

A LINE ON LIFE

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Still More About Persuasion *

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Last month (year), I wrote a couple of articles on influence principles. These principles included **contrast**, **reciprocity**, **scarcity** and **credibility**. Remember that all of these principles rely on what happens *before* the request is made. However, there are still more principles.

Another principle relates to **consistency** – we want our beliefs, emotions, and actions to match each other. For example, suppose a person said, "*I really care about other people. If anyone says I don't, I'll smash them in the face.*" This statement leads to a great deal of confusion. If the person cares about others, why smash them for disagreeing? To avoid this confusion, we try to match our actions, beliefs and emotions to each other.

The "**foot-in-the-door**" **method** – making an initial, small request and following it with a larger one – takes advantage of this need for consistency. One study in Toronto asked people at every other house in several neighborhoods to wear a small lapel pin for a day that said, "*Support Your Cancer Society.*" It was such a small request that almost nobody refused. Later, when the Cancer Society began their annual drive for funds, 46% of those who had not been previously contacted gave donations. In contrast, among those who wore pins, 76% gave donations – over a 50% increase! After committing ourselves publicly to the Cancer Society, it is more consistent to give donations later.

Another principle is **social validation** or **consensus** – we decide about our actions on the basis of the actions of others. It is more effective, if there are many others, and these others are **similar** to us. An Arizona State University business professor did a study on getting donations for the Heart Association. When asking for donations, they had a list of neighbors who had already donated. The list varied in terms of how many neighbors were listed and how large the donations were from each neighbor. As you may expect, the more neighbors on the list, the more likely people were to give donations. Likewise, the larger the indicated donations were, the more money they received. Not only are the numbers present, but most of us see ourselves as similar to our neighbors.

Similarity is also affected by the way people dress. In the 1960s, college students dressed in either conventional or hippie clothes. A petitioner approached students at a demonstration, dressed either similarly or differently from the students they approached. If they dressed differently, 25% signed their petition. If they dressed similarly, 45% signed. These people signed *without reading the petition!*

Have you been unsuccessfully tried to train your child to swim at your own pool? If so, you can use the consensus principle this summer. Register your child in a swimming

program at a local pool. When children see others similar to themselves learning how to swim, this will influence them to try harder and succeed.

Lastly, there is the principle of **liking** – we tend to be more influenced by those we like. This is why Tupperware sales are so effective. Tupperware parties are given to friends and neighbors. The salesperson will get a commission on what we buy. So out of friendship, we buy their products. With this method, Tupperware is making 2.5 million dollars a day, and a Tupperware party begins somewhere in the world every 3 seconds! Coincidentally, my daughter-in-law has just become an Avon representative. (Can you guess what cosmetics we will be buying?)

Liking can work even with *strangers* as long as similarities, pleasant associations, cooperative efforts and compliments exist. We tend to like others who are similar to us. If you find strangers who share similar interests, you will tend to like them. I don't think I need to explain how **pleasant associations** and **cooperative efforts** influence liking.

A sincere compliment not only leads others to like us; it also increases our liking for them.

We also like those who like us and **compliment** us. (Unfortunately, the compliment does not necessarily need to be a sincere one.) Salespersons can use compliments as an unethical ploy, but compliments can also be sincere. As we get to know others, we come across traits that are genuinely admirable – traits that deserve praise. If we sincerely compliment these qualities, not only will the other person like you more, but also you will come to like the other person more. You now can influence the other person more effectively. However – since you have also developed a liking for them – you are less likely to use unethical methods to influence them.

* Adapted from Robert B. Cialdini's talk, "Principles and Tactics of Social Influence," presented at the American Psychological Association Convention in Los Angeles, August 12, 1994. For more information, read Cialdini's book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Quill Publishers, 1993.