

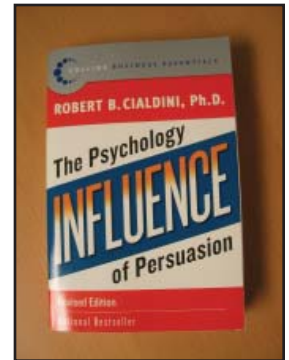


Look At This Book: Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion

By Gary M. Goscenski, Director of Consulting Services

Few people would be inclined to recommend a book that includes the frequent use of the words “compliance practitioners” without giving the book a fair shake. Nonetheless, in this case there are several good reasons why you should make a pot of coffee and indulge yourself and read, “Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion” by Robert Cialdini, Ph.D.

The book examines why people say yes to another person – what Cialdini refers to as compliance. He identifies six principles that will get you to say yes; reciprocity, consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. For anyone striving to raise funds, secure donations, or recruit volunteers these principles of compliance should be part of your toolbox. If your toolbox is anything like mine, you will undoubtedly have a couple favorite tools. I will discuss two of my favorite principles from the book: reciprocity and consistency.



Reciprocity is when we are obligated to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like. Cialdini cites an example from the Disabled American Veterans organization that discovered when they enclosed an unsolicited gift and personalized return address labels along with their simple mail appeal; the response rate doubled. The application for fundraisers comes from the rejection-then-retreat technique. One way to increase the likelihood you will say yes to my request is to first make a larger request that you would be likely to turn down, and then after you refuse, I will make a smaller request that I was really after all along. Of course this needs to be done skillfully, as a first demand so extreme and unreasonable will cause the application to fail. What makes this technique even more appealing is the assertion Cialdini makes that rejection-then-retreat will make people not only agree to the desired request, but then volunteer to perform further requests. This chapter of the book is a must-read.

Consistency is the other tool of choice for the nonprofit fundraiser. Consistency is the obsessive desire for us to be and appear consistent with our past behaviors. Once we have defined our behavioral traits we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Telephone solicitors use this technique all the time. For example, when solicitors begin a conversation by saying “Hello Mr. Moneybucks, how are you doing today?” and you respond “fine” or “I am doing great,” they have hooked you because how can you then appear stingy after admitting your situation was favorable? Cialdini cites an example in the book that found the “how are you doing today?” technique result in more than double the response rate of a solicitation without the seemingly superficial question. This is another must-read chapter.

While reciprocity and consistency are the big hammers in the compliance toolbox for nonprofits, you will probably find applications for the principles of social proof and liking within your organization. The book is a good explanation of the six principles with examples of each. The book does not go into great detail about how to apply each principle, but learning from the examples in the book will provide anyone with the knowledge to persuade more effectively. Now that I have given you this book review, you must reciprocate and go read “Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion” – today.

Source: Cialdini, Robert. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers: 1984

