applications, see ***"Utter Confidence – how what you say and do influences your effectiveness in business"*** by Ally Yates

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