



How to Influence People (Book Review)

A very popular book by Professor Cialdini, an expert in psychology, suggests that there are six main tools to use when you are trying to influence other people. These tools are:

1. Reciprocation

We are brought up to "respond in kind". If you do me a favour, I owe you one. We all hate to be seen as a freeloader. So by offering people something as a gift, they feel compelled to respond.

2. Commitment and Consistency

Commitment and consistency are valued in our society. This means that we can be influenced by committing ourselves to some course of action and remaining consistent thereafter. This tool is often used when we are approached on the street for our support or our donations. Initial questions established how we feel about something (our commitment), the following questions then exploit our need for consistency and ultimately this can end with us signing up for some cause or another.

3. Social Proof

"This is our most popular model... everyone is buying it this summer..." We've all encountered this sales pitch before. After all, if "everybody" is buying it, surely it is a fine product and surely I can find a use for it and would I like to be the only one without this? This is probably the same reason why restaurants like to seat patrons by the front windows! Another good example of social proof we are familiar with is the crowd- when we see someone staring at something in particular we all go and have a look ourselves.

4. Liking

People are more likely to respond to people they know and like. So if your friend asks you to sign up for a cause, you are more likely to say yes. This can be extended to familiarity (e.g. people we see regularly but not necessarily know well- like fellow commuters), similarity (e.g. members of the same association), charisma or physical attractiveness (e.g. movie stars advertising products) and flattery. Many modern advertising campaigns use a combination of these techniques to influence us into buying.

5. Authority

People in positions of authority can have great influence over us. This is probably one reason why a lot of the people selling health-related products usually have quotes from some doctor. Although experts are one source of ready authority used in TV news and advertisements, authority can be conferred by much simpler means. Our style of dress, whether a uniform or a formal business suit, can also display a certain authority and credibility. A combination of perceived relevant authority and credibility usually is sufficient to influence changes in behaviour.

6. Scarcity

We receive "Limited Offers" in the post telling us we only had 3 days to buy this or that wonder product. Internet vendors inform us that free postage is on offer for all sales until the end of this week. These are examples of the scarcity tool at work. The same tool is used in "previews" and "special discount for the first 100 applicants only", as well as "limited print run" on certain books and pictures. Everyone like to have something unique or in limited supply.

The book does a good job on describing how these are used and even more useful- how to defend yourself against these tools. It provides an understanding, with examples, of the way people behave and how marketers exploit this.

But do people really use these tools? You bet they do. The best examples are the 30-minute “info-commercials” on keep-fit apparatus you see on the TV shopping channels, they use:

7. Reciprocation - “... if you order now, we will give you an additional...”
8. Commitment and Consistency - “... tired of feeling tired? looking your age? can’t sleep?...” provides the commitment and followed by 30 minutes of consistent bombardment on feeling great, looking young and sleeping soundly.
9. Social Proof - all these “ordinary” people telling you how miserable they were and how wonderful they feel now after using this equipment.
10. Liking - some attractive person with immaculate physique telling you that it only takes 5 minutes a day and you can even fold the equipment under the bed for easy stowage afterwards.
11. Authority - there is usually a minor celebrity or former world karate champion talking to a health expert about how important keeping fit is and how well this particular piece of equipment can provide eternal youth, health and sex appeal.
12. Scarcity - “... hurry, stocks are limited...”, “...this unique package includes ...”

Our Recommendation:

Buy and read the book and then watch an info-mercial (or attend a sales meeting) and use our influence scoresheet (see below) to keep score!

After you read this book, hopefully you will not rush to the phone and spend £79.99 for the latest wonder device to enhance your life- unless, you really want it!

The Book

Influence: Science and Practice, Robert Cialdini, Allyn and Bacon, 2001 ISBN 0321 011473

Topic:			
Tool	Frequency (number of times tool used)	Effectiveness to you 1=low 5=high	Impact on you = Freq x Effectiveness
Reciprocation			
Commit./Consist.			
Social Proof			
Liking			
Authority			
Scarcity			
		total score:	

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