

Sample Proposal

Persuasive Techniques in Star Wars

Persuasion is the act and art of causing another to do something or change their mind as a result of debate, argument, or reasoning. Persuasion tools are commonly used in the course of negotiating with a counterpart, or in providing third party assistance to conflicted parties. Essentially, we try to persuade others to accept our view as it is, or to accept that our modified view (e.g., a concession we made in negotiation) is enough for them (and the best they will get). While our culture is filled with demonstrations of the power of persuasion in courtroom scenes, it is often not as effective a tool in negotiation or conflict settings. Like any other negotiation skill, however, persuasion skills can improve with understanding and practice.

Sometimes, persuasion wins the day, as when C3P0 concedes to Han and Chewbacca, saying “Let the Wookie win”. Why was C3P0 persuaded in this case? Conversely, why is persuasion so often ignored - as when Han scoffed in the face of science, saying ‘Never tell me the odds’? In fact, even the most powerful persuasive technique, the Jedi Mind Trick, seems to fail more often than it succeeds. What prevents persuasion from succeeding?

This chapter will introduce several persuasive methods, their effectiveness and best uses. We will introduce two frameworks: Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion, and Robert Cialdini’s (1984) model of generating persuasive power through seven sources of influence, exemplifying each element with a Star Wars persuasion attempt. When a persuasion method proved effective, we will explain why, suggesting when it may be similarly effective in the real world. When it is ineffective, we will explain its failure, pointing out alternative methods the characters might have used to gain their persuasive ends.

Persuasion comes from the Dark Side, as well. Fear, anger, or hatred, skillfully manipulated, can alter one’s understanding and perception, leading to deep shifts of opinion and loyalty. While such manipulative tactics are used by both sides, they are the go-to tools of the Dark Side, with none more skilled in their use than Emperor Palpatine. Understanding general principles of persuasion as well as those persuasive tools of the Dark Side will be enlisted to explain the battle for Luke’s soul in the Emperor’s throne room, and for Anakin’s in the Chancellor’s office.

We might even explain the rationale behind Obi-Wan’s effort to persuade Anakin to desist from their mortal combat by saying: “It’s over. I have the high ground!”. However, that may be beyond the author’s persuasive powers.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

Cialdini, R. B. (1984). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*.

Rapp, Christof, "Aristotle's Rhetoric", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), www.plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/aristotle-rhetoric