The Art and Science of Persuasion

The word "to persuade" defined by Merriam –Webster Dictionary means "to move by argument, entreaty, or expostulation to a belief, position, or course of action." Persuasion is a form of convincing another person to do something that may or may not have been that person's original intentions but with persuasion, that person will do something entirely different.

John S. Seiter is a professor of Communications Studies in the department of Languages, Philosophy, and Communications Studies at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Seiter was born in, what he refers to as, Disneyland (a city just outside of the theme park). From his home he could see the Disney fire work show every night and breathe in the smoky air. He and his wife met while attending a speech and debate class in college which only increased his interest in this area of study and immediately connected the two. He received his Masters of Art (M.A.), in Speech Communication from California State University-Fullerton and his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Communication Arts and Sciences from the University of Southern California where his goal after graduation was to become a Communication professor. After graduation he received a position at Utah State University as a professor and has now been here for almost 21 years. He and his wife have three boys and love living in the beautiful Cache Valley, Utah.

Along with being a full time professor, Seiter's research encompasses two main areas; persuasion, and non-verbal behavior and communication. He has also recently started researching in the area of Hospitality and how good and nice customer service influences and affects the customer's behavior and demeanor. Most recently, Seiter has been working on

research of the behavior of candidates in political debates and how this affects themselves and their audience. Along with the help of Harry Weger, Jr., and Edward A. Hinck, his recent paper, Background Behavior in Political Debates: The Role of Nonspeaking Candidates, along with his passion and dedication for this topic, just earned him the Top Paper award in the Argumentation and Forensics Division for the National Communication Association, where he will be presenting his paper in front of a national audience.

The paper talks reviews and talks about the role of candidates' background nonverbal behavior in political debates and provides experimental studies that explore this area. Sometimes it is a good thing for a candidate to remain silent and listen to their opponent, but sometimes this changes and nonverbal behavior has a large impact on what they person is actually communicating to their audience and Seiter expounds upon saying how sometimes debates have had predictions on who will win, solely on body language. This nonverbal communication is enhanced by the way candidates are portrayed, for example, if the media is using split screens, or switching from one candidate to the next; reaction shots, and camera angles as well as how many times and how long each candidate has on camera. This nonverbal communication that the candidates are presenting, whether deliberately or accidentally, has a huge impact on how voters understand and evaluate a candidate's values, image, and goals.

Seiter goes on to talk about that how a person acts and his or her gestures and movements reflect their emotions and really who they are. There are plenty of ways to express nonverbal communication, some of which include, rolling the eyes, smiling, nodding the head, and sighing. This nonverbal communication is not however, always a good thing and does not always

communicate what was intended, resulting in it sometimes backfiring on the nonverbal communicator and assisting the candidate who is speaking.

In the conclusion of the paper, Seiter suggests that viewers want a candidate who is willing to stand up for himself or herself and occasionally people who do not give back verbal aggression are seemingly less credible. In a debate the cameras are always filming both candidates; their verbal and nonverbal communication is watched and assessed and many times what the person says who is not speaking with his or her body language, speaks louder than the person speaking with their voice. This silent behavior can also persuade their viewers and voters in a more dramatic and influential way than through speech. Speech is a powerful form of communication however, sometimes body language and gestures are the most powerful and persuasive factor in succeeding in a debate.

By Allison Newell