

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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Enrollment: A New View on the Art of Persuasion

You may wonder, “Why would I want to learn the skill of persuasion?” In the workplace, there are several reasons:



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- You want staff to take ownership for their role in the firm.
- You feel like everyone in the firm is not on the same page.
- Support staff do not always put full effort into their work.
- You have trouble managing when others do not seem to listen to you.

In each of the above scenarios, you may want to persuade someone to do something — and much of communication involves an element of persuasion.

ENROLLMENT GENERATES BUY-IN

Our persuasive communication tool is known as enrollment. It’s the skill of focusing on what the other person wants in order to gain buy-in for your suggestions and solutions. When persuasive communication is complete, both parties feel they have a good outcome.

Though similar to sales, enrollment is not convincing, cajoling or pressuring. In traditional sales (and in many traditional management styles), the salesperson may be aggressive and won't take no for an answer. He or she may push until you say yes. The same is true with traditional management techniques. When people feel pressured into doing something, there is no buy-in. As a result, employees won't give it their full effort.

This is when enrollment is beneficial. It involves more than just getting a yes.

The result is focused on generating commitment: The other person not only agrees to take action in alignment with your solution, but also believes the solution is the best one for him or her. The only way you can tell that people are truly enrolled is if they take action.

This is more than a simple yes — it's a committed yes.

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HOW TO ENROLL

First, you must understand what the other person wants. What is most important to them? Why do they want it? What obstacles do they see? What do they think are the best solutions?

A few points to note from this model — you must gain rapport and be engaged during the entire conversation. Do not try to enroll someone who is texting or otherwise distracted; do not have an enrollment conversation when you and the other person are in conflict.

ENROLLMENT IN ACTION

The following is an example of how this technique can apply in the workplace.

Your legal secretary has great potential. But some days, she seems to just phone it in. She comes in at 9 a.m. and leaves right at 5 p.m. Her work is fine, but she just does the bare minimum. You'd like to get her enrolled so she will take initiative.

The first step is to make sure you are in rapport and engaged. You want to be focused on her.

Next is the most important part of this process — asking her curious questions. Ask her how things are in her life, how work is going for her. Remember, you aren't directing — you are just listening to learn her motivations and finding what's important to her.

The goal is to show her you are hearing her without any judgment or an agenda. As you ask questions, you are listening for what she likes about her job, what is most challenging, what is most rewarding. If you are curious, you will learn things you did not know. When something new comes out, you have the opportunity to hear her and validate her experience, providing deeper rapport and trust.

This conversation will reveal whether you can enroll her in a greater level of engagement.

For example, she may say she likes the job and the most rewarding thing for her is helping the attorneys be efficient and do good work for their clients. This is a great place for more curious questions. You may ask her if she has ideas about ways the attorneys could be more efficient. As she answers, she begins to enroll in looking for other ways to help the firm excel.

Not only is she becoming enrolled in something you want, but also something she is interested in doing. This is why you must be curious and listen closely for what is important to her. Take her up

on some of her ideas. Leave the meeting with a commitment that you both will take action based on the conversation.

When she takes action, you'll know she is enrolled.

Enrollment is not a one-time conversation. It is ongoing process. As with any new skill, it can be messy at first. Practice as much as possible. It gets easier, and you will surely reap the benefits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cami McLaren is the owner of McLaren Coaching, specializing in coaching attorneys and legal professionals to generate success in their practices and well-being in their lives. She is the author of *Coaching for Attorneys: Improving Productivity and Achieving Balance*, ABA, 2014. McLaren will be speaking about Persuasive Communications Strategies at [ALA's 2015 Annual Conference & Expo](#).

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