



# soundview

## Executive Book Summaries®

# Persuadable

## How Great Leaders Change Their Minds to Change the World

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

As a leader, changing your mind has always been perceived as a weakness. Not anymore. In a world that's changing fast, successful leaders realize that a genuine willingness to change their minds is the ultimate competitive advantage.

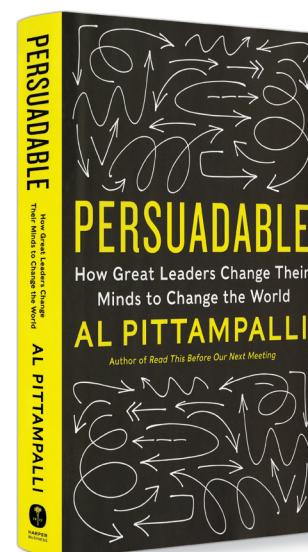
Drawing on evidence from social science, history, politics and more, business consultant Al Pittampalli reveals why confidence, consistency and conviction are increasingly becoming liabilities — while humility, inconsistency and radical open-mindedness are powerful leadership assets.

In *Persuadable*, you'll learn why being persuadable yields accuracy, agility and growth. But Pittampalli doesn't just explain why you should be persuadable. Distilling cutting edge research from cognitive and social psychology, he shows you precisely how by outlining seven key practices: consider the opposite, update your beliefs incrementally, kill your darlings, take the perspective of others, avoid being too persuadable, convert early and take on your own tribe. Through clear and compelling descriptions and stories, you'll learn exactly how to practice the art of persuadability.

Rife with actionable advice, *Persuadable* is an invaluable guide for today's data-driven, results-oriented leader.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why persuadability is especially suited for today's business environment.
- The seven practices of persuadability and strategies for using them.
- Why it's often better to persuade your own tribe before you try to convert others.



by Al Pittampalli

### CONTENTS

#### The Changing Face of Leadership

Page 2

#### The Truest Path to Self-Determination

Page 3

#### Consider the Opposite

Page 4

#### Kill Your Darlings

Page 6

#### Convert Early

Page 7

#### Take On Your Own Tribe

Page 8

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

by Al Pittampalli

**The author:** Al Pittampalli is a business consultant who has helped organizations like NASA, IBM, Kaiser Permanente, Hertz and Hewlett-Packard to adapt to a fast-changing world. He is also the author of *Read This Before Our Next Meeting*, a manifesto for transforming the way organizations hold meetings.

*Persuable: How Great Leaders Change Their Minds to Change the World* by Al Pittampalli. Copyright © 2016 by Al Pittampalli. Summarized by permission of the publisher, HarperCollins Publishers. 256 pages, \$29.99, ISBN 978-0-0623-3389-6. Summary copyright © 2016 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries ® www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY.

## The Changing Face of Leadership

In every imaginable field, a stunning number of successful leaders are breaking away from the traditional leadership archetype. One after another, they're progressively moving toward a new, flexible way of thinking: persuadability.

Persuadability is the genuine willingness and ability to change your mind in the face of new evidence. Being persuadable requires rejecting absolute certainty, treating your beliefs as temporary, and acknowledging the possibility that no matter how confident you are about any particular opinion — you could be wrong. It involves actively seeking out criticism and counterarguments against even your most long-standing favored beliefs. Most important, persuadability entails evaluating those arguments as objectively as possible and updating your beliefs accordingly.

Globalization, hyperconnectedness and the rapid advancement of technology have all made the world more complex, dynamic and unpredictable. At the same time, we have access to more knowledge, data and analytics than ever before to help us make sense of this world. Smart leaders exploit this shift, viewing it as an opportunity to succeed. In a world that is unpredictable, ultracompetitive and fast-changing, being persuadable is the ultimate competitive advantage.

Actively open-minded leaders are in a hurry to find out the truth no matter what it is, good or bad. They understand that the quicker they know the truth, the faster they can deal with it. Highly successful leaders go out of their way to challenge and even kill off their most cherished beliefs. If they're successful, good riddance. The belief deserved to be discarded. If it survives, they, as well as the belief, will emerge stronger. It's this gutsy

mindset that allows leaders to reap the most benefits of the Persuable advantage. ●

## PART I: THE PERSUADABLE ADVANTAGE

### Get Smart: Accuracy, Agility and Growth

Being persuadable gives leaders three key advantages. The first is accuracy. Being persuadable enables a better, more precise understanding of the world. This improved understanding allows you to make smarter decisions and more accurate judgments.

Improved accuracy begets the two other advantages: agility and growth. Being persuadable improves your ability to recognize and swiftly respond to incoming threats and opportunities. And finally, being persuadable allows you to honestly evaluate your performance so that you can identify your own weaknesses as well as solicit feedback in order to improve.

You've probably seen a refractor before. Stationed in any optometrist's office, this mechanical device looks like something out of a science fiction film, a forbidding black-and-silver contraption studded with lenses of differing strengths. Eye doctors use a refractor to determine your eyeglass prescription.

The doctor begins by having you sit down at the refractor and look at an eye chart through a pair of lenses. In the beginning your vision is bound to be fuzzy. The doctor then adjusts the refractor so a new lens replaces the old one and asks you for feedback, specifically, "Which one is better: #1 or #2?" If you answer #2, the new lens replaces the old. Then the process repeats, with



**1-800-SUMMARY**  
service@summary.com

1-800-SUMMARY (240-912-7513 outside the United States), or order online at [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com). Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 511 School House Road., Suite 300, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2016 by Soundview, Inc. **Available formats:** Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Ashleigh Imus, Senior Editor; Masiel Tejada, Graphic Designer; A. Imus, Contributing Editor

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

---

the doctor adding another lens and comparing them: “Which one is better: #1 or #2?” Each time, your vision improves slightly as the doctor continues to refine the lens. After many rounds of this, you end up with vision that is dramatically enhanced.

This is the power available to leaders who are willing to be persuadable. By progressively, incrementally evaluating and assessing the clarity of their vision to see if it could be improved on, persuadable leaders engage in an invaluable process that optimizes their ability to make decisions. As a result, they end up being more accurate.

### Agility

Now more than ever, leaders are desperate for agility. A survey by McKinsey & Company found that “nine out of ten executives ranked organizational agility as both critical to business success and growing in importance over time.” Yet despite being a stated priority for years, countless companies fail to adapt.

Unfortunately, humans are plagued by what psychologists call a status quo bias, meaning that we often have a strong preference for the current state of affairs over some alternative. In general, our status quo bias causes us to seek out information that supports the status quo with greater intensity than information that threatens the status quo.

In order to overcome the status quo bias, leaders need to pay close attention to information that threatens their current plans. In fact, leaders need to aggressively seek out the unpleasant facts. This mindset is the essence of agile leadership.

### Growth

The tendency to overestimate our own skills, abilities and performance is called illusory superiority (or, in lay terms, the better-than-average effect) and plagues virtually all of us across a wide range of traits and behaviors. A litany of studies have shown that people think they're better than they actually are at everything, from personality traits, such as intelligence and honesty, to skills such as driving and academic performance, to how charitable they are.

But while illusory superiority can make us feel good about ourselves, it has severe disadvantages to anyone who is interested in growth. In order to improve, we need to know precisely what the gap is between where we are now and where we'd like to be. We must understand our weaknesses.

If we want to know how we're doing, we can seek out insights from others. Despite the proven value of feedback, however, most people don't seek it out nearly as often as they should. It forces you to confront the unpleasant

reality that you're not as good as you want to believe, which can be damaging to your self-concept.

Persuadable leaders gain more accuracy, agility and growth than their peers because they have an intense willingness and desire to constantly update their understanding of the world in the face of new evidence. But one common theme among them is their realization that they can't do it alone. Persuadable leaders understand they are limited by their own biases and therefore frequently seek out the opinions of others. ●

---

## The Truest Path to Self-Determination

The willingness to change your mind in response to evidence is a powerful character strength. Unfortunately, our culture doesn't always see it that way. While we may praise open-mindedness and humility in the abstract, in reality, when acted on by our leaders, these traits are often perceived as signs of weakness. People who change their opinions — even for intelligent reasons — risk being labeled flip-flopers or pushovers.

Sometimes resisting persuasion is the least self-determined thing a leader can do, and being persuaded is often the most self-determined thing a leader can do.

The truest path to self-determination is not knee-jerk defiance but autonomy. Autonomy may sound like resisting the influence of others, but it's a much more comprehensive and measured pursuit than that. Autonomy involves a conscious deliberation of all available evidence, along with reflecting on your own values and goals, and *then* making the decision. Sometimes this process results in resisting external pressures; other times it results in aligning with them. What determines if it's free will is whether you've made the choice that you truly think is the best *regardless of the external pressures*. Not just understanding but embracing this concept is essential for leaders to be persuadable.

A theory was developed in 1966 by a social psychologist named Jack Brehm who realized that all human beings consider freedom a critical need. So much so that when they perceive their behavioral freedoms are being threatened or eliminated, they enter a state of emotional arousal called reactance. It's essentially an inflamed attempt to reassert the very freedom that is being taken away. Reactance is often accompanied by overt displays of aggressiveness or anger.

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

Leaders are especially susceptible to reactance. As a general rule, the more power one has, the more one has the incentive to maintain an appearance of authority and command and therefore resist influence.

Any young child can resist persuasion, but no one would argue that children are the quintessential examples of self-determination. What happens with age and maturity is that we learn to control our reactance. We develop the ability to determine our own fate by making a truly free choice. Sometimes making a free choice results in our accepting persuasion. Sometimes accepting persuasion is the most self-determined action we can take. The lesson is this: making the choice that matches your interests and values at the highest level of reflection, regardless of external influence and norms, is the true mark of self-determination. This is what's known as autonomy.

### TOMS

In 2006, while vacationing in Argentina, a college dropout named Blake Mycoskie met an American woman in a café collecting shoes for the poor. Blake was heartbroken to learn that so many children in the third world were in need of shoes. Soon inspiration struck: What if he created a shoe store where every time someone bought a pair of shoes, another pair — the same exact pair — would be donated to a child in need? Everyone around him said his one-for-one idea was impossible.

But Blake Mycoskie thought otherwise. And so TOMS shoes was born, and the rest is history. In less than a decade, TOMS has given away more than 35 million pairs of shoes to kids in need in over 60 different countries, one of the darlings of the social-good world.

But as TOMS grew, it began to draw criticism. Some people argued that TOMS was disrupting local markets by manufacturing shoes in Argentina, China and Ethiopia and then importing these shoes into poor countries, thereby undercutting local producers. Others insisted that donating shoes is vastly less efficient than just donating money to programs whose sole mission is to alleviate poverty.

At first Blake admittedly took it all personally. But then, he paused to carefully reflect on the critiques. After doing so, he came to realize that his critics had a point. There was much more that he could do to help. And so at the 2013 Clinton Global Initiative event, Blake made a big announcement. In early 2014, TOMS would build its first major plant in the country of Haiti, where it would hire at least 40 local employees to operate the plant. He went on to make a pledge, to be realized by the end of 2015, that one-third of TOMS shoes would be manufactured in the countries where the shoes are donated.

The Blake Mycoskie who defied the critics to begin his company is as self-determined as the Blake Mycoskie who followed his critics' advice to change the way he does business. The critical attribute here is autonomy, the willingness to reflect on different opinions, rather than to just reflexively dismiss them. ●

## PART II: THE SEVEN PRACTICES OF PERSUADABLE LEADERS

### Consider the Opposite

If being persuadable means changing our minds in the face of evidence, the first thing we have to be able to do is to spot evidence when it crosses our desk. Noticing evidence that supports our current beliefs is easy, but when it comes to counterevidence — information that cuts against our current hypothesis, theory or opinion — it can be devilishly difficult. When we look at counterevidence, it often appears to us as an anomaly (a one-off that should be dismissed completely) or else as information that, despite contradicting our current way of thinking, somehow strangely confirms it.

The force responsible for this distorted thinking is what's known as the confirmation bias. The confirmation bias is one of the most powerful and insidious forces in human behavior, and if we want to be persuadable, we're going to have to learn how to manage it.

There are two forms of confirmation bias, which we can refer to as “motivated” and “unmotivated.” You're likely already familiar with the motivated form of the confirmation bias (MCB). This is where people seek out information that supports their preferred conclusion and ignore information that contradicts it. It's the other unmotivated kind of the confirmation bias (UCB) that's far more subtle and difficult to recognize. Confirmation bias doesn't only apply to people who have a horse in the race. Even without a stake in the matter, we are susceptible to this bias.

In order to understand why that is, we need to acknowledge one of the most fundamental priorities of the human brain: conservation of energy. When making sense of the world, we tend to follow a simple rule: use only as much energy as we can get away with. This is why, when called on to deliberate about something, we first tend toward a kind of thinking we can refer to as “intuitive reasoning,” which requires little cognitive power. Intuitive reasoning is a slow and often careful form of thinking, but it's narrow in that it follows only one train of thought without

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

---

considering alternatives. Like motivated reasoning, intuitive reasoning begins with a conclusion and reasons backward.

### The Key to Identifying Counterevidence

In order to recognize counterevidence, we need to tap into a cognitively expensive kind of reasoning called reflective thinking. Keith Stanovich, emeritus professor of applied psychology and human development at the University of Toronto, explains in his meticulous book *Rationality and the Reflective Mind* that reflective thinking consciously and deliberately considers competing scenarios that aren't immediately obvious. While this might sound intimidating, it's actually very straightforward and simple to do. The most direct and helpful way to access this kind of reasoning is just to "consider the opposite."

Considering the opposite really is a simple technique. Ask yourself questions like, "What are some reasons I may be wrong?" Or "What's an alternative explanation for this information?" All you need are a few direct questions that force you to consider alternative scenarios.

The hardest part of considering the opposite is knowing *when* to do it. That's because when we have a model of the world (and we all do), we don't relate to it as our model of the world; we relate to it as reality. It's like wearing a pair of contact lenses that change the way we see everything. At some point you forget you're even wearing contact lenses, and the world just *is*.

That's why we need to be on the lookout for clues. The first clue, which is a signal that you're being guided by the confirmation bias and might need to consider the opposite, is when, in response to some information, you experience intense emotions like anger or anxiety. That is the time to intentionally consider the opposite.

The second clue you should be on the lookout for is confusion. Imagine you find yourself in an argument with a friend with whom you had just canceled coffee plans. He is excoriating you for what he sees as a pattern of not following through on commitments with him. As you pride yourself on generally keeping commitments and honoring your word, you are deeply offended. What he is saying doesn't feel true at all.

As you are debating, he mentions two other times that you had failed to follow through on commitments. Your first reaction is to continue defending yourself, but at that moment, noticing your own confusion, you catch yourself instead. You stop reaching for an explanation and consider the opposite. In that moment, you recognize that the feedback your friend is offering is legitimate counterevidence. He is right. You had failed to follow through on those two

other commitments. You apologize and tell him you will do better next time.

If you want to recognize counterevidence, you have to be actively engaged and willing to remain puzzled, and to consider alternative scenarios more often than most. It takes mental effort, but the payoff can be extraordinary. ●

---

## Update Your Beliefs Incrementally

What good is counterevidence if it doesn't change anything? How do we actually change our minds? It's surprisingly not that simple.

In the face of common, nonoverwhelming evidence, we tend not to change our minds. A large part of the reason is that human beings are prone to dichotomous thinking. We like things to be true or false, black or white. When it comes to facts, this isn't necessarily problematic, but alas it also applies to our opinions. In order to be persuadable, we need to move from thinking in black and white to thinking in shades of gray.

### Thomas Bayes

Thomas Bayes was a theologian who, sometime in the 1740s, took a keen interest in theories of probability. Bayes was interested in inverse probability — because unlike a deck of cards, the world is often highly uncertain. We don't always know exactly what the cause is. Instead, what often shows up in our observations about the world is the effect. For example, upon getting handed four aces, what's the probability the dealer is using a loaded deck?

Any Bayesian analysis begins with an initial belief. Then we encounter objective information. When you combine the two, it gives you an improved belief. By continually updating our belief with new evidence, we can continually improve the accuracy of a belief. If we continue over and over again, the process ultimately will get us progressively more accurate beliefs. If we learn to treat all our beliefs as initial guesses with particular probabilities associated with them, then we can welcome new evidence as an opportunity to get closer to seeing the world the way it actually is.

A practical way to think about Bayes is the "three strikes" rule. It's a simplifying assumption that means to change your mind and get rid of any particular belief that you have confidence in, it'll take three strikes. When you first face counterevidence that isn't overwhelming enough to change your mind, think of it as strike one. This allows you to learn from the information, without needlessly overreacting and getting rid of the belief altogether. If you then find another piece of counterevidence, this is strike

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

---

two. At this point you should have some serious doubts about your belief, but still it's okay to remain unconvinced. But once you're hit with a third piece of counterevidence, now you know it's time to change your mind. ●

---

### Kill Your Darlings

In 2014, Jeff Bezos brought Steve Kessel, one of his most trusted executives, into his office. Kessel ran Amazon's book division, the company's bread-and-butter business category. Bezos wanted Kessel to focus on e-books. At the time, Bezos could see that digital books were poised to threaten physical books, just as digital music had threatened CDs. He was still reeling from Apple's takeover of online music with its iTunes store. His reluctance to enter the market had caused Amazon to miss out on a tremendous opportunity, and Bezos wasn't about to let it happen again. So Bezos told Kessel that his first priority was to build an electronic reading device — a piece of technology that would become the dominant hardware platform for e-books, something innovative and impressive enough to be at the forefront of the movement toward digital books.

It was an ambitious call to action, but Kessel was confused. A foray into digital would undermine Amazon's traditional business, cannibalizing his current division's physical book sales. Bezos was well aware of this conflict of interests. He had been highly influenced by Clayton Christensen's eye-opening book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, which attributes the downfall of great companies to their unwillingness — in the face of disruptive change — to actively go after new opportunities which, in the short term, undermine their core businesses.

Bezos assigned Kessel as the head of Amazon's new digital division and told him he wanted Amazon to own the e-book business.

Killing your darlings entails accelerating your journey to the truth by actively seeking out counterevidence — in an attempt to try to destroy your most favored beliefs.

What are favored beliefs? Put simply, they're ideas about the world that we want to be true. Some of our most favored beliefs take the form of "all is well." We want to believe that all is well with our health, that all is well with our business, that all is well with our marriage, our reputation, our prospects for getting a promotion.

For this reason, when faced with threatening information about our favored beliefs, remaining open-minded is a challenge. Even though the open-minded are open to the possibility that they might be wrong, they're in no hurry.

Ordinary open-mindedness leads to ordinary growth and agility, but as Bezos proved, active open-mindedness leads to extraordinary growth and agility. In 2014 Amazon sold 65 percent of all digital titles in the U.S.

If you're committed to extraordinary growth, then you should be killing your darlings. Go out of your way and try to disprove your own favored belief. If you succeed, then you know that you can discard the belief. If you fail, then you can be more confident that your belief is the right one. If the exercise proves inconclusive, and it often will, you can wait for more evidence, knowing that you've done your duty for now.

Even when we're focused on the higher mission, the thought of killing your darlings will bring up tremendous anxiety — so much so that it can feel outright impossible. Why? It's because you're imagining the worst. Your unconscious mind is whirring with disastrous future scenarios, regardless of the likelihood of these ruinous details coming true. Ironically, imagining the worst can actually be one of the best strategies to dealing with anxiety. In many cases, visualizing the worst-case scenario in detail can lead you to come up with creative, winning solutions that never would have occurred to you otherwise. ●

---

### Taking the Perspectives of Others

In order to lead effectively, we need to be understood. But in order to be understood, we need first to understand. People are complex creatures, and we can't communicate with and influence them effectively if we don't know their interests and positions. Often the way we think they see the world isn't the way they see the world.

In order for us to communicate effectively, especially when we're in leadership positions, we have to take into account the receiver's worldview. We need to take that person's perspective. Perspective taking is an exercise in reflective thinking. Reflective thinking is inherently difficult.

But for leaders there's an additional challenge. While being a follower increases your ability to take perspectives, leadership diminishes your ability. Adam Galinsky, professor of management and organizations at Columbia University, conducted experiments to understand how power affects people's ability to see someone else's point of view.

Galinsky's findings, that power diminishes perspective taking, shouldn't be surprising for two reasons: One, powerful people are the ones with the resources. Because they're less dependent on others, they simply are less incentivized to take other people's perspectives. This stands

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

---

in contrast to someone with low power, who often is very dependent on other people and therefore needs to understand what is going on inside their heads in order to fulfill their needs and get access to resources. Two, powerful people are busy. Because they have so many demands on their time and attention, they don't often stop to take others' perspectives.

Powerful people tend to anchor heavily to their own opinions, expecting that other people share their views. In order to be seen as fair, leaders need to communicate and explain policies in a way that takes into account others' interests and positions. But powerful people don't often take into account what others' needs and interests are.

Yet, even though powerful people are less likely to take perspectives, Galinsky found that when you combine the two, you get synergistic effects. Power galvanizes perspective taking. Powerful people become better at understanding the positions and interests of others, even when compared with low-power people.

All leaders, and people in power, have the ability to excel at understanding what the people around them are thinking, accurately identifying their positions and interests, if they're willing to make it a priority. ●

---

### Avoid Being Too Persuadable

We have to realize that there is a tradeoff involved with being persuadable. Being persuadable enables accuracy, agility and growth — but it would be foolish to pretend that there are no costs to acquiring these benefits. We need to understand those costs so that we can recognize when being persuadable just isn't worth it and when we should, instead, be more decisive.

Being persuadable comes with both explicit and implicit costs. Explicit costs are visible and obvious. For example, let's say you run into some legal trouble. If you decide to pay a lawyer \$300 an hour in order to hear her advice, that costs you real money (\$300, to be exact). But that isn't the only cost. There are also implicit costs — for example, your time and attention. What if instead of paying for a lawyer you decided to research the topic online for free. Even though it doesn't cost you any money, it still costs you one hour of time and attention, scarce resources that also have value. Research shows that people who are persuadable, who care a lot about making the best decision, often forget to take into account these implicit costs.

#### The Danger of Diminishing Marginal Returns

When it comes to the quality of any decision, the incremental value of more information declines over time.

In economics this is referred to as “diminishing marginal returns.” When gathering advice for an upcoming decision you need to make, perhaps you begin by reaching out to a few people. They offer you valuable opinions and insights that you hadn't considered before. As a result, the quality of your decision is likely to go up. But at some point, for every new person you ask, the information is likely to be similar to a previous opinion. You're no longer receiving a lot of new insights. And so the quality of your decision probably won't go up by nearly as much. As you continue to solicit more opinions, the marginal returns for each new opinion begin to get smaller and smaller.

The failure to consider the costs of more analysis in relation to the diminishing marginal benefits is one of the traps that perfectionists tend to fall into.

#### How to Be Decisive Without Being Close-Minded

Remember two things when you want to be decisive: First, you are forgoing optimal accuracy. The benefits of decisiveness are speed, efficiency and action, but they're at the cost of accuracy. There's nothing necessarily wrong with that. The problem occurs when we believe that our decision is still, somehow, the most accurate one possible. Then we fall into overconfidence, dismissing a review of the decision later, in case we need to amend or correct something.

The second thing to remember is that we shouldn't maximize decisiveness any more than we should maximize persuadability. When we become too decisive, we also become close-minded and blind to new information. The world is just too fluctuating and unpredictable for this. Even something that you thought was settled may abruptly change or be overturned. ●

---

### Convert Early

As a leader, if you want to change the world, the quickest and most powerful way is often not to persuade others — it's to be persuaded yourself.

The diffusion of innovations model is most often applied to products, but it works just as well with ideas and behaviors. The model predicts that any innovation progresses through predictable stages. Each stage marks the penetration of the idea into a different group: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.

Although from the way the curve is normally drawn, it looks as though there should be a seamless transition between the groups, there isn't. In fact, the transition between the early adopters and the early majority is

## SUMMARY: PERSUADABLE

notoriously the most problematic. According to the business expert Geoffrey Moore, between these two groups lies a chasm. The reason for this is that early adopters have very different needs than the early majority. Early adopters are visionaries who like taking risks, while early majority members are practical and dislike taking risks. And, perhaps most critically, the early majority make their decisions based on what their peer group is doing.

For any idea to be adopted by the majority of society, it must cross the chasm — meaning it needs to be embraced by the early majority. But in order for the early majority to adopt an idea, a few brave souls have to go first. They need to courageously change their minds, defying the current social norms. This punctures unanimity and allows for nonconformity within that critical early majority group. These early majority champions prove indispensable by serving as a legitimizing reference to their peers. In addition, now we know — thanks to researchers Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler — that this influence affects not only the people closest to them but others in their social network distant degrees away. Ultimately, this creates the possibility of accelerating social movements.

Leaders, of course, have an even greater ability to accelerate social movements by changing their minds. Because of their status, they are more likely than others to transmit social norms in an impactful way. ●

### Take On Your Own Tribe

Since our earliest history, human beings have belonged to tribes. It's how we survived, through cooperation and solidarity. This tendency to be a part of tribes remains with us today.

You didn't consciously choose many of your beliefs and positions. You adopted the belief, not through analysis, but mainly because it was normal and acceptable within your tribe. Conformity toward shared beliefs leads to feelings of attachment and solidarity with fellow tribe members. It's like the glue that holds groups together.

Conformity is an undeniably strong and problematic force because it causes people to believe things without evaluating the reasons. But conformity isn't the only problem inside tribes; there's also polarization. When everyone in the tribe shares the same beliefs, discussions and debates tend to be one-sided, and an echo chamber is created. This type of self-reinforcing dialogue leads people to ever greater certainty about the tribe's ideas. As a result, people in tribes, when left unchecked, often develop

extreme views and become wildly overconfident that these views are true.

We're more likely to listen to people whom we find very similar, preferably fellow members of our own tribes. This presents an opportunity. Instead of futilely badgering people outside of our tribes and telling them "you're wrong," what if we brought change to our *own* tribes by employing a much more persuasive statement, "*we're* wrong."

If ever there was a time to take on your own tribe, it's now. According to journalist Bill Bishop's landmark book, *The Big Sort*, over the past several decades a monumental shift has occurred in the American cultural landscape. We have been sorting ourselves into communities of closely like-minded people to a staggering degree. While in 1976, less than 25 percent of Americans lived in places where the presidential election was a landslide, Bishop points out "by 2004, nearly half of all voters lived in landslide counties."

With ever greater frequency, we're clustering into tightly knit groups of increasingly homogenous beliefs: churches, volunteer groups, civic organizations, clubs and businesses. The result is a vast buzzing echo chamber that has taken over so much of the national discourse.

In this epidemic of homophily, the most powerful thing you can do is to listen to those with whom you disagree, change your mind in the face of good reasons and then help change the minds of others similar to you. Right now, there is no shortage of unreasonable activists committed to pushing their own tribe's cause. What we're sorely in need of are reasonable individuals courageously willing to change their own minds and champion the cause of others. What we need now are persuadables.

Take pride in being persuadable. It's the highest human ideal to try to map our beliefs as closely as possible onto the actual structure of the world. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Persuadable*, you'll also like:

1. ***360 Degrees of Influence* by Harrison Monarth.** Monarth provides advice on how to gain the trust and respect of those around you and how to expand your influence well beyond your immediate environment.
2. ***Persuasion Equation* by Mark Rodgers.** Rodgers reveals what drives decisions and introduces the persuasion equation — a powerful combination of factors proven to speed agreement.
3. ***The 360 Leader* by John C. Maxwell.** According to Maxwell, you can learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization by becoming a 360-degree leader.