

Advocating the Art of Persuasion

By Saranjit Singh

There was an interesting attempt recently to snooker me into admitting that I impose my views on others. I refuted the claim and foiled that attempt! Attractively crafted cajolery perhaps?

As lawyers we are trained in the *art* of persuasion. We are not taught to persuade. It is a natural instinct of every individual acquired from childhood to get what they want. From the time you persuade your father for a treat or to sanction a bigger allowance to having him consider favourably your desire to tour Europe on your own. The level and form of persuasion gets better as you age and in the modern-day highly competitive knowledge economy where ideas are the catalyst to development and change, the art of persuasion is a fundamental and indispensable skill.

Advocacy is an art of persuasion. A person, be it a lawyer or a professional or employee of any field, is an advocate in his own right if he holds belief and stands firm on his views over a subject or opinion and wishes to have another consider it favourably. In the context of a lawyer, it could be a junior barrister intending to have his senior endorsing his views, a lawyer to his adversary seeking a concession on his point or from an advocate to a judge accepting his legal arguments.

Yes, the object of the advocate most certainly is to push upon his target audience a matter cleverly and persuasively that the point he makes will be ultimately adopted. This very much depends on a number of factors, the chief of which is the attraction of the logic and rationale of the viewpoint and the palpable optimism felt of its likely outcome and no less important is knowing your audience well.

Manner and *matter* are at heart of this art of persuasion. It has broadly 3 basic facets. The first involves impression; how it looks and sounds. A viewpoint must be conveyed through attractive oratory with sufficient eloquence. First impression always matters. Non-verbal qualities such as gestures, facial expression and mannerism is helpful. Appropriate dressing is crucial as it exudes confidence and professionalism. Eye contact, posture, quality of the voice and intonation enhances the power of persuasion.

The second essential facet is undoubtedly the thorough knowledge the subject matter, strong common sense and logical thought of the view to be advanced coupled with the good handle of human nature, patience and experience.

Finally, it is the presentation and *packaging* of the viewpoint. Lucidity of expression follows the logical and common sensical thought process on the subject issue. Tell the story by skilfully arranging and hooking the audience with the enticement of the reward of wisdom, experience and hope. Inspire, elevate and motivate your audience. Let them see another side of their pre-judged mindset, steer them away from their initial leaning and predilection, draw them to your viewpoint and attract them to the nectar of its sagacity, rationale and immense possibilities.

In a nutshell, how you will want to persuade your parents, partners and children at home or your seniors in chambers, opponents in settlement negotiations and judges in courts or in short, to sell an idea is nothing but advocacy, the art of persuasion.