

# Power of PERS

BY WILLIAM C. JOHNSON AND NORMAN YOUNG

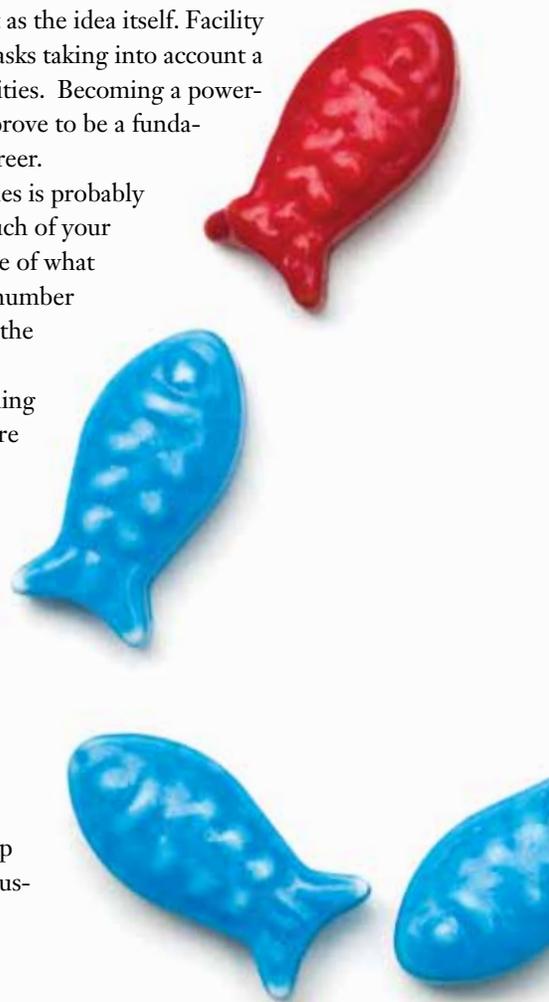
**T**he ability to effectively communicate an idea is as important as the idea itself. Facility managers are called on to perform an incredible variety of tasks taking into account a diverse group of stakeholders and multiple competing priorities. Becoming a powerful influencer and sharpening your skills of persuasion will prove to be a fundamental and foundational element in building a successful career.

When you think about what you do on a daily basis the idea of sales is probably the furthest thing from your mind. But consider the fact that for much of your day you are trying to convince people to do a variety of things. Some of what you are asking is being received by willing ears and minds, but in a number of cases you are going to have to do some convincing. That's where the sales part comes in.

A trainer at Honeywell said something at the beginning of a grueling 30-day sales training process that has stuck for years. He said, "You're always selling something to someone, being on your team, doing something you want them to do, getting something approved—whatever you're trying to accomplish takes some sort of buy-in. It's your choice whether you want to get good at the process of buy-in or not. If you do get good at it, it will cut across all boundaries."

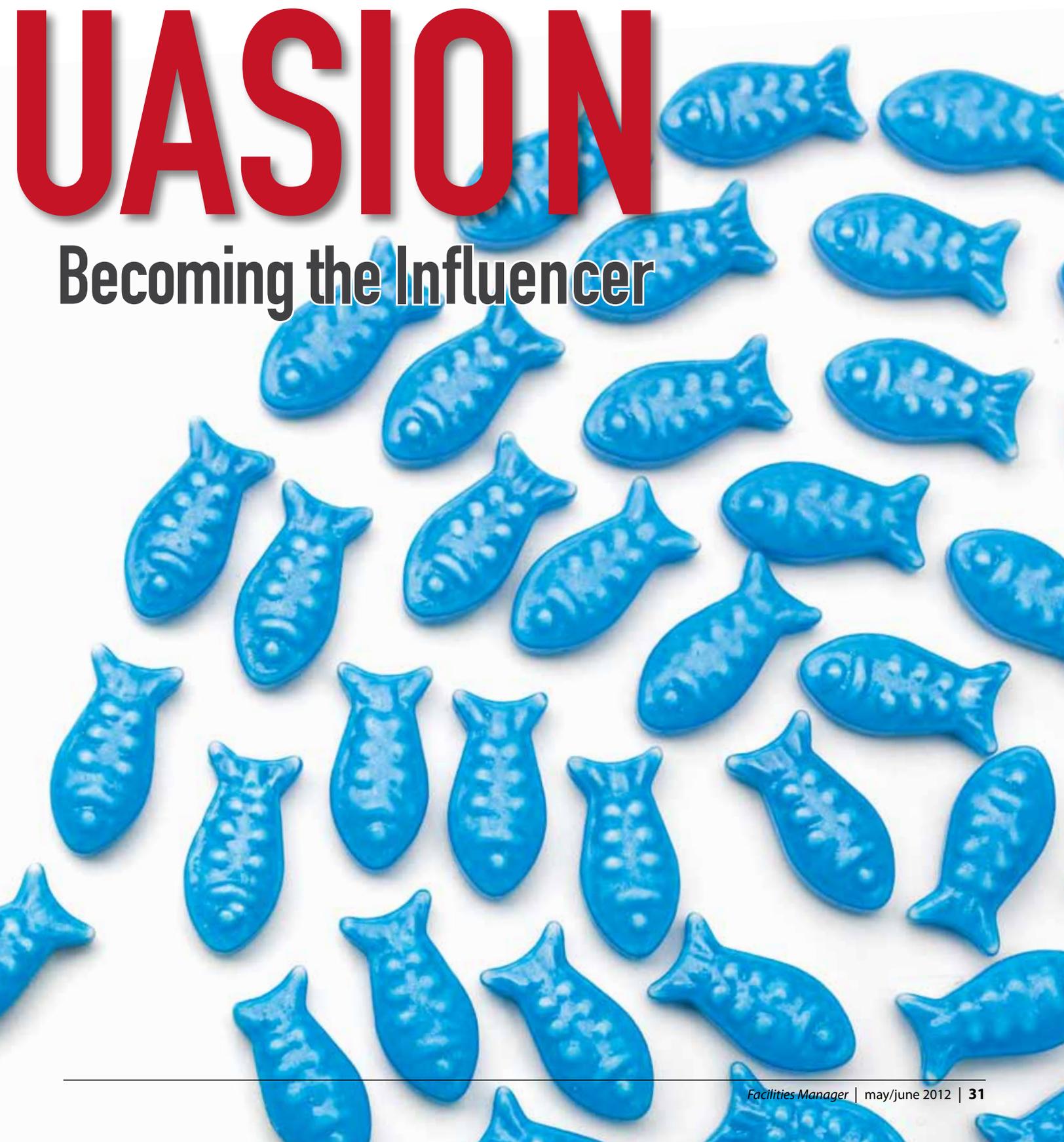
Over the years the authors have spent in business development and in facilities management, respectively, we've found his words to be truer by the year. We are in fact always trying to "sell something to somebody!"

The key motivation for all effective sales is that it's always about helping. If you keep this in mind, whatever you are trying to "sell," you will be much more successful. If you are looking for ways to help someone else with your projects/ideas/plans and couching your discussions based on that thought, you will be highly successful.



# UASION

Becoming the Influencer



## FEATURES, FUNCTIONS, AND BENEFITS

Selling involves a clear delineation of the benefits associated with the features and functions of the action you are seeking to take. Many of us assume that the benefits are obvious, but this is often not the case.

For instance, a project was proposed by the facilities department at the University of Hartford involving moderately significant funding to install an irrigation system on campus. The initial sell to senior administration involved a description of the feature (a well water pumping station) and the function (daily watering of the landscaping) with a benefit described as maintaining green, healthy grass. While this was seen as desirable, it was a tough sell during hard economic times. Interest did not pique until the project was tied to a strategic goal.

The benefit was recast as a direct way to attract new students through an improved appearance of campus. Since admission tours occur year-round, including the hot summer months, green, healthy grass would increase overall attractiveness. The project was wholeheartedly approved. The administration was not buying grass; they were buying students. Most of us are expert at understanding features and functions. Getting to know the real benefits to a variety of constituent groups takes time and effort to discover.

## THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

One of the most important, if not *the* most important, part of the sales process involves something that every facility manager is expert at—asking questions. In order to get anything accomplished, it's fundamentally important to have a thorough understanding of the issues involved. This holds true for honing your persuasive skills. Let's call this the discovery process, where you uncover needs, ideas, deal-breakers, tangible/intangible benefits, and general information on the project or plans you are working on.

Becoming an expert interviewer is part of the process of persuasion or influence. One of the keys to becoming a highly effective interviewer is to carefully and thoughtfully develop before any important meeting a list of questions you want to ask. Engaging your internal team in a discussion about this might be appropriate depending on the importance of the meeting, but getting the questions down on paper and taking them with you is key.

Remember that being influential sometimes doesn't involve you telling anyone anything. In a number of cases, merely showing up with insightful questions that point to the fact that you've taken the time to truly understand the other person's position and concerns can be more persuasive than any speech.

In order to be persuasive you will need to identify to whom you are aiming your persuasiveness. Decision makers, opinion leaders, and champions for your cause come in all sorts of flavors on a campus. Identifying each one is important to strategically placing yourself at the right place at the right time with the right message. Identifying these various people early in the influence process is important. As you plan your collaboration efforts you won't miss someone who could become a "show-stopper" later on.

Opinion leaders can be found at all levels of the organizational structure. They could be the groundskeeper who plays golf with the provost, or the physics professor who has the ear of the board chair. Find out who they are and engage them in appropriate ways to bolster your approach and give you feedback, thoughts, and suggestions.

Champions can be extremely helpful. This might be an influential board member who really "gets" facilities and what you are trying to accomplish and who supports your efforts on a

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continual basis. Nurture these relationships. They are like bank accounts; the more you put in, the more you can take out with interest.

The discovery process should be liberally peppered with open-ended questions: the who, what, where, why, and how questions that can't be answered with a simple Yes or No. By asking questions in this format you will be able to quickly identify critical features (what is it?), functions (what is it supposed to do?), and benefits (so what does it mean to me?).

The benefits can be tangible (savings in time, money, or resources) or intangible (making someone look good, saving aggravation, improving morale), and each project usually has a smattering of both. Asking the big "so what?" question—not so much verbally but in your head, when you are listening or speaking—can help you focus on what really matters to the other people in the discussion.

When you are discussing the features and functions of a project, remember that some if not all of the others will be asking in their own way, "So, what does this mean to me?" If you are able to effectively determine the "so what's?" and include answers in your presentation, you will improve your ability to be persuasive. Remember, people buy benefits!

#### MANAGEMENT "SPEAK"

Understanding and speaking the language of the decision makers is also a critical factor in being persuasive. Using terminology and framing your thoughts, ideas, and explanations in the vernacular of the audience you are speaking with will enable you to engage with them at their level. You can show that you have taken the initiative to articulate your message in a clear manner, and solidify a spot at the table where decisions are made.

Changing your language from "engineering" to "finance" and "funding" to "investments" and becoming fluent in those vocabularies will serve to illustrate the importance you place on effective engagement. Our buildings are more than a collection of deferred maintenance problems. They are likely the largest asset on campus serving vital strategic needs and, like any investment, need to be preserved. One method might be for you to engage with your champion on the board or others in senior administration and have an open discussion about the decision-making process, common critical success factors, and strategic planning topics. By doing so, you will be more closely in line with critical criteria to include in your presentations and information sharing.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING

One more building block in improving your persuasiveness is



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mirrored in the acronym MBWA, management by walking around. Knowing your staff, knowing your campus, and knowing your internal clients can only be done one way, by walking around and talking to them. Establishing relationships at all levels of the institution and developing your supporters and mentors is like building a human communication network.

This network will broadcast back to you all manner of important information and knowledge, keeping you up to date on the latest developments. Some of the information might be valuable and some not so much, but the key is the communication. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. With all networks the communication is a two-way process. You have information available to you that others might find interesting and important for them to know; share it as appropriate. It is often the case that when you share information with others, even more information will flow back to you, building and feeding your network on campus.

#### PACKING THE CANNON BALLS

The adage that "all of us are smarter than any of us" holds true when you utilize the collective thoughts and knowledge of your team to effectively position your "story." One of the techniques you might consider using is the pre-meeting meet-

ing. You could assemble your team, discuss the project/program/idea as a group, come up with questions to ask and prospective objections, and develop some answers.

The session should be somewhat open-ended with the intent to engage and think it through together, turning over all the rocks and making sure you are positioning yourself as well as possible for the upcoming meetings or presentations. An informed, engaged staff can be invaluable in helping you get to “yes.” Think of your team as packing the information cannon balls for you to fire when the opportunity arises. Pre-meeting planning can be an effective team-building tool for intra-departmental collaboration and relationship building. Try it out on your next project!

### THE PRESENTATION

Presentations are where the rubber hits the road when it comes to being truly persuasive. Being effective here always makes a difference. The format might be standing before an audience or board, or sitting around a conference table having a targeted discussion, but being able to clearly articulate with words and graphics your points is critically important to your long-term career in facilities.

We have all been subject to “death by PowerPoint” and have lists of what to do and not to do in our heads. Discussing it here will hopefully bring some light to the subject of how to be truly effective.

What do we all hate about a presentation? Going on too long; being too technical; speaking in a monotone; reading the slides; busy slides with too much text; 6-point font; no graphics; no stories; and knowing that the presenter did not practice.

Reading slides is probably the #1 no-no in presentations. It’s usually caused by a couple of things: little or no practicing so the presenter doesn’t really know where they are at in the whole continuum of the talk, or excessive nervousness also caused by no practice sessions. The watchword is this: *practice your presentation*, multiple times. If you will do this, and we know you may hate to do this, you will be exponentially more confident and comfortable in front of the audience. Put on the slides only what you need to prompt your next thought, if you use slides.

Sometimes a flip chart and markers is the most effective solution to the “same old same old.” You can be quite engaging when you begin the discussion by asking the audience what they want to discuss about the subject, let them build the agenda, and then go through the items. Possessing the depth of knowledge you have on your subjects and practicing with your own staff will be key to making this work for you.

Practicing also will guard against the deadly “umms and ahhs” that plague most presenters. If you don’t have something

to say between thoughts, don’t say anything. Pauses can actually engage the audience, and when used effectively can be quite beneficial. If you are comfortable doing it, walk around a bit rather than hanging onto the podium like you’re going down with the ship. It will engage you with the audience and provide a way for you to burn off some nervous energy during the event!

Most of the projects/programs/ideas on which you will be presenting have things in common with previous projects and ideas. Stories are a powerful addition to any presentation or discussion. When used effectively, stories can illustrate by example what you are talking about. The most relevant and long-lasting impressions are based on someone hearing a story and being able to connect to it both emotionally and intellectually. You probably have dozens of stories or real-life examples that you could use to illustrate a variety of benefits associated with doing any number of project types.

The stories you use should include multiple benefits for all the stakeholders in the room, and be appropriate to illustrations to the points you’re trying to make. Think about telling a story about every 6 to 8 minutes during a presentation. Try it and see how it works.

### GO FORTH – GET TO YES

As you develop your new techniques, be careful to keep track of your best practices. There may be variations to some of the concepts we’ve presented here that you will identify as being quite effective. Keep track of these and cement them into your departmental culture. This can be done informally, or you could literally start to create a “Becoming more Persuasive” list of “things to do” as the years progress. Whatever works for you and your staff in a positive way and leads to the increase of institutional knowledge is where you want to be.

Finally, be intentional and proactive in developing your skills of persuasion. Realize that you are selling benefits. By engaging your internal team, developing a sound game plan, becoming a better presenter, and tapping into your network, you can achieve more success at getting to that big “affirmative!” 💰

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Bill Johnson is vice president for client development at Haley & Aldrich, Inc., Manchester, NH; he can be reached at [wjohnson@haleyaldrich.com](mailto:wjohnson@haleyaldrich.com). Norm Young is associate vice president, facilities planning and management, at the University of Hartford, Hartford, CT; he can be reached at [young@hartford.edu](mailto:young@hartford.edu). This article is adapted from a presentation made at APPA’s Institute for Facilities Management.

“PRESENTATIONS ARE WHERE THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD WHEN IT COMES TO BEING TRULY PERSUASIVE. BEING EFFECTIVE HERE ALWAYS MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”