

Homo sapiens? By no means!

We like to rely on our intellect - and with it, the activity of the forebrain, the prefrontal cortex. This is the part of the brain that developed last. In doing so, we tend to overestimate our rationality. In reality, we are guided much more by our emotions than we might like to admit. That's why your communication should deliberately appeal to emotions as well.

Peter Näf

Far too often, people try to convince others of certain ideas by presenting what they believe are the best arguments. And then they wonder why their audience doesn't respond. This becomes especially clear in sales conversations for products and services or in political communication. And it's equally true when it comes to selling one's own skills in personal marketing - whether for internal positioning within a company or in a job application.

We rationalize emotional decisions

The fact that humans are not only not always rational but often not rational at all is illustrated by psychologist Jonathan Haidt with the image of the elephant and its rider. The elephant - our intuition - makes the primary decision, while the rider - our rationality - justifies it afterward.

Daniel Kahneman describes the same phenomenon by differentiating between System 1 and System 2 when making decisions. The first operates quickly, intuitively, emotionally, and unconsciously; the second, slowly, analytically, and consciously.

In job applications, for example, many people target System 2. They communicate in a factual,

objective, and therefore abstract way. This is not fundamentally wrong, since companies use multi-stage recruitment processes to ensure that rational evaluation criteria aligned with System 2 are applied. They try to neutralize System 1, which is unsuitable for sustainable decisions. But recruiters and hiring managers are human too - and they want to be addressed emotionally.

It's (also) about images

The key, then, is to spark emotions in your counterpart by creating mental images. We do this anyway, but usually unconsciously - and often in a negative way, as I explained in the article «Don't wake sleeping dogs in a job interview». We evoke negative images through negative phrasing, such as: «I'm not quick-tempered».

So how do you create positive images? Through concrete descriptions, by illustrating abstract concepts with examples, and by telling stories of professional success - in short: by being concrete. Only concrete depictions create vivid imagery. Concrete beats abstract. I therefore recommend appealing to both systems described by Kahneman. So, aim your communication at the elephant too. After all, especially in people who make unconscious decisions, it's the elephant who takes the lead - and the rider has little to say.

But when it comes to your own decisions, make sure the rider takes the lead, and that the elephant doesn't rush you into the wrong one.

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