

Six Principles of Persuasion You Need to Know

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In a world where every e-mail, every request and every event we plan competes against other compelling demands, the skill of persuasion is essential. Of course, you can google “persuasion” and read for hours. How do you know which advice to take and which to toss?

Believe it or not, principles of persuasion stay constant. The recognized expert in influence and persuasion is Robert Cialdini, whose groundbreaking work, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, holds a copyright date of 1984. Yet, experts still turn to Cialdini to learn six principles as relevant today as they were 20+ years ago.

Cialdini’s principles are easy to understand, and they are as relevant for you as they are for any scholar. Here’s a quick overview:

1. Principle of reciprocity

Given that every human culture follows a rule of reciprocity, we can think of it as a powerful universal law. It’s very simple: “If you give something to me, I am obligated to give something in return.”

In addition, says Cialdini, “You are given a moment of power after someone has thanked you. . . .” Take care to use the moment productively. For example, don’t say, “It was nothing, no problem at all.” Use the influence you’ve just won by saying “I was glad to help. It’s what partners do for one another. I’m sure you would do the same for me.”

This principle explains why successful professionals are so committed to networking. In networking, we share information, leads, and even business secrets—relying completely on the principle of reciprocity. Without reciprocity, networking is useless.

2. Principle of scarcity

You can’t miss this principle in action if you watch TV. It’s always a limited time offer, and the offer extends to the lucky few who dial fastest. Advertisers use the technique of scarcity because it works! People want things that are unique and rare. If you can convince them that you hold the path to scarce desirable things, people will follow you.

What’s more, people are motivated to keep what they have. They hate to lose things even more than they desire to acquire new things. Cialdini puts it this way, “People are more motivated by the idea of losing something than gaining those same things.”

When attempting to persuade, be sure to tell your prospects and colleagues not only about what they will gain by following your plan, but what they will lose if they don’t.

3. Principle of authority

Expertise is a key element in influence and persuasion. We look up to the experts in every field. Yet, many people feel embarrassed to “toot their own horn.” It’s important to find a variety of ways to convey your expertise and qualifications, including your education, experience and connections with others who are widely respected.

Balance your qualifications with honesty about your weaknesses. Large corporations precede their strongest argument in favor of their product or service by mentioning a

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weakness in their position. This establishes them as both powerful and honest. The time to deliver your strongest point is immediately after admitting a weakness.

4. Principle of commitment and consistency

In order to feel balanced, we need to believe we are consistent within ourselves. That's why salespeople say things like this, "If I can demonstrate the product performs better than my competitor's will you buy it?" Once the prospect says, "Yes," he or she will feel compelled to follow through with the commitment.

During the process of presenting your case, get people to say, "Yes," along the way. This increases the chance they will say, "Yes," at the end. Increase your chances even more by having prospects write down their commitments.

5. Principle of consensus

People rely on the judgments of those around them when they make decisions. We look to our friends and neighbors when it's time to hire a contractor. We read the testimonials on the backs of books. "We decide what we should do by looking at what others like us do in that situation," says Cialdini.

As you present your plan or proposal, refer to endorsements by those in your industry, organization or professional association. Use statistics and testimony to show consensus regarding your plan of action.

6. Principle of liking

Cialdini identified likeability as a principle of persuasion decades ago. Subsequent research keeps proving him right. Tim Sanders book, *The Likeability Factor*, published in 2005, is a fascinating study of how likeable people are more likely to succeed in every area of life than their less likeable counterparts.

One way to build likeability is to find and point out similarities between yourself and others. We like people who are similar to us, perhaps because they feel familiar and safe. The earlier in a relationship you find similarities, the more positive that relationship will be over time.

Persuasive skill is a predictor of success in both business and personal life, as it always has been. You can count on Cialdini's six principles of persuasion as reliable guides in a very demanding world. Cialdini provides six principles you need to know—six principles you need to master. Start today!

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