



IN*f*LUENCE

follow me

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QUESTIONABLE ETHICS. UNADULTERATED GREED. BOTH PLAYED LARGE ROLES IN BUSINESS SCANDALS THAT SPLASHED ACROSS FRONT PAGES AND LED NIGHTLY TV NEWSCASTS DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS. THE SUBTLE POWER OF INFLUENCE WAS ALSO AT WORK IN THOSE SCANDALS.

Robert Cialdini says that even small changes in corporate offices can grow to have enormous effects. Cialdini is a Regents Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University and an expert on the power of influence.

Cialdini understands the dynamic. He has 30-plus years' experience in the field of persuasion, compliance and negotiation. The publication of his signature book, *Influence*, has made him one of the most sought-after speakers in the United States and in many parts of the world. With more than half a million copies sold, the book comfortably rides on the best-seller list of corporate and organizational communication "must-read" tomes.

To better appreciate the power of influence, Cialdini provides examples. He says to think about American soldiers and pilots who were captured and held prisoners of war during the Korean War. Now think about the many miscreant American executives who grabbed the headlines during the Enron, Global Crossing, Tyco, and other recent corporate scandals. Do these people have anything in common?

And what do they, in turn, have in common with a restaurant owner who wants to improve his reservations process and yield rate?

Their commonality is "consistency," one of the six basic principles of influence, as uncovered and taught by the ASU psychologist.

After the Korean War, a high percentage of American prisoners were found to have collaborated with the enemy in some way. Yet their behavior was not a result of physical torture, according to Cialdini. The prisoners were subjected to some very skillful uses of two key principles of influence.

The Korean captors began their work on prisoners based on the premise that Americans try to behave consistently with what they've said and done. They first asked prisoners to agree with seemingly innocuous statements, such as "The United States is not perfect."

Once a prisoner had agreed to that statement, he might be asked to explain some of the ways in which his country is not perfect. He was then asked to write down those ways and sign his name to the document. Not wanting to become inconsistent in their actions or words, prisoners would comply with the request.

This request, and the ones that came after, would have been followed by a "public" reading. The prisoner would be told to read his list of imperfections to his fellow prisoners. They, in turn, would be more likely to also agree to imperfections in the United States because one of their fellow prisoners had already cited them. At that point, these prisoners succumbed to the principle of social proof. Humans rely heavily on the people around us for cues on how to think, feel, and act.

Eventually, the small step of consistently acknowledging imperfections, and the strong need for social proof, would lead to collaboration and charges of aiding and abetting the enemy.

Turning to more recent times, Cialdini cites a parallel example.

A consistency of behavior usually exists among corporate executives and their subordinates. During recent scandals, that consistency, when combined with the principle of social proof, led to disaster. It became acceptable among some organizations for individuals to falsify

records, receive personal gain from malfeasance, and ignore, completely, ethical codes of conduct that other employees faithfully followed. The power of influence allowed small changes in corporate offices to have enormous effects. "The first step may seem trivial, just as acknowledging that America is not perfect may seem trivial," Cialdini explains. "But what may initially seem like isolated and exceptional ethical lapses can grow to infect an entire organization."

Social proof operates not just among individuals, but also among organizations. The Enron and Global Crossing scandals provided social proof to members of the lucrative fund industry. They perceived that they could ignore the commonly accepted rules of ethical behavior.

Cialdini links the principles of consistency and social proof to the potential downfall of ethical behavior in business organizations. "The power of influence is so strong that leaders need to be ruthless in rooting out dishonesty and deception in the way that the organization deals with its customers, clients, regulators, suppliers, employees, and vendors," he says. "Leaders who tolerate anything less will pay a heavy price, because employees tend to ascend or tumble to the level of their leaders."

On the flip side, consistency, according to Cialdini, can be extremely effective in setting up good rules for people to follow. "The key," he says, "is to prompt them to make an initial public commitment that is consistent with the rule."

This leads to the restaurant owner and his dilemma.

The restaurant was having problems with large numbers of patrons who neither honored their reservations nor called to cancel them. Rather than take a dogmatic approach to solving the problem, the owner came up with a simple yet profoundly effective solution.

He had the receptionist change her usual request when taking a reservation over the telephone. Instead of saying, "Please call if you have to change your plans," she rephrased the statement as a question. She began asking, "Will you call if you change your plans?"

The question caused the patron to commit to calling if he or she could not keep or needed to change their reservation. The no-show rate at the restaurant fell from 30 percent to 10 percent.

Part of the success of Cialdini's book and his rise as a top-rated international keynote speaker can be attributed to the simplicity of the arguments. There are six easy-to-understand principles of influence:

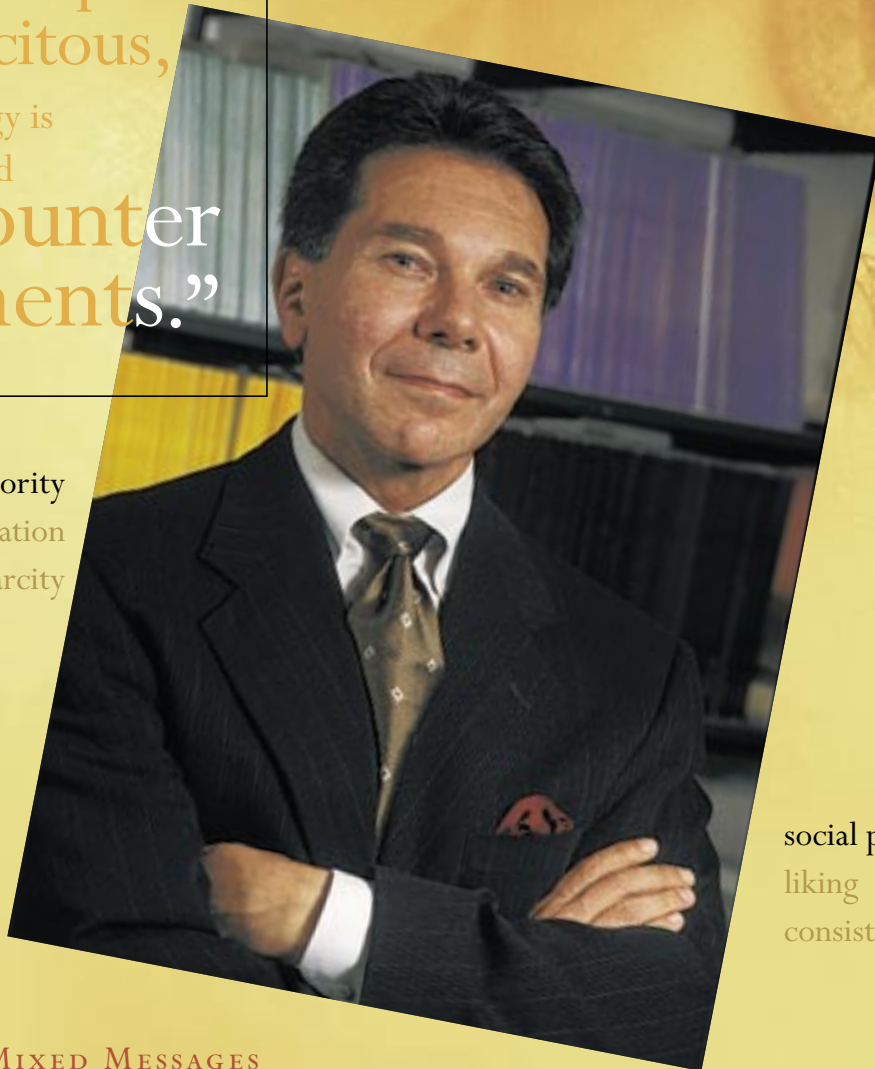
1. Reciprocation
2. Consistency and Commitment
3. Social Proof
4. Authority
5. Liking (the person who is trying to influence us)
6. Scarcity

A portion of the success is also linked to the ASU researcher's eureka moment — a Eureka vacuum cleaner moment.

Cialdini is a self-professed sucker for people selling things he neither needs nor wants. Door-to-door salespeople seem to have his number. Based on these experiences and a houseful of unused items,

“If we want people to resist an argument we think is **deceptive or duplicitous**, the best strategy is appropriate and accessible **counter arguments.**”

authority
reciprocation
scarcity



social proof
liking
consistency and commitment

AVOIDING MIXED MESSAGES

Robert Cialdini continues to study the power of influence and persuasion. The ASU psychologist's work has applications in many fields. His studies reveal answers and provide guidance to those looking for solutions to major, national problems such as littering. ✓ Cialdini describes research that he and colleagues conducted. The results show how some techniques for stopping littering actually endorse, and can increase, littering. The findings were published as part of an article in the *Journal of Interpretation Research*. ✓ Cialdini used the famous Iron Eyes Cody public service announcement as a prime example. In the ad, people are seen tossing bags of garbage from their cars along the roadside. Tears roll down the face of a regal looking Native American chief as he witnesses the trashing of the environment. ✓ In his article, Cialdini notes that this interpretive message was designed to “encourage desirable conduct in an audience by describing shameful levels of undesirable conduct.” But the ad actually may be “sending a mixed message to its audience.” ✓ Specifically, if communicators show a littered environment scene to an audience, with the admonition that “littering is harming our environment,” the audience is actually seeing a scene that validates their belief that “everyone litters.” ✓ To validate their idea, the researchers took a look at littering activity taking place in two public garages. One was filled with litter. The other was relatively clean. They found that there was more littering taking place in the littered environment than in the clean environment, and that this pattern was accentuated when subjects' attention was drawn to the state of the environment. ✓ The recommendation from the findings is helpful to communicators who are working to develop appeal campaigns. They should focus their message on the desired outcome rather than the existing problem. Wilma Mathews

Cialdini developed a theory of universally successful sales principles. The principles are effective regardless of the product or service being offered.

To develop his theory, Cialdini went to work. Over the course of 15 years, he enrolled in numerous sales training programs. He learned how to sell vacuum cleaners, real estate, cars, and even portrait photography.

With the six principles clearly defined, Cialdini's next move was to present his research. The result was *Influence*. The book brought an unexpected career turn for the author. Cialdini went from professor to keynote speaker. "It changed my life," he says. "I went from being an academic and staying close to campus to a regular speaker in business."

The change has given Cialdini ample access to sales and advertising people. "These people fight the influence wars every day. They know how the persuasion process works in real life terms."

Cialdini likes to compare notes with influence users. As a result, he is able to further refine his principles and enrich the number and types of examples.

In the *principle of liking*, Cialdini notes that actually liking the person (such as the salesperson) can have more to do with the sale than the qualities of the item or service being sold. For example, research on Tupperware Home Demonstration parties showed that guests are three times more likely to purchase products because they like the hostess than because they like the products.

Similarly, potential donors will often pledge funds to a worthy cause if they have been asked by someone they know, like, or respect. Adding to the mix is the *principle of social proof* or *social validation*. Potential donors will often pledge funds because the people they know also are donors.

The *principle of authority*, once clearly defined, has needed adjustment. The trends toward teams and matrix management continue to dilute the more formal hierarchical business model.

Normally, people are more willing to follow directions of someone to whom they attribute relevant authority or expertise. For example, one study showed that three times as many pedestrians were willing to follow a man into traffic against the red light, when that man was dressed as an authority in a business suit and tie.

Unfortunately, in teams, there is no clear definition of who is the boss. Team players have to be more resourceful when it comes to influencing their colleagues.

The *principle of reciprocity* is commonly referred to as "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." This principle is especially beneficial in negotiations. If one side makes an effort to listen to all arguments and points, the other side will, in turn, feel the obligation to reciprocate by listening as well.

Non-profit firms have learned that reciprocity works especially well in soliciting donations. A straightforward solicitation may bring in an 18 percent response. But a solicitation which includes an unexpected gift, such as address labels or a bookmark, can double the response rate.

Scarcity is the sixth principle. Scarcity is readily used and easily recognized by anyone in the retail or wholesale business. People find objects and opportunities more attractive to the degree that they are rare, scarce, or decreasing in availability.

When General Motors announced they would no longer manufacture Oldsmobiles, consumers did not stop buying the brand. Instead, droves of buyers poured into showrooms across the country to buy Oldsmobiles.

Jewelry stores often offer a "limited number" of diamond bracelets at a low price. The stores fill with people demanding the item.

Cialdini cites the example of an American beef importer. The importer informed his customers that, because of weather conditions in Australia, there was likely to be a shortage of Australian beef. His orders doubled. The importer then reassured his customers that this information came from his company's contacts with the Australian National Weather Service. His orders increased by 600 percent.

"In situations characterized by uncertainty, presenting these unique advantages as what stands to be lost by a failure to take action is more persuasive than emphasizing what stands to be gained by taking the action," Cialdini explains.

Now that the powers and principles of persuasion are clearly defined and understood, the ASU psychologist has turned his focus to understanding how to resist those powers. He calls them *devious persuasion*. He says there is practical value in identifying successful resistance tactics.

Cialdini works from the premise that people are daily subjected to an avalanche of persuasive appeals, mostly from marketers and advertisers. He thinks that there should be ways to create resistance to an objectionable form of persuasive appeal—the sort that can be considered dishonest and thereby illegitimate.

Deceptive persuasion can be delivered by dishonest message content, such as exaggeration, omission, or lies with statistics. There is also dishonest message delivery, such as having actors appear in commercials as physicians, attorneys, or other authority figures.

"If we want people to resist an argument we think is deceptive or duplicitous, the best strategy is appropriate and accessible counter arguments," Cialdini wrote in a publication of the American Psychological Society. To create a counter argument advertisement, Cialdini suggested tactics that would "call into question the opponent's facts and trustworthiness." These tactics include "mnemonic links to the opponent's ads, a parasitic device which essentially infects the opponents' message by linking its memory and impact to the counter ad; and ridicule to satirize the opponent's ads."

As example, Cialdini cites an anti-smoking campaign which satirized the original "Marlboro Man" advertisements. The counter ads depicted cowboys coughing, wheezing, and displaying other health symptoms and de-bunked the myth that smoking is linked to male strength and virility. "The more we can puncture an argument," Cialdini says, "the less truthful it is."

Cialdini's greatest gratification may come from knowing that his exhaustive work on influence, persuasion, and counter persuasion may lead to significant behavior changes among entire groups of people, especially young, impressionable teens.

"We need to puncture their sense of invulnerability," Cialdini says, "and eliminate the 'it won't happen to me' syndrome that causes young people to engage in dangerous activities and behaviors such as drinking and driving or having unprotected sex."

In his book, Cialdini notes that 95 percent of people are followers and only five percent are leaders. Considering that imbalance, the power of persuasion becomes obvious. It is easier to understand how the principles of persuasion and influence can affect how we make the vast majority of decisions on what to buy, how to behave, who to help, who not to help, or even for whom to vote.

CIALDINI IS A REGENTS PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY. HIS BOOK, *INFLUENCE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION*, HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO 11 LANGUAGES. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT ROBERT CIALDINI, PH.D., DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES, 480.965.3326. SEND E-MAIL TO ROBERT.CIALDINI@ASU.EDU