

# Influence

## The Psychology of Persuasion

by Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D.

### Getting to Yes

#### How to Persuade People to Your Point of View

#### QUICK OVERVIEW

Focused on the six major techniques for getting people to say “yes,” Robert Cialdini’s classic, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, is a must-read for businesspeople and entrepreneurs. Grounded in solid research, the book introduces readers to the six key principles of persuasion: reciprocity, consistency and commitment, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity.

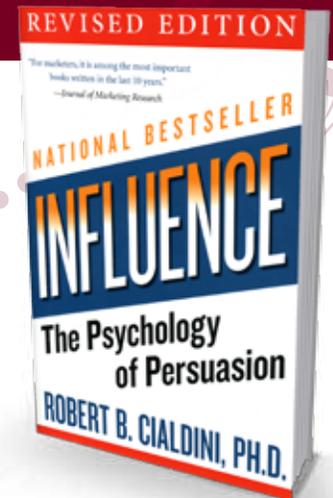
Cialdini explains how to gain compliance from customers, business associates, even friends and family by appealing to the “shortcuts” we create in our brains for easy decision-making. His book is loaded with intriguing stories of social experiments as well as real-life scenarios that demonstrate how the principles of compliance work, how to use them, and how (when faced with unscrupulous businesspeople) to avoid them.

#### APPLY AND ACHIEVE

How often have you been grocery shopping and been offered a free sample by a cheerful store employee pushing a new food product? And how often has the offering of that free sample led you to feel obligated to buy the product? You may not realize what’s going on here, but Cialdini does. The grocery store has tapped into the rule of reciprocity, a key technique in the art of persuasion. When someone gives you something for free or offers you a complimentary service, it is only human nature to feel obligated to return the favor.

This is important to know if you’re an entrepreneur. What better way to both expose your product to your potential customers *and* give them a sense of obligation to buy than by giving them a free sampling of what you have to offer, whether that’s a free wine tasting at your vineyard or a discount card for use at your car wash? As a general rule, Cialdini points out, no one wants to be perceived as the rake who doesn’t return favors, so most of us respond immediately to the rule of reciprocity, feeling obligated to give a service (or money) in return.

Of course, like all six of the rules of persuasion that Cialdini chronicles, reciprocation can be used for ill as well as useful ends. That’s one reason he closes every chapter with



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#### SUCCESS Points

*In this book you'll learn:*

- The six techniques of persuasion and how to use them
- The tricks to avoid being persuaded
- How to influence people to make decisions quickly
- How to make sure you aren't abusing the persuasion techniques

# SUMMARY

## *Influence*

a section on “how to say no.” For example, if you really don’t want or need to purchase the food product you’ve just sampled, Cialdini says, “It is essential to recognize that the requester who invokes the reciprocation rule (or any other weapon of influence) to gain our compliance is not the real opponent.” Rather he says, “the real opponent is the rule.” And Cialdini says that if the rule is being used as a “compliance tactic,” we need not feel obligated to respond in kind. “The rule says that favors are to be met with favors; it does not require that tricks be met with favors.”

**J**ust what are the factors that cause one person to say yes to another person? And which techniques most effectively use these factors to bring about such compliance? I wondered why it is that a request stated in a certain way will be rejected, while a request that asks for the same favor in a slightly different fashion will be successful.

Those who don’t know how to get people to say yes soon fall away; those who do, stay and flourish.

Although there are thousands of different tactics that compliance practitioners employ to produce yes, the majority fall within six basic categories. Each of these categories is governed by a fundamental psychological principle that directs human behavior: consistency, reciprocation, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity.

The evidence suggests that the ever-accelerating pace and informational crush of modern life will make this particular form of unthinking compliance more and more prevalent in the future. It will be increasingly important for the society, therefore, to understand the how and why of automatic influence.

## **WEAPONS OF INFLUENCE**

Automatic, stereotyped behavior is prevalent in much of human action, because in many cases it is the most efficient form of behaving, and in other cases it is simply necessary. You and I exist in an extraordinarily complicated stimulus environment, easily the most rapidly moving and complex that has ever existed on this planet. To deal with it, we need shortcuts. We can’t be expected to recognize and analyze all the aspects in

each person, event, and situation we encounter in even one day. Whatever the reason, it is vital that we clearly recognize one of their properties: They make us terribly vulnerable to anyone who does know how they work.

There is a group of people who know very well where the weapons of automatic influence lie and who employ them regularly and expertly to get what they want. The secret of their effectiveness lies in the way they structure their requests, the way they arm themselves with one or another of the weapons of influence that exist within the social environment. To do this may take no more than one correctly chosen word that engages a strong psychological principle and sets an automatic behavior tape rolling within us.

### ***Reciprocation***

The rule for reciprocation says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us. By virtue of the reciprocity rule, then, we are *obligated* to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like.

A widely shared and strongly held feeling of future obligation made an enormous difference in human social evolution, because it meant that one person could give something (for example, food, energy, care) to another with confidence that it was not being lost. For the first time in evolutionary history, one individual could give away any of a variety of resources without actually giving them away. The result was the lowering of the natural inhibitions against transactions that must be *begun* by one person’s providing personal resources to another. Sophisticated and coordinated systems of aid, gift giving, defense, and trade became possible, bringing immense benefit to the societies that possessed them.

Because there is general distaste for those who take and make no effort to give in return, we will often go to great lengths to avoid being considered one of their number. It is to those lengths that we will often be taken and, in the process, be “taken” by individuals who stand to gain from our indebtedness.

Of course, the power of reciprocity can be found in the merchandising field as well. Although the number of possible examples is large, let’s examine a pair of familiar ones deriving from the “free sample.” As a marketing technique, the free sample has a long and effective history. In most instances, a small amount of the relevant product is provided to potential customers for the stated purpose of allowing them to try it to

see if they like it. And certainly this is a legitimate desire of the manufacturer—to expose the public to the qualities of the product. The beauty of the free sample, however, is that it is also a gift and, as such, can engage the reciprocity rule.

## **Commitment and Consistency**

A study done by a pair of Canadian psychologists uncovered something fascinating about people at the racetrack: Just after placing a bet, they are much more confident of their horse's chances of winning than they are immediately before laying down that bet. Like the other weapons of influence, this one lies deep within us, directing our actions with quiet power. It is, quite simply, our nearly obsessive desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. Once we

## **The Advantages of Public and Written Commitments**

We are truest to our decisions if we have bound ourselves to them publicly.

Many weight-reduction clinics, for instance, understand that often a person's private decision to lose weight will be too weak to withstand the blandishments of bakery windows, wafting cooking scents, and late-night Sara Lee commercials. So they see to it that the decision is buttressed by the pillars of public commitment. They require their clients to write down an immediate weight-loss goal and *show* that goal to as many friends, relatives, and neighbors as possible.

Yet another reason that written commitments are so effective is that they require more work than verbal ones. And the evidence is clear that the more effort that goes into a commitment, the greater is its ability to influence the attitudes of the person who made it.

It appears that commitments are most effective in changing a person's self-image and future behavior when they are active, public, and effortful.

have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Those pressures will cause us to respond in ways that justify our earlier decision.

The act of making a final decision—in this case, of buying a ticket—had been the critical factor. Once a stand had been taken, the need for consistency pressured these people to bring what they felt and believed into line with what they had already done. They simply convinced themselves that they had made the right choice and, no doubt, felt better about it all.

Psychologists have long understood the power of the consistency principle to direct human action. There is no question about it. The drive to be (and look) consistent constitutes a highly potent weapon of social influence, often causing us to act in ways that are clearly contrary to our own best interests.

To understand why consistency is so powerful a motive, it is important to recognize that in most circumstances consistency is valued and adaptive. Inconsistency is commonly thought to be an undesirable personality trait. The person whose beliefs, words, and deeds don't match may be seen as indecisive, confused, two-faced, or even mentally ill.

On the other side, a high degree of consistency is normally associated with personal and intellectual strength. It is at the heart of logic, rationality, stability, and honesty.

Most of the time, we will be better off if our approach to things is well laced with consistency. Without it our lives would be difficult, erratic, and disjointed.

## **Social Proof**

The tendency to see an action as more appropriate when others are doing it normally works quite well. As a rule, we will make fewer mistakes by acting in accord with social evidence than contrary to it. Usually, when a lot of people are doing something, it is the right thing to do. This feature of the principle of social proof is simultaneously its major strength and its major weakness. Like the other weapons of influence, it provides a convenient shortcut for determining how to behave but, at the same time, makes one who uses the shortcut vulnerable to the attacks of profiteers who lie in wait along its path.

## Liking

Few people would be surprised to learn that, as a rule, we most prefer to say yes to the requests of someone we know and like. What might be startling to note, however, is that this simple rule is used in hundreds of ways by total strangers to get us to comply with *their* requests.

Actor McLean Stevenson once described how his wife tricked him into marriage: “She said she liked me.” Although designed for a laugh, the remark is as much instructive as humorous. The information that someone fancies us can be a bewitchingly effective device for producing return liking and willing compliance. So, often in terms of flattery or simple claims of affinity, we hear positive estimation from people who want something from us.

We are phenomenal suckers for flattery. Although there are limits to our gullibility—especially when we can be sure that the flatterer is trying to manipulate us—we tend, as a rule, to believe praise and to like those who provide it, oftentimes when it is clearly false.

Because of its effect on liking, familiarity plays a role in decisions about all sorts of things, including the politicians we elect. It appears that in an election booth voters often choose a candidate merely because the name seems familiar. Often, we don’t realize that our attitude toward something has been influenced by the number of times we have been exposed to it in the past.

## Authority

Information from a recognized authority can provide us a valuable shortcut for deciding how to act in a situation.

This paradox is, of course, the same one that attends all major weapons of influence. In this instance, once we realize that obedience to authority is mostly rewarding, it is easy to allow ourselves the convenience of automatic obedience.

A better understanding of the workings of authority influence should help us resist it. Yet there is a perverse complication—the familiar one inherent in all weapons of influence: We shouldn’t want to resist altogether, or even most of the time. Generally, authority figures know what they are talking about. Physicians, judges, corporate executives, legislative leaders, and the like have typically gained their positions because of superior knowledge and judgment. Thus, as a rule, their directives offer excellent counsel.

The trick is to be able to recognize without much strain or vigilance when authority promptings are best followed and when they should be resisted.

Posing two questions to ourselves can help enormously to accomplish this trick. The first is to ask, “Is this authority truly an expert?” The question is helpful because it focuses our attention on a pair of crucial pieces of information: the authority’s credentials and the relevance of those credentials to the topic at hand. By orienting in this simple way toward the *evidence* for authority status, we can avoid the major pitfalls of automatic deference.

Suppose, though, we are confronted with an authority we determine is a relevant expert. Before submitting to authority influence, it would be wise to ask a second simple question: “How truthful can we expect the expert to be here?” Authorities, even the best informed, may not present their information honestly to us. Therefore we need to consider their trustworthiness in the situation. In fact, most of the time, we do. We allow ourselves to be much more swayed by experts who seem to be impartial than by those who have something to gain by convincing us; and this has been shown by research to be true around the world. By wondering how an expert stands to benefit from our compliance, we give ourselves another safety net against undue and automatic influence. Even knowledgeable authorities in a field will not persuade us until we are satisfied that their messages represent the facts faithfully.

## Scarcity

The idea of potential loss plays a large role in human decision making. In fact, people seem to be more motivated by the thought of losing something than by the thought of gaining something of equal value.

The evidence, then, is clear. Compliance practitioners’ reliance on scarcity as a weapon of influence is frequent, wide-ranging, systematic, and diverse. Whenever such is the case with a weapon of influence, we can feel assured that the principle involved has notable power in directing human action. In the instance of the scarcity principle, that power comes from two major sources. The first is familiar. Like the other weapons of influence, the scarcity principle trades on our weakness for shortcuts. The weakness is, as before, an *enlightened* one. In this case, because we know that the things that are difficult to possess are typically better than those that are easy to possess, we can often use an item’s

## Want an Edge? Pay Attention to How You Look

Although it is generally acknowledged that good-looking people have an advantage in social interaction, recent findings indicate that we may have sorely underestimated the size and reach of that advantage.

Research has shown that we automatically assign to good-looking individuals such favorable traits as talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence. Furthermore, we make these judgments without being aware that physical attractiveness plays a role in the process.

availability to help us quickly and correctly decide on its quality. Thus, one reason for the potency of the scarcity principle is that, by following it, we are usually and efficiently right.

In addition, there is a unique, secondary source of power within the scarcity principle: As opportunities become less available, we lose freedoms; and we *hate* to lose the freedoms we already have. This desire to preserve our established prerogatives is the centerpiece of psychological reactance theory, developed by psychologist Jack Brehm to explain the human response to diminishing personal control. According to the theory, whenever free choice is limited or threatened, the need to retain our freedoms makes us desire them (as well as the goods and services associated with them) significantly more than previously. So when increasing scarcity—or anything else—interferes with our prior access to some item, we will *react against* the interference by wanting and trying to possess the item more than before.

This sort of response is typical of individuals who have lost an established freedom and is crucial to an understanding of how psychological reactance and scarcity work on us. When our freedom to have something is limited, the item becomes less available, and we experience an increased desire for it. However, we rarely recognize that psychological reactance has caused us to want the item more; all we know is that we *want* it. Still, we need to make sense of our desire for the item, so we begin to assign it positive qualities to justify the desire. After all, it is natural to suppose that if one feels drawn to something, it is because of the merit of the thing.

Not only do we want the same item more when it is scarce, we want it most when we are in competition for it.

## INSTANT INFLUENCE

Very often in making a decision about someone or something, we don't use all the relevant available information; we use, instead, only a single, highly representative piece of the total. And an isolated piece of information, even though it normally counsels us correctly, can lead us to clearly stupid mistakes—mistakes that, when exploited by clever others, leave us looking silly or worse.

We have been exploring several of the most popular of the single pieces of information that we use to prompt our compliance decisions. They are the most popular prompts precisely because they are the most reliable ones, those that normally point us toward the correct choice. That is why we employ the factors of reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity so often and so automatically in making our compliance decisions. Each, by itself, provides a highly reliable cue as to when we will be better off saying yes than no. We are likely to use these lone cues when we don't have the inclination, time, energy, or cognitive resources to undertake a complete analysis of the situation. Where we are rushed, stressed, uncertain, indifferent, distracted, or fatigued, we tend to focus on less of the information available to us. When making decisions under these circumstances, we often revert to the rather primitive but necessary single-piece-of-good-evidence approach. All this leads to a jarring insight: With the sophisticated mental apparatus we have used to build world eminence as a species, we have created an environment so complex, fast-paced, and information-laden that we must increasingly deal with it in the fashion of the animals we long ago transcended.

More and more frequently, we will find ourselves in the position of the lower animals—with a mental apparatus that is unequipped to deal thoroughly with the intricacy and richness of the outside environment. Unlike the animals, whose cognitive powers have always been relatively deficient, we have created our own deficiency by constructing a radically more complex world. But the consequence of our new deficiency is the same as that of the animals' long-standing one. When making a decision, we will less frequently enjoy the luxury of a fully considered analysis of the total situation but will revert increasingly to a focus on a single, usually reliable feature of it.

## ➔ ACTION STEPS

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by putting what you've learned into action. Here are a few questions and thoughts to help you get started.

1. What free samples could you offer prospects to sway them to purchase from you?
2. Could you add a "member benefit" to your offering that encourages repeated, consistent purchases?
3. Has there been a time when you've allowed social proof to sabotage your success?
4. People are conditioned to trust those with authority or expert status. How can you position yourself as an expert in your field?
5. The last time you purchased a car or a home, did the salesperson employ the scarcity tactic by telling you how many others wanted the same thing you did?
6. How frequently do you make decisions based on one piece of information? Before committing, consider all the pertinent pros and cons.
7. The next time you're faced with a decision, stop and consider how external (and perhaps irrelevant) evidence is affecting your decision.

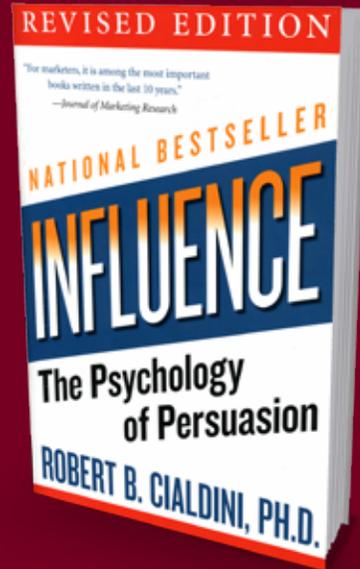
## Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of **Influence**, you may also want to check out:

**YES! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive** by Noah J. Goldstein, Robert B. Cialdini, Steve J. Martin

**Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking** by Malcolm Gladwell

**NLP: The New Technology of Achievement** edited by Steve Andreas and Charles Faulkner



## About the Author

Social psychologist **Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D.**, is Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University, where he has also been named Distinguished Graduate Research Professor. Cialdini is president of Influence at Work, an international training and consulting company based on his groundbreaking research into the science of influence and how to apply that science ethically in business. His clients have included Google, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Merrill Lynch, Pfizer, IBM and GlaxoSmithKline.

Cialdini received his Ph.D. in social psychology from the University of North Carolina and completed additional postdoctoral study in social psychology at Columbia University. His book *Influence* has sold more than 2 million copies worldwide and has been published in 26 languages. *CEO Read* lists *Influence* in their "100 Best Business Books of All Time."

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