

## Magic Words of Persuasion

By: Sylvia Mayer

But. If. Imagine. Goods News! These magic words help open us up to possibilities and opportunities. And that is what persuasion is all about.

### **But.**

Think about it. When you hear “but,” do you remember what came before it? Do you fixate on what came after? Exactly. We all do. Consider the difference between:

- You have great instincts and natural talent, but you lack the training you need to get ahead.
- You lack the training you need to get ahead, but you have great instincts and natural talent.

Which sentence encourages you to get more training?

It is human nature for everything before “but” to be forgotten or downplayed and everything after the “but” to be enhanced and amplified.

To open up new possibilities, consider what to say after the “but.” Those words are the words you want them to focus on and remember.

### **If.**

Fear can be an insurmountable obstacle, but you can overcome it with the word “if.” “If” leap frogs us over what may seem impossible, so we can explore possibilities beyond that barrier. “If” works as a magic words in two ways. It helps us envision alternatives beyond where we feel stuck and, when combined with then, gives us a structure to see future opportunities. Consider these “if” examples:

- How would you feel if this helped your business grow?
- If two customers like it, then others will too.

“If” is like a word window – it allows us to look outside whatever is holding us back to explore a new future.

## **Imagine.**

The word “imagine” triggers the creative part of our brain. It give us permission to set aside critical evaluation and focus on the promise of what is being imagined. In sales, it may be used to imagine driving up in your new car. In litigation, it may be used to have a jury imagine losing a loved one. In mediation, it may be used to imagine closure if the dispute is settled.

“Imagine” triggers neurons in our brains enabling us to picture and feel what is being imagined. Our imagination allows us to bridge from whatever is holding us back, to being open to the possibilities described.

## **Goods News!**

“Good news” can help us reframe the negative into the positive. Using the phrase “good news” allows us to shift from pessimism to optimism and reduces negativity. In my experience, “good news” is most effective when everyone is fixated on their differences and disagreements, rather than recognizing their similarities and common understanding. Similar to “but,” good news signals to listen to what comes next. Similar to “if,” good news signals to leap over an obstacle. Similar to “imagine,” good news opens our minds to new opportunities.

*Author’s Note: As a mediator, I am a “forever student” always seeking new ways to help people find a path to resolution in mediation. I recently read “Exactly What to Say” by Phil Jones, which inspired this article. In reading his book, I was struck by the relevance of many of his sales tips to my mediation work. His suggested magic words can be used from the board room to the dinner table and anywhere in between.*