

Editor's Note: Al Uszynski is a sales trainer and speaker with over 17 years' experience as a sales professional. From sales rep to national sales manager, Al has sold for small companies and big companies alike. As national sales manager for a division of a \$1.6 billion company, he achieved double-digit percentage growth in each of his three years on the job. Today he provides customized training programs for clients like Bloomberg, Philadelphia Weekly, and Hunter Douglas.

Steer Clear of Persuasion Pitfalls

by Al Uszynski

Sometimes we fall into the habit of saying things the same way we've said them for years. By doing so, we often miss opportunities to be more persuasive. Without realizing it, we may even put another person on the defensive, or create a negative image of our business and ourselves. As a sales professional, you can enhance your success by improving your persuasive communication skills. Here are six common phrases and habits to avoid or alter in order to become more persuasive.

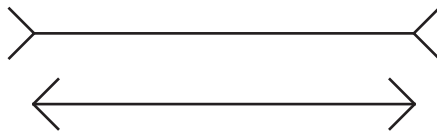
- **“To be honest with you...”** Why do people feel the need to announce their honesty? Does this mean that they're lying otherwise? Generally, people use this phrase to set up a statement that might be inconsistent with the goals they are trying to achieve, for example, “To be honest with you, our competitor's system is somewhat faster.”

The alternative is to omit the “be honest” phrase altogether and get to the point. If you feel compelled to announce that you are being upfront, do what Mel Kass of Bear Stearns in New York City does. He replaces the phrase with one word: *candidly*. It's simple, and it focuses more on spontaneity than honesty. It goes without saying that we should always be honest—and when we are, it's much easier to remember what we've said!

- **“What I want to talk about is...”** People don't care about what you want, especially if you're trying to persuade them about something. They only care about what *they* want. When it's time to introduce a new topic in a conversation, tie it to the other person's benefit.

For example, you might say, “So that we can find out how to best (save you money, increase your productivity, give you another benefit), let’s discuss... .” Do this, and you’ll be appealing to your customers’ concerns, rather than forcing your agenda upon them.

- **Negative language.** The well-known optical illusion below is a good example of how context affects perception. Which horizontal line is longer? They’re both the same length, but the top one looks longer. The arrowheads at each end of the lines have a significant impact on the viewer’s perception. Similarly, different words packaged around the same information in persuasive speech can have a huge impact on the listener’s perception.



Persuasive speakers communicate by using positive language. Instead of saying, “We can’t ship the products until next Tuesday,” say, “We can ship the products as early as next Tuesday.” What a difference! Put yourself in your listener’s shoes; which version is more appealing?

The habit of using positive speech has helped me to achieve more results than I ever thought possible. You can practice this skill all the time, too. Try it with coworkers, family, and friends. You’ll begin to see things in a whole new light!

- “**So what you’re saying is...**” I hate it when someone pulls this one on me. Half the time his interpretation of my words is off base; I have to correct him and reiterate my ideas. Since he’s summarizing me and I’m correcting him, this dangerous phrase puts both of us on the defensive. Often his summary is not necessarily wrong, but incomplete and missing major points. That causes me to restate my points while he clings to his “brilliant” summary. This also sends the message that he perceives my points as long-winded and vague, forcing him to rescue my message from obscurity. Obviously, this doesn’t put me at ease, or give me a sense of confidence in him. The same may be true for the people you deal with.