

# Review: Influence – Science and Practice<sup>i</sup>

I'm always eager know how influence works. What are the things that make us say "yes"? How do we comply with a request? There are two reasons why this topic is interesting to me:

1. I want to be able to increase my influence.
2. I want to avoid being exploited by ill-intentioned people.

As it turned out, the book [Influence: Science and Practice](#) by Robert Cialdini was what I needed. It talks in details about the factors that make us say "yes" to a request. There is actually a similar book from the same author entitled [Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion](#). Here is [the difference](#) between them:

*Influence: Science and Practice* is designed as a textbook for classroom instruction. So, it has things like chapter summaries and questions that can be assigned as homework. However, the other book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, is designed for a more general audience. The content is basically the same, but it omits the classroom-oriented layout.

The one I read is [Influence: Science and Practice](#) so that's what I'm going to review here.

## **Inside Influence: Science and Practice**

The book is divided into eight chapters with an Introduction in the beginning. Let's see the summary of each of them.

### **Introduction**

There is an interesting phenomenon to watch: a request stated in a certain way will be rejected, but a request that asks for the same favor in a slightly different fashion will be successful. While there are a lot of tactics used by compliance practitioners to produce yes, most of them fall within six basic categories: *reciprocation*, *consistency*, *social proof*, *liking*, *authority*, and *scarcity*.

### **Chapter 1. Weapons of Influence**

We have the tendency to respond automatically to certain trigger features. While it is usually helpful, it can be exploited to dupe us to respond automatically at the wrong times. For example, people who are unsure of an item's quality often uses the shortcut that expensive = good. In this case, price alone had become a trigger feature for quality.

Why does such thing happen? It's because we live in an increasingly complicated environment. To deal with it, we *need* shortcuts. Unfortunately, most of us know very little about our automatic behavior patterns. They make us terribly vulnerable to anyone who does know how they work.

### **Chapter 2. Reciprocation: The Old Give and Take, and Take**

One of the most potent of the weapons of influence around us is the rule of reciprocation. The rule says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us.

A person can trigger a feeling of indebtedness by doing us an uninvited favor. A small initial favor can produce a sense of obligation to agree to a substantially larger return favor. Another consequence of the rule is an obligation to make a concession to someone who has made a concession to us.

To defend ourselves against this tactic, we should accept the offers of others but to accept those offers only for what they fundamentally are, not for what they are represented to be. As long as we perceive and define the action as a compliance device instead of a favor, the giver no longer has the reciprocity rule as an ally. Merely define whatever you have received not as gifts but as sales devices.

### **Chapter 3. Commitment and Consistency: Hobgoblins of the Mind**

We have the desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. That force is engaged through commitment. If I can get you to make a commitment (that is, to take a stand, to go on record), I will have set the stage for your automatic and ill-considered consistency with that earlier commitment.

For the salesperson, the strategy is to obtain a large purchase by starting with a small one. Almost any small sale will do because the purpose of that small transaction is not profit, it is commitment.

There are certain conditions that should be present for a commitment to be effective in this way: they should be active, public, effortful, and freely chosen.

The only way out of the dilemma is to know when such consistency is likely to lead to a poor choice. There are two separate kinds of signals to tip us off. The first signal occurs right in the pit of our *stomachs* when we realize we are trapped into complying with a request we know we *don't* want to perform. The second signal occurs in the *heart of hearts* for things we *do* want to perform. For this second signal, here is a question to help you recognize it: "Knowing what I know, if I could go back in time, would I make the same commitment?"

### **Chapter 4. Social Proof: Truths Are Us**

This principle states that we determine what is correct by finding out what other people think is correct. This especially applies when the situation is unclear or ambiguous. The principle of social proof also operates most powerfully when we are observing the behavior of people just like us.

There are two types of situations in which the principle of social proof give us poor counsel:

1. *The social evidence has been purposely falsified.*  
These situations are manufactured by exploiters intent on creating the impression that a multitude is performing the way the exploiters want us to perform.
2. *We to assume that if a lot of people are doing the same thing, they must know something we don't.*

The lesson is social proof should never be trusted fully. We need to check it against the other sources of evidence in the situation like the objective facts or our own judgments.

### **Chapter 5. Liking: The Friendly Thief**

Few of us would be surprised to learn that, as a rule, we most prefer to say yes to the requests of people we know and like. Here are the factors that cause one person to like another:

- *Physical attractiveness*
- *Similarity*  
We like people who are similar to us.
- *Compliments*
- *Contact and Cooperation*  
Compliance professionals are forever attempting to establish that we and they are working for the same goals.

- *Conditioning and association*  
They are incessantly trying to connect themselves or their products with the things we like.

The time to call out the defense is when we feel ourselves liking the practitioner more than we should under the circumstances. Once we notice this feeling, we can start taking the necessary countermeasures. Our proper response is a conscious effort to concentrate exclusively on the merits of the deal by mentally separating the person from that thing he's trying to sell.

## **Chapter 6. Authority: Directed Deference**

Our obedience to authority frequently takes place with little or no conscious deliberation. In that situation, we are often as vulnerable to the symbols of authority as to the substance. There are three types of symbols of authority:

- *Title*  
It is possible for somebody to adopt the mere label and receive a kind of automatic deference.
- *Clothes*  
The cloak of authority can be faked. There is also another kind of attire that has traditionally indicated authority status in our culture: the well-tailored business suit.
- *Trappings*  
Trappings such as jewelry and cars carry an aura of status and position.

A fundamental form of defense against this problem is a heightened awareness of authority power coupled with recognition of how easily authority symbols can be faked.

Posing two questions to ourselves can help enormously to determine when authority directives should and should not be followed:

1. *"Is this authority truly an expert?"*  
Does he or she have substance or just symbol?
2. *"How truthful can we expect the expert to be?"*  
If, from question #1, the authority does have substance, we should ask how honest he or she could be.

## **Chapter 7. Scarcity: The Rule of the Few**

Opportunities seem more valuable to us when they are less available. There are two tactics that are commonly employed here:

- *Limited Numbers*  
A customer is informed that a certain product is in short supply that cannot be guaranteed to last long.
- *Time Limits*  
Some official time limit is placed on the customer's opportunity to get what the compliance professional is offering.

Not only do we want the same item more when it is scarce, we want it most when we are in competition for it. Therefore, extreme caution is advised whenever we encounter the devilish construction of scarcity plus rivalry.

Should we find ourselves beset by scarcity pressures in a compliance situation, our best response would occur in a two-stage sequence:

1. As soon as we feel the tide of emotional arousal that flows from scarcity influences, we should stop short. We need to calm ourselves and regain a rational perspective.
2. Ask ourselves why we want the item under consideration. If the answer is that we want it primarily for its function (that is, we want something good to drive or drink or eat), then we must remember that the item under consideration will function equally well whether scarce or plentiful.

## **Chapter 8. Instant Influence: Primitive Consent for an Automatic Age**

Very often when we make a decision about someone or something we don't use all of the relevant available information. We use, instead, only a single, highly representative piece of the total. Despite the susceptibility to stupid decisions that accompanies a reliance on a single feature of the available data, the pace of modern life demands that we frequently use this shortcut.

So we should be aware of intensified attack on our system of shortcuts. Compliance professionals who play fairly by the rules are not to be considered the enemy. The real treachery, and what we cannot tolerate, is any attempt to make their profit in a way that threatens the reliability of our shortcuts.

## **Conclusion**

Regarding my two reasons of why I'm interested in the topic of influence, this book deals more with the second ("I want to avoid being exploited by ill-intentioned people."). **This book is eye-opening.** It makes me aware of many compliance tactics I see in my daily life. For instance, when I was in a certain situation, I could see that the other party used social proof, authority, and scarcity. While I don't judge that the other party used them with exploitative purpose, the insight I got from this book helped me see through all those and focus solely on the merit of the deal.

**If you want to prevent yourself from being exploited by the weapons of influence, [Influence: Science and Practice](#) is a must.** There are a lot of examples in each chapter that you can relate with things in your life.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lifeoptimizer.org/2008/04/19/review-influence-science-and-practice/>