

How to cut the red wire

[Business](#)



Everyone has had their hides saved by their little alarm bell at some point in time. You know the one I'm talking about.

.. the one that's caused you to say "no" to something that seemed irresistible because that shrilly annoying bell went off. (There are, of course, people who have no little alarm bell. These are the people who click on Internet pop-ups because they're the 1,000,000th visitor, or get roped into buying timeshares in Iceland because it's a once-in-a-lifetime deal.) However, most people's alarm bells are alive and well, and there's only one way to override them: strong, effective persuasion.

William Shakespeare must have known this, because in his play, *Julius Caesar*, the conspirator Decius uses four persuasive techniques to cut the red wire of Caesar's alarm bell and make him waltz happily off to his own fate. First, Decius carefully influences Caesar by refuting the opposition (in this case, Calphurnia). Earlier, Calphurnia convinces Caesar not to go to the Senate because of a nightmare she had, which Caesar relates to Decius: "Calphurnia here, my wife, stays me at home./ She dreamt tonight she saw my statue,/ Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,/ Did run pure blood, and many lusty Romans/ Came smiling and did bathe their hands in it" (Lines 75-79). When Decius hears this, it is an instance of dramatic irony: Decius, already plotting to kill Caesar, knows that Calphurnia's dream of Caesar's death is a true omen.

He knows that Caesar's intention to stay at home will ruin the plans of the conspirators, so he refutes the interpretation with this: "This dream is all amiss interpreted;/ It was a vision fair and fortunate:/ Your statue spouting

blood in many pipes,/ In which so many smiling Romans bathed,/ Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck / Reviving blood, and that great men shall press/ for tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.” This interpretation turns an originally bloody dream into a celebration of Caesar’s greatness and a representation of the people’s love for him. By appealing to Caesar’s vanity and interpreting the dream as a portent of good, Decius successfully persuades Caesar into his own death. Another way Decius shows his skill in persuasion when he uses emotional appeal to manipulate Caesar’s overlarge ego. In Act II, Scene 2, Decius uses Caesar’s obsession with self-image to his advantage: “ If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper/ ‘ Lo, Caesar is afraid’?” (Lines 100-101).

Here, Decius is telling Caesar that if he does not go to the Senate, they will assume that he is fearful of his wife’s nightmares. This quote shows that Decius can manipulate Caesar’s personality because he knows that Caesar will never accept being seen as a coward. In this way, Decius plays a major role in Caesar’s decision to go to the Senate (and be murdered for it). A third way Decius shows his persuasion skill is by using loaded words. In his very first line, he greets Caesar: “ Caesar, all hail! Good morrow, worthy Caesar. ..” (58), an obvious appeal for Caesar’s favor. Or, in other words, a suck-up. By hailing his intended victim and calling him “ worthy Caesar,” Decius saturates his greeting with words that ensure Caesar will think of him as loyal and trustworthy.

This is the first step Decius takes to get Caesar to listen to him, which Caesar does...and ends up dying for it. The final way Decius persuades Caesar into his own death is by using logical appeal.

Just after he has explained to Caesar about what he thinks the dream meant, and Caesar agrees with him, Decius adds more incentive to go to the Senate: " And know it now, the Senate have concluded / To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar. / If you shall send them word you will not come, / Their minds may change" (93-96). And so Decius has left Caesar with a clear choice: stay home with Calphurnia, be mocked, and lose the opportunity for the crown; or ignore the silly portents of Calphurnia, go to the Senate, and be hailed as a great ruler. Caesar decides on the latter, never imagining that Decius has merely used logical appeal. In conclusion, Decius's skill with persuasion was what eventually killed Caesar.

Even after Caesar was warned, even after he had decided not to go, Decius entered the picture and managed not to laugh as he tugged on Caesar's marionette strings, marching and dancing him off to his own grave. Caesar must have had some doubts. After all, almost everyone has that little alarm bell in their heads that goes off in situations such as these; why shouldn't he? But in the face of fame, fortune, and egotism, Caesar ignored it and was happily led into his own demise.