GCG

Global Coach Group
Lead for Good

The Persuasion Playbook

5 Decision-Making Styles, 5 Ways In



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Introduction

You sit down with the executive who can green-light your proposal. She scans the first slide, asks for the outcome in one sentence, then pivots to risk, precedent, and ownership. You respond well, but the answer still ends with, “Send me an updated proposal based on what we just discussed.”

The proposal wasn’t the problem. The real issue? Your pitch didn’t match how she processes decisions.

These kinds of mismatched moments are everywhere. Leaders don’t just need to make smart proposals, they need to deliver them in a way that resonates with how others think, decide, and commit.

That’s why we created this guide.

Built on the foundational framework from Harvard Business Review’s “Change the Way You Persuade” by Gary A. Williams and Robert B. Miller, this guide explores five distinct decision-making styles, patterns in how people weigh risk, absorb information, and ultimately say yes. These are behavioral defaults, not personality types. And when you can recognize them, you can tailor your message with clarity and speed.

To make this more practical, we combined the HBR model with GCG’s behavioral insights from over 20,000 leaders and 150,000 coworkers across industries. The result is a hands-on persuasion guide that shows you how to spot each style quickly, sequence your case effectively, and use real data to build traction, fast.

Each style page ends with a brief GCG Research Spotlight linking our Global Leadership Assessment (GLA360) to actual behavioral gaps: what most leaders do well, where they fall short, and what can be done differently to close the gap and drive commitment.

What You'll Find in This Guide

A quick-read page for each style, showing you:

- How to recognize the decision pattern
- What convinces them — and what turns them off
- How to frame your message, pick the right proof, and make the ask
- Data-backed spotlight connecting the behavior to common leadership traits

How to Use This Guide Effectively

1. Choose one real stakeholder you need to persuade.
2. Read through each style with them in mind.
3. Match the cues you observe to the most likely pattern.
4. Use that style’s playbook to shape your opener, proof, and call to commitment.
5. Then reflect, ask for brief feedforward, and repeat. Repetition builds the habit.



#1 Charismatics

Leaders who decide quickly — when inspired.

How to Recognize This Decision-Making Style

Charismatics move fast when they feel emotionally aligned with the idea. They talk in bold, outcome-first language, and tend to lead with energy, not caution. They want to be excited — and they expect others to match that tempo.

Look for:

- Fast decision pace, driven by conviction
- Preference for big-picture framing
- Visuals, stories, and outcomes over data lineage
- Impatience with small steps or abstract theories

What Convinces Them

- A strong, emotional hook tied to outcomes
- Optimism, urgency, and a clear "why now"
- One big idea that can be made real — not overcomplicated

What Turns Them Off

- Long-winded setups or risk hedging
- Excessive data before belief
- Overly cautious tone that kills momentum

How to Frame Your Message

> *"Here's the outcome we can drive — and why now is the right moment."*

Start with the destination. Use energy and visuals. Show feasibility after inspiration, not before.

What Kind of Evidence Works

- One-page visual summary
- Pilot results, success stories from similar teams, or third-party benchmarks that show momentum
- A short slide with clear benefits and a simple risk logic
- Confident framing paired with visible next steps

Who Should Deliver the Message

You *should,* if you bring belief and energy. But if the decision-maker still needs assurance, bring in someone they already trust internally to confirm feasibility and ground the vision.

How to Make the Ask

> *"Can we align on this version today so we can move by Friday?"*

Use forward-leaning, time-bound phrasing. Don't soften the ask or leave the commitment vague.



#1 Charismatics

GCG Research Spotlight: Charismatics

Charismatics respond to vision, energy, and momentum. They commit quickly when they feel urgency, see early wins, and believe the people around them can deliver.

To influence them, leaders need to move fast, affirm progress publicly, and express visible belief in others.

Global Leadership Assessment (GLA360) data shows many leaders demonstrate these behaviors at solid levels — but "solid" isn't enough for Charismatics. They need these signals amplified. When urgency, recognition, and confidence are dialed up, Charismatics don't just buy in — they lead the charge.

These are strengths for many leaders. But to win over Charismatics, they need to be more visible, more intentional, and more frequent.

GLA360 Data

Leadership Behavior	Global Percentile
Communicate a positive, can-do sense of urgency	59%
Provide effective recognition for others' achievements	57%
Build people's confidence	51%

The data above come from GCG's GLA360 Global Leadership Assessment, which draws on feedback from more than 20,000 leaders and 150,000 coworkers across industries, regions, and leadership levels. These items represent core interpersonal behaviors that increase likability, connection, and trust—all of which make people more open to your ideas, input, and leadership.



#2 Thinkers

Leaders who decide analytically — when the logic holds up.

How to Recognize This Decision-Making Style

Thinkers slow the conversation down. They want to understand the logic, assess trade-offs, and consider risks before giving a yes. They ask questions that reveal how you built your case — and expect you to have the evidence to back it up.

Look for:

- Measured decision pace — they rarely commit in the room
- Preference for structured options, not one fixed answer
- Questions about risk, assumptions, and contingencies
- Neutral tone focused on logic, not emotion

What Convinces Them

- Two to three options with visible trade-offs
- A clear explanation of how the numbers and logic were built
- Time to evaluate — and the space to say no without pressure

What Turns Them Off

- Oversimplification or vague answers
- Rushed timelines or false urgency
- Overly promotional tone — anything that sounds like a pitch

How to Frame Your Message

> *"I've mapped out two approaches — both are viable, and I'll walk you through the rationale and assumptions behind each."*

Show that you've done the work. Let them ask questions early. Give them decision space without pushing for it too soon.

What Kind of Evidence Works

- Comparative analysis with sensitivity ranges
- Risks flagged clearly with mitigation steps
- Data lineage — where the numbers came from and why they hold
- Short appendices or detail-ready backup if they want it

Who Should Deliver the Message

Someone who can stay calm under scrutiny. Ideally, the messenger is seen as technically competent and can explain the logic without overselling. Don't crowd the room with voices, clarity beats having every stakeholder in the room.

How to Make the Ask

> *"Would you be open to reviewing this with your team and letting me know what concerns you most?"*

Invite further thinking rather than cornering them into a yes. Make it safe to ask for more — and easy to follow up.



#2 Thinkers

GCG Research Spotlight: Thinkers

Thinkers are deliberate, analytical, and focused on making the right decision—not the fastest one. They need logic, structure, and evidence to feel confident moving forward. Emotion or urgency alone won't sway them—instead, they look for clarity, relevance, and depth of thought.

GLA data shows many leaders do invest in insight and perspective. But for Thinkers, it's not just about knowing—it's about showing your thinking. Leaders who surface trends, explore multiple angles, and connect to real-world implications are far more likely to earn trust and traction.

These behaviors show that many leaders are thinking critically—but to influence Thinkers, it's about making that thinking visible, relevant, and tailored to how the other person sees the world.

GLA360 Data

Leadership Behavior	Global Percentile
Strive to understand the other person's frame of reference	50%
Invest in learning about future trends	61%
Understand the competitive options available to your customers	56%

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#3 Skeptics

Leaders who decide cautiously — when trust is earned.

How to Recognize This Decision-Making Style

Skeptics often enter a conversation with doubt. They challenge assumptions, question motives, and push back early. It's not personal — it's their default. They want control, clarity, and credibility before they even consider a yes.

Look for:

- Direct or blunt tone, especially early on
- High scrutiny of assumptions, people, and risks
- Low tolerance for fluff or hype
- Strong preference for trusted messengers over outside experts

What Convinces Them

- Calm, direct facts — no spin
- Proven examples, ideally from colleagues and direct reports they trust
- Control over the pace and sequence of the conversation
- Respectful tone that holds ground without over-apologizing



What Turns Them Off

- Overpromising or enthusiasm that feels performative
- Too many unknowns — gaps they have to fill in
- Soft language, hedging, or vague intentions
- Being rushed or sold to

How to Frame Your Message

> *"Here's what we know, where this worked, and the risks we've already considered."*

Be calm, firm, and honest. If they challenge you, that's part of the process — not a personal rejection. Don't try to "win" the conversation. Just show your case can stand up.

What Kind of Evidence Works

- Proof or endorsement from someone they know or respect
- Operational results — not just conceptual benefits
- Risk handling: what could go wrong and how it's mitigated
- Short, clean slides — no filler or sizzle

Who Should Deliver the Message

Bring someone they already trust or who mirrors their tone. If you don't have that relationship yet, lead with facts and bring in a peer or internal expert to validate.

How to Make the Ask

> *"What would make this feel more solid for you?"*

Keep the ask low-pressure and curiosity-based. Let them shape what happens next.

#3 Skeptics

GCG Research Spotlight: Skeptics

Skeptics don't buy in easily — and that's the point. They value integrity over enthusiasm, and consistency over charisma. To influence them, leaders need to show credibility, act with transparency, and demonstrate alignment between words and behavior.

GLA360 data shows many leaders are already strong in ethical behavior and values-driven leadership. These are the exact behaviors that resonate with Skeptics — when trust is on the line, credibility is your persuasion strategy.

These scores show strong credibility signals. To win over Skeptics, leaders must keep those behaviors consistent, visible, and grounded in action — not just intention.

GLA360 Data

Leadership Behavior	Global Percentile
Demonstrate honest, ethical behavior in all interactions	62%
Ensure the highest standards for ethical behavior	65%
Are a role model for living our organization's values	60%

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#4 Followers

Leaders who decide confidently — when others already have.

How to Recognize This Decision-Making Style

Followers look for social proof. They want to see that others — especially respected peers or leaders — have already bought in. It's not about indecision. It's about trust in precedent, alignment, and shared direction.

Look for:

- Questions like "Who else has done this?" or "Has leadership signed off?"
- Preference for tested ideas over unproven ones
- Comfort with direction from above — less interest in pioneering
- High sensitivity to internal alignment and visible support

What Convinces Them

- Internal case studies, pilot wins, or reference examples
- Senior leader support — ideally already secured
- A sense of shared movement: "others like us are doing this"

What Turns Them Off

- Ideas that feel untested or off-strategy
- Lack of visible endorsement
- Risk-heavy options without precedent
- Any signal that they'd be the first

How to Frame Your Message

> *"This approach was used by [peer team/leader] and got X result — here's how we'd adapt it."*

Lead with precedent. Let them see that others they trust are already in motion. Avoid framing it as something "bold" or "new."

What Kind of Evidence Works

- Peer examples or department-level wins
- Endorsements or quotes from respected leaders
- Adoption data from internal or competitor benchmarks
- Summary emails from senior stakeholders confirming alignment

Who Should Deliver the Message

Ideally, someone who is visibly aligned with leadership — or better, someone from a peer team who has already adopted the idea. Familiarity matters more than flash.

How to Make the Ask

> *"Would you be comfortable aligning with what [team/leader] is doing?"*

Make the ask feel like a logical next step in a shared direction.



#4 Followers

GCG Research Spotlight: Followers

Followers look for alignment, safety, and clarity. They're more likely to commit when others are on board, when the process feels inclusive, and when decisions reflect shared input—not just top-down direction. Influence here isn't about pushing—it's about enrolling.

GLA360 data shows many leaders are already skilled in collaborative behaviors, but there's still room to make these more intentional. For Followers, involvement isn't just a nice-to-have—it's the trigger for commitment.

These behaviors help Followers feel part of the process—and when that happens, buy-in becomes much easier to earn.

GLA360 Data

Leadership Behavior	Global Percentile
Effectively involve people in decision-making	47%
Treat coworkers as partners, not competitors	57%
Build effective partnerships across the organization	46%

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#5 Controllers

Leaders who decide methodically — when the plan is clear.

How to Recognize This Decision-Making Style

Controllers want clarity, control, and risk containment. They're not looking for bold leaps. They want a clear map: what's happening, who owns what, how progress will be tracked. Vague or high-level pitches make them uneasy — specifics earn their confidence.

Look for:

- Detailed questions about roles, sequencing, or resource use
- Interest in feasibility, timelines, and control points
- Cautious tone — focused on process and ownership
- Preference for structure over storytelling

What Convinces Them

- Step-by-step planning with visible checkpoints
- Defined responsibilities and fallback options
- Clear logic behind decisions — especially risk-related ones

What Turns Them Off

- Ambiguous goals or shifting plans
- Overreliance on emotion or abstract vision
- Surprises in the room — they want predictability
- Hype or language that downplays risks

How to Frame Your Message

> *"Here's the structure we'll use — who's doing what, by when, and how we'll manage issues as they come up."*

Lay out the roadmap. Make sure the sequence is clear, roles are defined, and nothing feels improvised.

What Kind of Evidence Works

- Timeline visual with owners and milestones
- Budget/resource assumptions spelled out
- Known risks with clear mitigation plans
- Any supporting data that strengthens planning logic

Who Should Deliver the Message

Someone who can walk the plan confidently — not just the vision. Ideally, a peer who's respected for operational follow-through or who's delivered similar work in the past.

How to Make the Ask

> *"Are you comfortable signing off on this structure so we can begin with alignment?"*

The commitment should feel like a green light on a sound, structured approach — not a leap of faith.



#5 Controllers

GCG Research Spotlight: Controllers

Controllers value control, certainty, and competence. They're most influenced by leaders who demonstrate confidence, build strong networks, and bring the right people into the room. Authority matters to them — but only when it's earned and applied effectively.

GLA360 data shows many leaders are performing well in these areas. With Controllers, the key is to lead decisively, show your track record, and position yourself — and your team — as the most capable to drive outcomes.

These behaviors give Controllers the confidence that things will get done — effectively, and on their terms.

GLA360 Data

Leadership Behavior	Global Percentile
Demonstrate self-confidence as a leader	60%
Create a network of relationships that help to get things done	55%
Involve people with complementary strengths	46%

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Conclusion

Persuasion is not a performance, rather, it's a practice of alignment.

Every leader has good ideas. What sets great persuaders apart is their ability to shape those ideas in ways that match how others make decisions. When the opener, the evidence, the messenger, and the task are aligned to the decision-maker's style, friction drops. Commitment rises. Progress becomes visible.

This guide was built to help you do just that.

You've learned how to recognize five distinct decision-making styles, what each one responds to, and where many leaders misfire. You've seen how GCG's global research points to specific leadership behaviors that help, or hinder, persuasion. You've practiced sequencing your case, bringing the right voice, and locking commitments that move things forward.

You don't need to get it perfect. Start with one conversation. Adapt one ask. Reflect on one outcome. Let your coworkers see the shift. That's how leadership becomes habit and how persuasion becomes a daily skill, not a one-off tactic.

It's also where coaching helps. With the right rhythm, structure, and feedback, persuasion stops being a scramble and starts becoming second nature.

That's what sticks.
That's what scales.



For Clients



We Deliver a Triple Win

Better Leaders, Better Teams, and Better Results — boasting a 95% success rate confirmed by coworkers, based on more than 100,000+ leaders coached.

Global Coach Group delivers the best results-based coaching worldwide through our network of over 4,000 world-class certified coaches, powered by our proven Triple Win Leadership Coaching approach and proprietary digital tools.

Triple Win Leadership Coaching, captured in Everybody Wins by Will Linssen — Amazon #1 International Bestselling Author.

Author



Will Linssen

Will Linssen has been ranked World's #1 Leadership Coach by Global Gurus (USA) and World's #1 Coach Trainer by Thinkers50 (UK), serves as advisor to the Harvard Business Review, and is recognized as a LinkedIn Top Executive Coaching Voice. He is an Amazon #1 International Bestselling Author. With more than 30 years of experience in executive leadership across Europe, North America, and Asia, Will holds the International Coaching Federation's highest accreditation: Master Certified Coach.

He is the founder and CEO of Global Coach Group, the world's #1 international leadership coaching network, with over 4,000 coaches worldwide serving Fortune 500 companies and leading multinational corporations.