

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF

INFLUENCE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION

by Robert B. Cialdini

Who is Robert Cialdini

Robert Cialdini is a professor of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University. He is best known for his book 'Influence' that was listed by Fortune Magazine in their list of '75 Smartest Business Books'. Dr Cialdini is a PhD holder with over three decades of experience in research. As an impeccable expert in the matters of persuasion, negotiation and compliance, he has delved deep into enigmatic mysteries that explain why people behave the way they do. As the most cited social psychologist, Robert has explained how people use psychological weapons to influence others in their day-to-day life through his book: **Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion**.

Preston and Stig's General Thoughts on the Book

I've always been under the impression that everyone worked in sales and marketing. Whether a father is telling his son to eat vegetables to build muscles, or the car salesman working towards a commission, the game is the same. One way or the other, we want to influence other people around us. I think all business people will find it extremely useful to read this book. However, I feel that the true benefit from reading this book is not to learn how we can influence other people, but more importantly how we might be influenced by others. I strongly believe that the best way to become successful is through authenticity and only be influenced by people you admire. For me "Influence" did just that.

Preface

This book should be included in every seminar and course that teaches about sales, marketing and psychology. Most importantly, Robert has done a splendid job at explaining how the power of persuasion works for and against people in different situations. If you've ever wondered how big companies succeed in luring customers, you simply can't miss this book. Robert's clear and honest accounts that explain numerous scenarios are both witty and concise. Not only will you learn how to use the principles of persuasion to your advantage, you will also be able to defend yourself against such tactics.

Chapter 1: WEAPONS OF INFLUENCE

This section deals with a very simple principle which states that people simply need a reason to do something. We have automatic patterns embedded in us; thereby making us react differently to different circumstances. This doesn't apply only to animals, but also humans. The author starts the book by talking about a mother turkey that protects her offspring automatically, by traits that revolve around a sense of smell and touch. For example, scientists discovered that a mother turkey would care about her offspring only when it uttered a 'Cheep cheep' sound, thus making it obvious that the turkey was reacting in an automatic pattern. One might think that we are entering dangerous territory when acting in automatic patterns, but as Cialdini explain it is very understandable. We live in a very complex

world, and don't have the capacity to deal with all the information and signals we get from other people and our environment, and we therefore fall into the trap of using shortcuts.

A principle on human behavior states that we are more likely to get someone to grant us a favor if we provide a reason. For example, if you were to stand in a line to get some printouts and find that there are five people ahead of you, it might be tricky to get your job done before anyone else. If you simply state, "May I get my printouts done?" you might not succeed; however, if you were to say, "May I get my printouts done because I'm in a rush" you will have a better chance of succeeding. Why? Note that the operative word here is 'because', and once you give someone a reason to help you, you will be able to get things done pretty easily.

Chapter 2: RECIPROCATION – The Old Give and Take...and Take

The second principle asserts that we need to repay another person if we have received something from that person. No, this isn't about being kind to our fellow human beings, but it's an inherent human attitude. According to the principle of reciprocity, we actually feel obliged to return favors whenever someone helps us because we feel indebted and uncomfortable if we don't. This is true even in situations where you don't like the person whose favor you feel obligated to reciprocate. In many situations when we feel indebted we even feel that we should return bigger favors.

This principle can be proven by taking several examples that occur in our daily lives. For instance, you might find yourself giving extra tips to a waitress who has been very kind to you. Or, you might feel obligated to donate to a charity when they send you a gift, even if the gift is worthless. Similarly, you will definitely help your colleague if he/she has been considerate towards you.

For years, marketers have constantly made money by offering free samples to people. If you get a free sample from a company, you will probably feel like purchasing more products from the company, simply because you feel obligated to do so. This rule is very powerful and often produces a 'Yes' from an individual even they are not really interested. Simply put, marketers use this rule because it becomes very difficult for you to refuse whatever they're selling to you.

As a customer, you need to remember that you aren't up against the marketer or any other individual who's trying to persuade you, but you're actually against the very rule of reciprocity. You can take several steps to prevent the rule from abusing you. So, if you see signs of insincere reciprocity, where a person tries to persuade you to buy his product, you need to avoid taking his free sample in the first place, thereby avoiding feelings of confrontation and guilt.

Chapter 3: COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY - Hobgoblins of the Mind

The third principle revolves around our desire to be consistent with whatever we have done already. Once we commit to something, whether it's verbal or written, it means that we have made a choice and taken a stand, and though we may encounter personal pressures that might sway us away from our commitment we find ways and respond in a manner that justifies our previous decision. Commitment and consistency are desirable traits that we all try to live up to, and it is unnatural for us to deviate from that. Actually this even becomes worse if we have made a given statement or action to more people.

Once we make up our minds about something, our stubborn consistency offers several luxuries where we don't really have to think about the issue anymore, because we have made a decision already. Since we don't have to think deeply about solid facts that sometimes prove our beliefs otherwise, and since we aren't inclined to spend our mental energy and think about the positives and negatives of a certain situation, we choose the easy route of automatic, blind consistency.

Let's take an example of people who bet on horse races. Normally, they tend to be uncertain about the race's outcome before they buy the tickets. However, once they take a stand and buy the ticket, which is a commitment, they tend to become positive and believe that their horse is going to win. They won't be inclined to think about the pros and cons, but they are simply going to go ahead because they made the commitment. At this point of time we feel more certain about our decision than ever before.

Similarly, if you buy a sample from a company, you will feel obligated to buy the actual product from them because you've already made a commitment. This rule applies not only in our professional lives but in our personal lives too, where you find it tough to sway from a decision once you've already made.

Chapter 4: SOCIAL PROOF – Truths are us

The fourth principle deals with 'Social Proof' where we steer towards a herd mentality. We believe that our behavior is apt depending on how many other people react to it, which simply means that our decisions are based on actions taken by others.

As humans, we sometimes tend to mimic others around us. For example, if you see hordes of people staring at the sky, you're bound to do the same, even if you don't know why you're actually doing it. Let's take another example. If you see your colleagues working hard, clocking over-time every week, you're probably going to mimic their behavior, even if you don't really need to stay late. While some of us tend to think and do things our way, many people don't want to think and end up doing something out of the ordinary. We usually give so much importance to others that our behavior is consistently altered according to various situations.

So why do we behave according to the actions taken by others? Generally, we think that we are going to commit fewer mistakes by doing what others are doing because we instantaneously think that if others are doing it, it's definitely the right thing to do. This principle of the social proof has its merits but on the other hand it has its disadvantages too. Just like the other principles used to influence others, the social proof provides an easy shortcut if you're worried about making decisions; however, it could make you vulnerable to people who use this principle to their advantage.

Advertisers, for instance, love this principle since it really helps them create a buzz around a product that might not be selling well. This is exactly why you see some products projected as the 'largest-selling' or 'fastest-moving', making you feel that it's exceptionally great.

Another condition that works well with social proof is the uncertainty. For example, victims involved in road accidents don't receive help from others who pass by unless and until they ask for help. Since other people do not stop and offer, the group thinking is that nothing is wrong. Studies show that the more uncertain we are about how to react, the more likely we are to follow the actions of the crowd or other people.

Chapter 5: LIKING – The Friendly Thief

The fifth principle deals with the concept of likeability that states that we are more likely to be influenced by people we like. Though we see this rule used generally by people we meet every day, it is startling to see how advertisers and marketers use this simple rule to lure in customers. Just think of Tupperware's concepts where someone is inviting people over to their house for "Tupperware Parties". Since you are invited by your friend, and you know that your friend can make money, or lose face dependent on your decision to buy the product, you most often end up buying products if you need them or not. The reason is simply that you like your friend. So what exactly makes us like someone?

Physical attractiveness – People usually love celebrities and though some of them aren't really talented, they still manage to get hordes of fans dying to talk to them. Why? Well, it's because of their physical attractiveness and once people get attracted to them, they simply want to connect with them.

Similarity – We usually tend to work and gel with people who are similar to us, don't we? Even at work, we generally avoid people who we think are dissimilar to us. So when we establish a similarity with someone, we tend to like them because it feels like it's the right thing to do.

Compliments – No matter how much we deny that compliments don't work, most of us fall for them. Of course, we all love compliments because it makes us feel good, so if we talk to people who are sweet and shower compliments on us, we begin to establish a closer, better connection with them. However, on the other hand, this could backfire for people who use this extensively by complimenting someone repeatedly. In such cases, it might not work because everyone recognizes a phony.

Contact – Simply put, we usually like things that seem familiar to us, instead of taking up something that's unknown. In the book, Dr. Cialdini talks extensively how people of similar race or gender are more likely to help each other out because they have a sense of familiarity to that person.

Cooperation – As humans, we love to connect with people who seem to be very cooperative, right? For example, if you're at work, you will more likely work with a person who cooperates and helps you with your work as opposed to a person who tends to think outside the box.

Conditioning and Association – Although this principle is a general one, it governs both the positive and negative connections. The long story cut short, we usually associate ourselves with positive events and avoid negative ones.

Chapter 6: AUTHORITY – Directed Deference

The sixth principle is regarding authority that states that people feel a sense of obligation or duty towards people in positions of authority. As kids, we are taught to be obedient and thanks to that advice, we generally follow authority figures. In addition, we are taught that while obedience is right, disobedience is a bad behavior and is therefore wrong. It's no wonder that we listen to people in positions of authority, including policemen, CEOs, managers and others.

Most people respect and follow authority to a great extent. We want to follow the direction shown by people who hold powerful positions and though this might not be right all the time, it's something that happens automatically, just like other automatic patterns embedded in us. People believe in the expertise of leaders who dominate in their

respective fields. In addition, many of us are easily impressed with people who dress smartly and drive expensive cars because they present a confident personality. Such factors not only lend credibility to that individual but it also makes us believe in whatever they say, even if they aren't very knowledgeable.

As always, marketers often use this ploy through their celebrity endorsements that lure their customers. For example, let's assume that there are two companies that are selling a particular product or service. While one company claims that it's the best, you don't see any kind of proof that validates their claims, but on the other hand, the other company has glowing testimonials from authority figures that are very impressive. In addition, you also see the authority figures claiming that they use the product themselves. Now, which company would you choose? Most of us flock to the website that's filled with discussions and reports made by people in authority, thereby proving, we respect authority.

While there is very often a good reason to listen to authorities since their skills have put them in that unique position, we should question their advice for what it is. The first thing to ask yourself is whether their credentials are biasing your opinion. For example, we might listen to a talented actor give his opinion about the quality of coffee. As talented as the actors might be, his credentials should give you no reason to trust his ability to understand the quality of coffee better than anyone else. The second thing you need to ask yourself when listening to an authority, is whether or not that person stands to reap personal benefits. It might be a commercial with a doctor branding a new drug. Though his credentials justify him commenting on the drug, the fact that he is profiting from the sale of the drug, should be sufficient for you to be skeptical of the advice.

Chapter 7: SCARCITY – The Rule of the Few

The seventh principle states that people react quickly when they sense scarcity. Don't we all tend to buy products quickly when we see the product listed as, "limited...Hurry!!!" Somehow, this trick makes people feel as though they are missing out on something important. According to Dr Cialdini, things become more attractive when their availability is limited, thereby making people buy products before they are sold out. This is likely because we as people react more to risk of losing than the potential to profit.

Basically, scarcity is related to both supply and demand. This means that an item gains more value, regardless of its quality when it's limited. People crave for anything that's rare and priceless. When something is unlimited, we usually don't feel the necessity to purchase the item immediately, but on the other hand, when we realize that we might not be able to buy the item anymore because there's no stock, we jump at the opportunity.

This is exactly how advertisers sell their products easily. They understand how the human psychology works and use that to their advantage when they sell.

Sooner or later, many people realize that it's just a ploy used by companies to sell their products; however, this principle works so effectively that even seasoned, knowledgeable customers fall for it! Interestingly, there are several variants used by companies to market their products. For example, 'limited stock' means that if you don't hurry up, you might not get a chance to own the product or service. No matter how the scarcity principal is used, the results are consistently the same – people end up buying those products hastily.

Conclusion: Effective principles that teach you a lot

Whether you're a consumer or a marketer or a person who simply wants to understand how human psychology works, this book will provide some amazing studies and insights. Dr. Cialdini offers several methods you can use if you're a marketer trying to sell products, but he also dispenses golden advice for people who want to avoid falling into traps.

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