



Rob McKay

# Psychology of persuasion provides the tools

The ability to influence people is a valuable skill — and one that can be learnt

taste, you reciprocate by buying. The key concept here is, when giving, make it a gift, not a reward. Your actions must not be contingent.

## Commitment/consistency

People are more willing to be moved in a particular direction if they see it as consistent with an existing commitment. A good example of the commitment principle is used in retail sales — notice how a good salesperson will try to get you to try something on, once you are committed to try, you are closer to buying.

People will very rarely go against their own values and beliefs. Once a person makes a choice or takes a stand, they will encounter pressures to behave consistently with what they have previously said or done. Now you understand why getting a small "nothing" deposit from a potential buyer works so well.

## Authority

People are more willing to follow the directions or recommendations of a communicator to whom they attribute relevant authority or

witness talking in technical terms has more persuasive powers with jurors than a lay eyewitness.

A tactic used a lot in advertising is to have recognised experts endorse products. Having Dr or PhD linked to a name adds persuasive power. Dan Carter sells a lot of men's underwear to women who are buying on behalf of men — a double whammy, as Dan has both authority and attractiveness (see below).

## Social validation

People are more willing to take a recommended action if they see evidence that many others, especially those similar to them, are taking it.

Have you ever noticed how a small group will attract a crowd and a crowd attracts a mob? If a street performer can get four or five people to stand and watch, I guarantee there will be 20 or 30 people there within a minute or two. If two or three people throw money into the hat, many other coins will follow — that's why buskers always "seed" their violin cases with notes and coins.

Here's a little test you can perform. When next in a crowded area with a couple of mates, have the three of you all

# to get you to 'yes'

everybody around you will do the same.

## Scarcity

I love this one; it sucks me in all the time. People find objects and opportunities more attractive to the degree that they are scarce, rare, or dwindling in availability. Air New Zealand's "grab a seat" campaign plays on this scarcity principle. Think about the one-day sale, or tickets to an event that last sold out in 30 minutes. The psychology working here is that people fear loss more than they want gain. Telling someone they will lose \$1000 if they don't take action is more powerful than promising they will make \$1000 by taking action.

## Linking/attractiveness

Yes, folks, beauty does sell. People prefer to say yes to those they know, like, find attractive or are similar too. Apart from people liking you, people will also be moved to say yes to your requests if you show them (naturally and sincerely) that you like them. We are suckers for flattery.

The science of influencing can be learned, but a person's ability to influence successfully is heavily driven by their

OST people probably associate the words "influence" or "persuasion" with the sales process. But influencing — getting another person to accede to your requests — is at the core of most soft skills. Whether it's leadership, negotiation, teamwork or sales — all these roles require us to influence and persuade others.

The ability to influence others — in an ethical manner — is a greatly underrated competency and one that many of us are poor at. But new research has highlighted the fact that persuasion skills can be learnt by almost anyone.

Enter Dr Robert Cialdini. If you want to sell anything, influence anybody or motivate the action, I urge you to read Cialdini's brilliant book *Influence: Science and Practice*. Cialdini is a psychology professor at Arizona State University. He is the most cited social psychologist on the subject of persuasion in the world.

As the book's title states, the content is based on science. Cialdini has examined hundreds of psychological experiments on persuasion to form his core thesis. But what is really impressive is that the re-

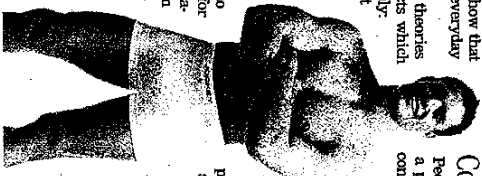
various jobs to understand how that science works in the everyday workplace.

Cialdini's influencing theories centre on six key constructs which are easy to learn and apply: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, likeability, authority and scarcity.

## Reciprocity

People are more willing to comply with requests (for favours, services, information, concessions) from those who have provided such things first. This is the old "give and take" scenario — if I do this for you, maybe, in future, you will do something for me.

One place you see this tactic used is in supermarkets: your



DAN CARTER: Authority

ally traits such as resilience, optimism and assertiveness, no amount of training will make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Personality can be measured. Influencing skills can be taught — you can't have one without the other. So, if you are hiring or developing staff who need persuading ability (salespeople, outbound call centre operators, leaders, managers, marketers) it's important to ensure they have the innate personality characteristics to drive this competency. Assessing them through a valid personality profile will give you this important information. Then, introducing them to Cialdini's six core principles of persuasion will be analogous to putting a strong sea breeze into their Korlar racing sails.

Those who understand the science of influencing will be better equipped to generate change and growth in their businesses.

But a word of caution — your influencing tactics must be ethical, people who use unethical strategies may win the first round, but will lose the match. ■

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