



Influence Science and Practice

Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr

Author: Robert B. Cialdini

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Author's Bio: Dr. Robert Cialdini is Regents' Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University and also consults widely in the subject of influence. He attributes his long-standing interest in the intricacies of social influence to the fact that he was raised in an entirely Italian family, in a predominantly Polish neighborhood, in a historically German city (Milwaukee) in an otherwise rural state.

Author's big thought: Have ever found yourself saying "yes" to a telemarketer or to a child selling chocolate bars and then wonder why you have just agreed to subscribe to a magazine that you really aren't interested in or buy a candy bar you really don't want? In this book, not only will you find out what techniques were used to get you to say yes, but you will also learn some worthwhile ways to defend yourself from future requests.

Introduction

- ◆ In his role as an experimental social psychologist, Cialdini began to research the psychology of compliance. At first the research took the form of experiments performed, for the most part, in his laboratory and on college students.
- ◆ After a time, though, he began to realize that the experimental work, while necessary, wasn't enough. It didn't allow him to judge the importance of the principles in the world beyond the psychology building and the campus where he was examining them. It became clear that if he were to understand fully the psychology of compliance, he would need to broaden his scope of investigation. He would need to look to the compliance professionals-the people who had been using the principles on him all his life.
- ◆ His purpose was to observe, from the inside, the techniques and strategies most commonly and effectively used by a broad range of compliance practitioners. That

program of observation sometimes took the form of interviews with the practitioners themselves and sometimes with the natural enemies (for example, police bunco squad officers, consumer agencies) of certain of the practitioners. At other times, it involved an intensive examination of the written materials by which compliance techniques are passed down from one generation to another—sales manuals and the like. Most frequently, though, it took the form of participant observation.

- ◆ One aspect of what he learned in this three-year period of participant observation was most instructive. 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 and, in so doing, gives the tactics their power.
- ◆ This book is organized around these six principles. The principles—reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity—are each discussed in terms of their function in the society and in terms of how their enormous force can be commissioned by a compliance professional who deftly incorporates them into requests for purchases, donations, concessions, votes, or assent.
- ◆ Finally, each principle is examined as to its ability to produce a distinct kind of automatic, mindless compliance from people, that is, a willingness to say yes without thinking first. 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 society, therefore, to understand the how and why of automatic influence.

Chapter 1: Weapons of Influence

- ◆ Ethologists, researchers who study animal behavior in the natural environment, have noticed that among many animal species behavior occurs in rigid and mechanical patterns. Called *fixed-action patterns*, these mechanical behavior sequences are noteworthy in their similarity to certain automatic (*click, whirr*) responding by humans. For both humans and sub humans, the automatic behavior patterns tend to be triggered by a single feature of the relevant information in the situation. This single feature, or trigger feature, can often prove very valuable by allowing an individual to decide on a correct course of action without having to analyze carefully and completely each of the other pieces of information in the situation.
- ◆ The advantage of such shortcut responding lies in its efficiency and economy; by reacting automatically to a usually informative trigger feature, an individual preserves crucial time, energy, and mental capacity. The disadvantage of such responding lies in its vulnerability to silly and costly mistakes; by reacting to only a piece of the available information (even a normally predictive piece), an individual increases the chances of error, especially when responding in an automatic, mindless fashion. The chances of error increase even further when other individuals seek to

profit by arranging (through manipulation of trigger features) to stimulate a desired behavior at inappropriate times.

- ◆ Much of the compliance process (wherein one person is spurred to comply with another person's request) can be understood in terms of a human tendency for automatic, shortcut responding. Most individuals in our culture have developed a set of trigger features for compliance, that is, a set of specific pieces of information that normally tell us when compliance with a request is likely to be correct and beneficial. Each of these trigger features for compliance can be used like a weapon (of influence) to stimulate people to agree to requests.

Chapter 2: Reciprocation

- ◆ According to sociologists and anthropologists, one of the most widespread and basic norms of human culture is embodied in the rule for reciprocation. The rule requires that one person try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided.
- ◆ By obligating the recipient of an act to repayment in the future, the rule for reciprocation allows one individual to give something to another with confidence that it is not being lost. This sense of future obligation within the rule makes possible the development of various kinds of continuing relationships, transactions, and exchanges that are beneficial to the society. Consequently, all members of the society are trained from childhood to abide by the rule or suffer serious social disapproval.
- ◆ The decision to comply with another's request is frequently influenced by the reciprocity rule. One favorite and profitable tactic of certain compliance professionals is to give something before asking for a return favor. The exploitability of this tactic is due to three characteristics of the rule for reciprocation. First, the rule is extremely powerful, often overwhelming the influence of other factors that normally determine compliance with a request. Second, the rule applies even to uninvited first favors, thereby reducing our ability to decide whom we wish to owe and putting the choice in the hands of others. Finally, the rule can spur unequal exchanges; to be rid of the uncomfortable feeling of indebtedness, an individual will often agree to a request for a substantially larger favor than the one he or she received.
- ◆ Another way that the rule for reciprocity can increase compliance involves a simple variation on the basic theme: Instead of providing a first favor that stimulates a return favor, an individual can make an initial concession that stimulates a return concession. One compliance procedure, called *the rejection then- retreat technique*, or door-in-the-face technique, relies heavily on the pressure to reciprocate concessions. By starting with an extreme request that is sure to be rejected, a requester can then profitably retreat to a smaller request (the one that was desired all along), which is likely to be accepted because it appears to be a concession. Research indicates that, aside from increasing the likelihood that a

person will say yes to a request, the rejection-then-retreat technique also increases the likelihood that the person will carry out the request and will agree to such requests in the future.

- ◆ Our best defense against the use of reciprocity pressures to gain our compliance is not systematic rejection of the initial offers of others. Rather, we should accept initial favors or concessions in good faith, but be ready to redefine them as tricks should they later be proved as such. Once they are redefined in this way, we will no longer feel a need to respond with a favor or concession of our own.

Chapter 3: Commitment and Consistency

- ◆ Psychologists have long recognized a desire in most people to be and look consistent within their words, beliefs, attitudes, and deeds. This tendency for consistency is fed from three sources. First, good personal consistency is highly valued by society. Second, aside from its effect on public image, generally consistent conduct provides a beneficial approach to daily life. Third, a consistent orientation affords a valuable shortcut through the complexity of modern existence. By being consistent with earlier decisions, one reduces the need to process all the relevant information in future similar situations; instead, one merely needs to recall the earlier decision and to respond consistently with it.
- ◆ Within the realm of compliance, securing an initial commitment is the key. After making a commitment (that is, taking a stand or position), people are more willing to agree to requests that are in keeping with the prior commitment. Thus, many compliance professionals try to induce people to take an initial position that is consistent with a behavior they will later request from these people. Not all commitments are equally effective, however, in producing consistent future action. Commitments are most effective when they are active, public, effortful, and viewed as internally motivated (uncoerced).
- ◆ Commitment decisions, even erroneous ones, have a tendency to be self-perpetuating because they can "grow their own legs." That is, people often add new reasons and justifications to support the wisdom of commitments they have already made. As a consequence, some commitments remain in effect long after the conditions that spurred them have changed. This phenomenon explains the effectiveness of certain deceptive compliance practices such as "throwing the low-ball."
- ◆ To recognize and resist the undue influence of consistency pressures on our compliance decisions, we should listen for signals coming from two places within us: our stomachs and our heart of hearts. Stomach signs appear when we realize that we are being pushed by commitment and consistency pressures to agree to requests we know we don't want to perform. Under these circumstances, it is best to explain to the requester that such compliance would constitute a brand of foolish consistency in which we prefer not to engage. Heart-of-heart signs are different.

They are best employed when it is not clear to us that an initial commitment was wrongheaded. Here, we should ask ourselves a crucial question, "Knowing what I know, if I could go back in time, would I make the same commitment?" One informative answer may come as the first flash of feeling registered.

Chapter 4: Social Proof

- ◆ The principle of social proof states that one important means that people use to decide what to believe or how to act in a situation is to look at what other people are believing or doing there. Powerful imitative effects have been found among both children and adults and in such diverse activities as purchase decisions, charity donations, and phobia remission. The principle of social proof can be used to stimulate a person's compliance with a request by informing the person that many other individuals (the more, the better) are or have been complying with it.
- ◆ Social proof is most influential under two conditions. The first is uncertainty. When people are unsure, when the situation is ambiguous, they are more likely to attend to the actions of others and to accept those actions as correct. In ambiguous situations, for instance, the decisions of bystanders to help are much more influenced by the actions of other bystanders than when the situation is a clear-cut emergency. The second condition under which social proof is most influential is similarity: People are more inclined to follow the lead of similar others.
- ◆ Evidence for the powerful effect of the actions of similar others on human behavior can be readily seen in the suicide statistics compiled by sociologist David Phillips. Those statistics indicate that after highly publicized suicide stories other troubled individuals, who are similar to the suicide-story victim, decide to kill themselves. An analysis of the mass suicide incident at Jonestown, Guyana, suggests that the group's leader, Reverend Jim Jones, used both of the factors of uncertainty and similarity to induce a herd like suicide response from the majority of the Jonestown population.
- ◆ Recommendations to reduce our susceptibility to faulty social proof include a sensitivity to clearly counterfeit evidence of what similar others are doing and a recognition that the actions of similar others should not form the sole basis for our decisions.

Chapter 5: Liking

- ◆ *People prefer to say yes to individuals they know and like.* Recognizing this rule, compliance professionals commonly increase their effectiveness by emphasizing several factors that increase their overall attractiveness and likeability.
- ◆ One feature of a person that influences overall liking is physical attractiveness. Although it has long been suspected that physical beauty provides an advantage in social interaction, research indicates that the advantage may be greater than

supposed. Physical attractiveness seems to engender a halo effect that extends to favorable impressions of other traits such as talent, kindness, and intelligence. As a result, attractive people are more persuasive both in terms of getting what they request and in changing others' attitudes.

- ◆ A second factor that influences liking and compliance is similarity. We like people who are like us, and we are more willing to say yes to their requests, often in an unthinking manner. Another factor that produces liking is praise. Although they can sometimes backfire when crudely transparent, compliments generally enhance liking and, thus, compliance.
- ◆ Increased familiarity through repeated contact with a person or thing is yet another factor that normally facilitates liking. This relationship holds true principally when the contact takes place under positive rather than negative circumstances. One positive circumstance that works especially well is mutual and successful cooperation. Another factor linked to liking is association. By connecting themselves or their products with positive things, advertisers, politicians, and merchandisers frequently seek to share in the positivity through the process of association. Other individuals as well (sports fans, for example) appear to recognize the effect of simple connections and try to associate themselves with favorable events and distance themselves from unfavorable events in the eyes of observers.
- ◆ A potentially effective strategy for reducing the unwanted influence of liking on compliance decisions requires a special sensitivity to the experience of undue liking for a requester. Upon recognizing that we like a requester inordinately well under the circumstances, we should step back from the social interaction, mentally separate the requester from his or her offer, and make any compliance decision based solely on the merits of the offer.

Chapter 6: Authority

- ◆ In the Michigan studies of obedience we can see evidence of strong pressure in our society for compliance with the requests of an authority. Acting contrary to their own preferences, many normal, psychologically healthy individuals were willing to deliver dangerous and severe levels of pain to another person because they were directed to do so by an authority figure. The strength of this tendency to obey legitimate authorities comes from systematic socialization practices designed to instill in members of society the perception that such obedience constitutes correct conduct. In addition, it is frequently adaptive to obey the dictates of genuine authorities because such individuals usually possess high levels of knowledge, wisdom, and power. For these reasons, deference to authorities can occur in a mindless fashion as a kind of decision-making shortcut.
- ◆ When reacting to authority in an automatic fashion, there is a tendency to do so in response to the mere symbols of authority rather than to its substance. Three kinds of symbols that have been shown by research to be effective in this regard

are titles, clothing, and automobiles. In separate studies investigating the influence of these symbols, individuals possessing one or another of them (and no other legitimizing credentials) were accorded more deference or obedience by those they encountered. Moreover, in each instance, individuals who deferred or obeyed underestimated the effect of authority pressures on their behaviors.

- ◆ It is possible to defend ourselves against the detrimental effects of authority influence by asking two questions: Is this authority truly an expert? How truthful can we expect this to be? The first question directs our attention away from symbols and toward evidence for authority status. The second advises us to consider not just the expert's knowledge in the situation but also his or her trustworthiness. With regard to this second consideration, we should be alert to the trust-enhancing tactic in which communicators first provide some mildly negative information about themselves. Through this strategy they create a perception of honesty that makes all subsequent information seem more credible to observers.

Chapter 7: Scarcity

- ◆ According to the scarcity principle, people assign more value to opportunities when they are less available. The use of this principle for profit can be seen in such compliance techniques as the "limited number" and "deadline" tactics, wherein practitioners try to convince us that access to what they are offering is restricted by amount or time.
- ◆ The scarcity principle holds for two reasons. First, because things that are difficult to attain are typically more valuable, the availability of an item or experience can serve as a shortcut cue to its quality. Second, as things become less accessible, we lose freedoms. According to psychological reactance theory, we respond to the loss of freedoms by wanting to have them (along with the goods and services connected to them) more than before.
- ◆ As a motivator, psychological reactance is present throughout the great majority of the life span. However, it is especially evident at a pair of ages: the terrible twos and the teenage years. Both of these times are characterized by an emerging sense of individuality, which brings to prominence such issues as control, rights, and freedom. Consequently, individuals at these ages are especially sensitive to restrictions.
- ◆ In addition to its effect on the valuation of commodities, the scarcity principle also applies to the way that information is evaluated. Research indicates that the act of limiting access to a message causes individuals to want to receive it more and to become more favorable to it. The latter of these findings—that limited information is more persuasive—seems the more surprising. In the case of censorship, this effect occurs even when the message has not been received. When a message has

been received, it is more effective if it is perceived as consisting of exclusive information.

- ◆ The scarcity principle is most likely to hold true under two optimizing conditions. First, scarce items are heightened in value when they are newly scarce. That is, we value those things that have become recently restricted more than those that were restricted all along. Second, we are most attracted to scarce resources when we compete with others for them.
- ◆ It is difficult to steel ourselves cognitively against scarcity pressures because they have an emotion-arousing quality that makes thinking difficult. In defense, we might try to be alert to a rush of arousal in situations involving scarcity. Once alerted, we can take steps to calm the arousal and assess the merits of the opportunity in terms of why we want it.

Chapter 8: Instant Influence

- ◆ Modern life is different from any earlier time. Because of remarkable technological advances, information is burgeoning, choices and alternatives are expanding, and knowledge is exploding. In this avalanche of change and choice, we have had to adjust. One fundamental adjustment has come in the way we make decisions. Although we all wish to make the most thoughtful, fully considered decision possible in any situation, the changing form and accelerated pace of modern life frequently deprives us of the proper conditions for such a careful analysis of all the relevant pros and cons. More and more, we are forced to resort to another decision-making approach—a shortcut approach in which the decision to comply (or agree or believe or buy) is made on the basis of a single, usually reliable piece of information. The most reliable and, therefore, most popular such single triggers for compliance are those described throughout this book. They are commitments, opportunities for reciprocation, the compliant behavior of similar others, feelings of liking or friendship, authority directives, and scarcity information. .
- ◆ Because of the increasing tendency for cognitive overload in our society, the prevalence of shortcut decision making is likely to increase proportionately. Compliance professionals who infuse their requests with one or another of the triggers of influence are more likely to be successful. The use of these triggers by practitioners is not necessarily exploitative. It only becomes so when the trigger is not a natural feature of the situation but is fabricated by the practitioner. In order to retain the beneficial character of shortcut response, it is important to oppose such fabrication by all appropriate means.

Recommendation: As I am one of those people who is prone to succumb to several of these techniques from sales people, I now know how to raise my defenses. This is a worthwhile read.



Contact Frumi at 949-729-1577
cpacoach@frumi.com
www.frumi.com

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