

A portrait of Lee Carter, a woman with long blonde hair and glasses, smiling. She is wearing a black turtleneck. The background is a gradient of blue and purple.

The Power of Language

Lee Carter

President, Partner, Author,
Mom, Wordgeek

OmnicomHealth

A Conversation With Lee Carter on Persuasion, Communication, and Building Trust

Omnicom Health recently sat down with Lee Carter, President and Partner at maslansky + partners, Omnicom’s Language Strategy firm, to discuss the art of effective communication, the role of emotion in persuasion, and how to craft compelling narratives while building trust. Lee is also the author of *Persuasion: Convincing Others When Facts Don’t Seem to Matter*, co-host of the *HearSay* podcast, and a regular commentator on major news networks.

In a world where businesses are navigating constant change, polarization in perspectives, and heightened competition for attention, the ability to connect with others meaningfully has never been more important. Whether it’s engaging with diverse audiences, fostering trust within teams, or influencing behavior, communication is at the heart of success. Our conversation with Lee delves into how leaders, marketers, and individuals can cut through the noise, build authentic connections, and inspire action by understanding the power of language and personal narratives.



Emma McSherry: Can you tell us a little about yourself and your work at maslansky + partners?

Lee Carter: I’m the President and a Partner at maslansky + partners, Omnicom’s Language Strategy firm. Our approach is based on the idea that “it’s not what you say, it’s what they hear.” We focus on how language can frame and reframe perceptions, changing how people think or act. Whether it’s shifting opinions, building trust, or encouraging someone to engage with a brand, it all comes down to connecting emotionally. I also wrote a book, *Persuasion: Convincing Others When Facts Don’t Seem to Matter*, which emphasizes that effective communication requires active empathy—understanding your audience’s values, beliefs, and emotions before crafting messages they’ll actually hear.

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it’s what they hear.™



Your work focuses on the importance of emotion in communication. Why is this so critical in persuading others?

Many people believe that facts alone will change minds—“If they only knew this fact, they’d agree with me!” But that’s not how humans work. We’re emotional beings, not rational ones. Decisions are driven by feelings, perceptions, and experiences. If we don’t take the time to understand how someone is feeling or how they process information, we’ll miss the mark entirely. For instance, when we overload people with facts or use language that triggers guilt, shame, or anxiety, we create resistance rather than connection. The key is to engage core emotions like trust and curiosity while avoiding defensive reactions.



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That's such an important reminder. What's the biggest mistake people make when trying to persuade someone with a different perspective?

The biggest mistake is jumping in with corrections, judgments, or arguments. Too often, we focus on proving we're right rather than understanding the other person's point of view. This puts people on the defensive. Instead, we need to approach conversations with curiosity, asking why they believe what they do and genuinely listening. Effective persuasion starts with connection, not correction. We also need to recognize that changing someone's mind takes time—it's a process, not an instant result.



What's the biggest misconception people have about persuasion?

Many people believe persuasion is manipulative or impossible, especially when dealing with opposing viewpoints. That's simply not true. Persuasion is about connection, not coercion. It's possible to engage with someone who has a completely different perspective, as long as you approach the conversation with empathy. And remember, empathy doesn't mean endorsement—it simply means understanding where the other person is coming from so you can find common ground.



You've worked with a wide range of leaders across many industries. What qualities make someone a strong communicator?

Strong communicators are persistent, patient, and have thick skin. They understand that changing someone's mind takes time and effort, and they're willing to take risks to get their message across. If you're going to communicate anything that matters, you have to be ready for pushback. They also know their audience deeply—what they value, what they fear, and what motivates them.





What advice would you give to someone trying to break through the noise in today's over-saturated world?



The first step is to remember that people aren't sitting around waiting to hear from you—they're busy, distracted, and overwhelmed. You have just a few seconds to grab their attention, so your message needs to be clear, compelling, and relevant. It's also important to avoid falling in love with your own ideas. Always ask yourself, "What does my audience need to hear?" rather than "What do I want to say?" Messaging that resonates with your audience's needs will always outperform messaging that's simply clever or creative.



It's definitely a noisy world out there, and people's attention is more fragmented than ever. As it pertains to health and the competing information that people are reading, what would your suggestion be? How do you focus on what's correct in today's health environment?

In today's environment, it's crucial for those in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries to acknowledge our position as one of the least-trusted sectors globally. People often listen to our messages with skepticism, particularly because they perceive healthcare as a fundamental right, yet still see high costs associated with it.



When communicating about health-related topics, we must remember to focus not just on what we want to convey, but also on how our audience will receive that information. They are likely to approach our messages with doubt, questioning our motives and the accuracy of our claims. This means we cannot simply present data or facts; we need to frame our communications in a manner that resonates positively with our target audience.

To effectively navigate this landscape, it requires extra effort, discipline, and a genuine curiosity about how our messages might be interpreted. By understanding the skepticism that exists and proactively addressing it, we can foster a more trustworthy dialogue around healthcare that encourages public engagement and better health outcomes.





What's the most surprising insight you've discovered about how people process messages?



The most surprising insight is how resistant most people are to change. We like to think we're open-minded, but the reality is that we tend to cling to our existing beliefs and reject information that doesn't align with them. That's why it's so important to meet people where they are, using language and framing that makes them feel understood rather than judged. For example, when discussing sensitive topics like healthcare or sustainability, we need to be hyperaware of words or phrases that might trigger resistance.

Understanding how people process messages is not just critical for marketing or campaigns but also for how we present ourselves as individuals. Communication isn't just about persuading others—it's also about shaping our own personal narratives.



How can someone craft a personal narrative that resonates with others?



Start by identifying what makes you unique. What's the one thing you want people to remember about you? Then, weave that theme into everything you say and do. For example, I once heard about a woman in investment banking who was told she wasn't "tough enough" for the industry. She started consciously inserting the word "tough" into her conversations, and over time, that became her defining characteristic. The key is to be intentional about the story you're telling and ensure it aligns with how you want to be perceived.



What about situations where others have formed a negative narrative about you? How can you reshape perceptions?



The thing about your reputation that is so interesting is it's one thing about you that you don't own. You can't ignore negative perceptions—they'll persist unless you address them directly. Own your weaknesses, reframe them as strengths, and demonstrate how you're working to improve. For example, if someone thinks you lack attention to detail, acknowledge it and explain the steps you're taking to compensate. Transparency and self-awareness go a long way in rebuilding trust and credibility.





How does purpose tie into communication and persuasion?



Purpose is the North Star that guides everything. Whether you're crafting a marketing campaign or defining your personal narrative, knowing your "why" helps you stay grounded and focused. So, if you know your higher purpose—whatever that is—it's going to help you when the going gets tough, it's going to help other people follow you, and it's going to help you create vision. It gives you a foundation for navigating all sorts of situations that you wouldn't otherwise be able to get through because you've got something bigger than just a task at hand. For me, my purpose is to help people understand what they don't understand. That drives everything I do, from client work to public speaking. When you have a clear purpose, it becomes easier to stay motivated, connect with others, and lead with clarity and resilience.

At the end of the day, the words we choose don't just communicate our ideas—they shape how we're remembered. And when we lead with empathy, purpose, and clarity, we don't just connect—we inspire.

Closing Thoughts

Lee Carter's insights remind us that effective communication isn't about being right—it's about resonating. By leading with empathy, understanding your audience, and staying true to your purpose, you can build trust, change perceptions, and create meaningful connections.

maslansky + partners is Omnicom's Language Strategy firm, specializing in communication that influences perception and drives action. They analyze how audiences interpret messages and use behavioral science to craft language that resonates emotionally. Businesses should bring them in when preparing for a competitive pitch, enhancing client relationships, or tackling communication challenges in crowded, complex, controversial, or high-stakes situations. Their expertise is particularly valuable in differentiating brands, simplifying complex topics, shifting opinions, and ensuring messages are effectively received.



Would you like to learn more about Lee's work or explore how these insights can apply to your organization? Please reach out to Lee Carter at lcarter@maslansky.com for more information.