Goals of Persuasive Speaking

**Persuasion** is a communication process involving both verbal and nonverbal messages that attempts to reinforce or change the listeners’ attitudes, beliefs, values, or behaviors.

The ultimate goal of all persuasion is action; that is, successful persuasion reinforces existing behavior, changes existing behavior, or leads to new behavior. When a speaker’s main goal is to achieve action, he or she will also seek one of four sub-goals: adoption, discontinuance, deterrence, or continuance of a particular behavior.

**Adoption** – an action that asks listeners to demonstrate their acceptance of an attitude, belief, or value by performing the action suggested by the speaker.

*Example:* Assume you never wanted to donate blood, but then you see a commercial pleading for blood to help victims of a recent disaster. If you give blood the next day, you would be displaying adoption.

**Discontinuance** – the opposite of adoption. When your action goal is discontinuance, you want your listeners to stop doing something.

*Example:* You want your listeners to stop using illegal drugs, so you focus on all the problems drug use can cause.
**Deterrence** – an action goal that asks the listeners to demonstrate their acceptance of an attitude, belief, or value by avoiding a certain behavior.

*Example:* If you don’t eat junk food, don’t start now. If you don’t own a gun, don’t buy one. If you support busing to promote school integration, then don’t vote to eliminate the law.

**Continuance** – an action goal that asks the listeners to demonstrate their acceptance of an attitude, belief, or value by continuing to perform a certain behavior.

*Example:* Keep jogging for your health. Keep reading for pleasure. Stay involved in extracurricular activities. Keep buying from your locally owned store.

Seiler, William J. *Communication, Foundations, skills, and Applications*, 3rd Ed.
UNCG University Speaking Center, (336) 256-1346

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