



learningmaterials

The Art of Influence: Factors at Play

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“Integrity is the essence of everything successful” R Buckminster Fuller

In the world of professional services and consultancy, the old-fashioned “command and control” approach (“just do what I say without question”) is dead. Clients and colleagues are in general far more questioning – Wikipedia and Google experts! So in most situations you’re going to need a more sophisticated approach if you want to exert influence over others or persuade them to do something. And that includes those who choose you as their professional advisor. Daniel Vare, a 19th Century Italian diplomat, said that done well, good persuasion is actually “the art of letting them have your way”. It is his definition of “diplomacy”.

There are of course still some situations where direct command remains the right approach: “Brace for Impact!”, “Duck!” etc. But, in general, someone who does something only because you exert your seniority or status over them is almost certainly going to resent you for it, and if and when the boot ever ends up on the other foot, they are definitely going to think about kicking you with it..

So what factors are at play in determining whether someone is likely to be influenced or persuaded by you? Well, according to Dr Robert Cialdini, psychology professor, author of the best seller *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion*¹ and co-author of the more recent best-selling *Yes: 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive*², there are six key “weapons of influence”:

1. Likeability
2. Reciprocity
3. Social proof
4. Consistency/commitment
5. Authority
6. Scarcity

There are others i.e. fear, greed etc, but let’s concentrate on these six for now.

¹ Robert B Cialdini - *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion* ISBN-10: 0688128165; ISBN-13: 978-0688128166

² Noah J Goldstein PhD, Steve J Martin and Robert B Cialdini – *Yes! 50 Secrets from the Science of Persuasion* ISBN-13: 978-1846680168

2. Likeability

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The old adage really is true: people are far more likely to be influenced by those that they know, like and come to trust. Of course it takes time to earn someone's trust but we tend to form our initial likeability impressions very quickly. As David Maister observes in his book *The Trusted Advisor*³, we often say immediately after meeting someone that we do (or don't) "like" him / her. And we may immediately say that we don't trust a person, however we don't tend to say that we do trust someone early in a relationship... but rather that they seem like the kind of person we might come to trust.

For an example of the importance of likeability in a business context, it's worth spending an hour watching the Evan Davies' 2009 interview with Warren Buffet, "The World's Greatest Money Maker"⁴. Observe how Buffet came to buy Furniture Mart, then the biggest home furniture retail business in America, for \$50 million - which analysts reckon was about two thirds of its actual value. How on earth did he manage that?

When you watch the interview it seems that Buffet and Rose Blumkin, the lovely little old Russian lady who had built up this empire, sat down together over a cup of tea and had a nice chat; Mrs Blumkin really liked him and she decided that she wanted to sell her business to him. Warren wrote out their deal on a sheet of A4, Rose "made her mark" - she was illiterate - and that was it: no due diligence; no title checks; no lawyers. Likeability was clearly an influential factor in Buffet's multi-million dollar business deal!

A good place to start work on likeability would be to attend to your "small talk" right at the outset when you first meet a person. Actually "small talk" is a really unfortunate expression because it implies that this sort of conversation is not important – it's the little bit of "hairdresser's chat" that we feel obliged to have, but don't really care about, before we have the big business chat.

Wrong! Properly attended to, small talk can be a vital starting point in attempting to influence and persuade others. It relaxes people; settles them down; opens them up; shows you're human; allows you to come across as an interesting person, but more importantly to express genuine interest in them; you might even discover that you share some common interests. Never underestimate the human dimension in business.

³ David Maister, Charles Green and Robert Galford – *The Trusted Advisor* ISBN 978-0-7432-0776-8

⁴ The documentary can be found on You Tube – www.youtube.com

Remember: every word someone says to you in that seminar room, at that conference or over dinner is a clue to their interests, loves, hates, character and what gets them up in the morning. Attend to it!

A wealth of simple but excellent advice about getting people to like you is to be found in Dale Carnegie's seminal 1936 book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*⁵. If you watch the Buffet interview you'll hear him mention that the only certificate he hangs on his wall is the one he got for attending the Dale Carnegie How to Win Friends and Influence People course – so perhaps it really is worth reading the book if you haven't already done so! Carnegie suggests six practical ways to get others to like you:

- Be genuinely interested in them.
- Smile.
- Use their name when talking to them.
- Really listen to them.
- Talk in terms of their interests rather than yours.
- Make them feel important.

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⁵ Dale Carnegie – *How to Win Friends and Influence People* ISBN 0-7493-0784-6

3. Reciprocity

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The social norm of reciprocity means that people tend to respond to each other in similar ways. So if you do a favour for one of your colleagues, or professional/business contacts then they tend to feel inclined to reciprocate.

The reciprocity effect can be powerful even where the initial favour is a small one. Some research⁶ into the tipping of waiting staff in restaurants provides a useful insight into this. The question that interested the researchers was what the effect of giving a small sweet to a diner along with the bill would have on the size of the tip they left. Answer? Quite a lot actually!

Where one sweet was left for each diner tips increased on average 3% compared with no sweets given. Where two sweets were given for each diner, tips increased by 14%.

But the most interesting finding was that where the waiter/waitress laid down the bill with one sweet for each diner and turned to walk away, but then turned back and added a second couple of sweets – tips increased on average 23%. Don't you wish that someone had told you that when you were a struggling student doing evening and weekend restaurant work to fund your studies?

The increase in the reciprocity effect in this last situation in the restaurant tipping research seems to be the result of a combination of two things: (1) personalisation – it says to the diners: you're special; you've been nice diners to serve; and (2) it was unexpected – the diners got something they weren't expecting or got a bit more than they were expecting.

One very simple idea to think about in this vein could be sending a small gift such as a book to the relevant person you are looking to influence. However, ensure that this is not something chosen at random - it needs to be appropriate, relevant and personal to the recipient.

Think about how you might apply the power of reciprocity in a business context, bearing in mind that the favour you do for your colleague, client or contact might have more effect if it makes them feel special. For instance, as part of your on-going profile-raising activity you

6 Strohmets, DB, B Rind, R Fisher & M Lynn (2002) – Sweetening the till: the use of candy for increasing restaurant tipping, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 32: 300-309

might provide some content for a client's internal newsletter (for example, a company for whom you are providing R & D, consultancy, or training services), and then in return you are more likely to have that person agree to, for example, write an article for your departmental or School newsletter, or provide a case study of your work together for your website.

Here are a few more practical suggestions of things you could try:

- Try the book idea - just make sure it's appropriate and right for them .
- If you spot an interesting talk or seminar event that someone's running and you think they'd be interested, call them up and offer to get them a ticket and take them along with you.
- Be a connector - if you have a contact or client who you think might be of interest and use to them then offer to put them in touch with each other.
- Always be on the lookout for information about new developments and opportunities that might be of help to them and pass this on.
- Always try to make them feel special; like you're doing this just for them.
- Sending newsletters by mail or email are a good way of keeping you front of mind with colleagues, clients and a wide range of contacts, but personalising the email or covering letter in some way is always a good idea.

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4. Social Proof

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“Social proof” is a psychological phenomenon which means that people will often behave in a way that conforms to the way in which others around them are behaving, making the assumption that the others possess knowledge of the situation and are behaving in an appropriate way.

That’s why when the charity collectors come to your door they often start by telling you that they’ve already called on your neighbours and that they’ve been really generous with their donations. Research has shown that telling people this tends to produce higher levels of donation.

We recently experienced this effect in planning a strategy day for a client, where the Head of Learning & Development was keen to gain the participation of two of her Directors, who both said they were far too busy to attend. However, when a couple of the firm’s senior partners signed up for the day, word got round, and the two Directors managed to free up their diaries and came along. In situations where you are trying to influence and persuade others, think about who you might work especially hard on to get them on board with a view to mentioning that to others, and thereby gaining their co-operation by virtue of the social proof effect.

In business development situations some potential clients can be influenced to do business with you by hearing that other similar businesses have chosen you as their professional advisors. However, tread carefully here as some companies don’t like the thought of you acting for their competitors and are concerned about potential conflicts of interest and sharing of trade secrets.

Some practical ideas:

- Ask your clients for a testimonial after concluding a successful piece of work for them and don’t be shy about finding ways to demonstrate these to contacts who are potential clients.
- When asked by contacts who are potential clients what you’ve been working on recently, think about what work would be most likely to impress them and make sure that’s what you mention.

- Tell them about successes your clients have had with your professional input, while of course preserving client confidentiality.
- Undertake some benchmarking research and offer to tell them what the current top performing companies in their field are up to, with of course your excellent professional assistance.

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5. Consistency / Commitment

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Researcher⁷ into voting habits in the USA called up large number of voters the night before a presidential election and asked each person if they intended to vote the next day. All of them said “yes”. Of course in reality not all of them actually did vote. Presumably they said yes because they felt that was the right thing to say; they knew that really they should exercise their right to vote.

The next day, after voting was over, the researchers ascertained if the people who they’d called up had actually voted. They also checked the position in relation to a group of people who they hadn’t called up the day before polling day. It transpired that 25% more people in the group who’d been called up before voting day and who’d claimed that they would vote in the election had actually voted, when compared to the people who hadn’t been called up and made that assertion.

The factor at play here is consistency / commitment.

When people assert, either orally or in writing, that they intend to act in a certain way, then they are more likely later to act in a way consistent with their assertion. That is also one reason, similarly, why the process of goal setting – of actually writing down what you are committing to do - has been shown to greatly increase your chances of actually achieving your goals.

So, if you’re trying to influence and persuade people to do something, consider trying in the first place just to seek their agreement with the underlying principles behind what you want them to do. Then later remind them of that as you ask for them to do whatever it is that you want them to do. They’re more likely to agree.

Some practical ideas:

- At an initial meeting with a new contact, try to get their commitment to meet you again in x weeks / months’ time, and better still try to get a date in the diaries; don’t leave it vague as to when they might next give you some of their time.

⁷ Greenwald, AG, CG Carnot, B Beach and B Young (1987) – Increasing voting behaviour by asking people if they expect to vote, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 72: 315-18

- Get a new contact to agree that they'll give you half an hour of their time next time you're in their location - and then of course get in touch soon after to tell them you now have plans to be in their city (even if you didn't up until now) and to ask if they'll meet you.
- Try to gain even small commitments: to consider trying you out on the next small piece of work they have – and then keep in touch and after a while gently remind them of their offer to try you out.
- If you spot a potential opportunity to cross sell another service line's offering then try to obtain agreement that your contact will allow you to introduce them to your colleague and give them half an hour of time for a chat.

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6. Authority: Expertise And Credibility

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Probably the most extreme example of the power of authority as a factor in influencing others to do something was seen in the experiments conducted in the 1960s by the psychologist Stanley Milgram⁸. A stern, authoritative, lab-coated experimenter instructed participants to administer increasingly large electric shocks to another person located in an adjacent room for giving the wrong answers to a series of questions asked by the experimenter. Unbeknown to the participants the person in the adjacent room was “in” on the experiment and in fact not receiving any shocks at all.

Worryingly, 65% of the participants administered the final 450 volt electric shock to the other person - or at least believed that was what they were doing - despite the apparent screams coming from the adjacent room. Many of you may have seen on TV the more recent recreation of the Milgram experiments by Derren Brown with similar results.

In some slightly less troubling hospital research⁹ into patient compliance with the post operation exercise instructions of physiotherapists, it was found that patients would tend to do what their consultant told them to do, but were bad at complying with the instructions of their physiotherapists. The hospital tried something very simple: they asked the physiotherapists to hang all their qualification certificates on the walls of their consultation / treatment rooms. Impact? A 34% increase in patient compliance with the physiotherapists' instructions. Why? Because people tend to defer to authority, to people who they perceive as having more expertise and who they find more credible.

We're not suggesting that you should just hang all your professional qualification certificates on the wall and leave it at that. But think about how you might enhance your expertise and credibility in the eyes of those who you are trying to influence and persuade.

⁸ Milgram, Stanley (1963) – *Behavioural Study of Obedience*, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67: 371–378; Milgram, Stanley. (1974), *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. Harpercollins ISBN 0-06-131983-X

⁹ American hospital research

Here are some simple ideas to develop and enhance your credibility / expertise:

Raise your profile e.g. write articles, speak at conferences, join the appropriate organisations and networks. Although you are likely to do at least some of these already, consider where the person(s) you wish to influence are most likely to see/hear you. Which conferences should you speak at that you are not involved with already? What professional or industry journals exist in areas where you can get your message across more effectively? What internal University events, networks, meetings should you be actively participating in to get to know those you wish to influence...and to let them get to know you?

Get a recognised expert on board to support your idea/project. This could simply involve taking along to a meeting one of your colleagues who is well-known as an expert in a particular field.

Refer to appropriate research and studies to back up your ideas and suggestions.

Launch a pilot or trial if possible to prove that your idea works.

Be sure to have a range of **appropriate ways when you talk to others of expressing and exhibiting your personal qualifications and expertise**, and what differentiates you personally.

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7. Scarcity

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Why is it that sometimes, shortly after a national TV news broadcast, petrol stations are queued round the block? And why is it that every Christmas grown adult parents are to be found running around department stores like possessed madmen fighting with other parents over toys such as Cabbage Patch Kids and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? Answer? Scarcity.

In research¹⁰ involving the wholesale beef market, purchasers placed more than double their usual orders when they were told that due to weather conditions in the supplying country it was anticipated that there would be a shortage of beef. When they were additionally told that the information about this anticipated shortage was being made available to them but was not otherwise widely known they placed six times more orders!

Sometimes the scarcity is genuine. Do you remember the recent demise of the standard energy inefficient 100 watt light bulb? As soon as it became clear that under new energy efficiency legislation retailers would no longer be allowed to import the old bulbs and that soon the only option would be to buy the new energy efficient version, demand for the old ones soared. Those retailers who had been smart enough to stock up on the last of the old ones made a tidy profit.

Sometimes of course there is no scarcity at all. Salesmen in a whole range of industries selling products ranging from electrical goods to cars regularly employ apparent scarcity as a means of persuading potential customers to commit to placing an order. Typically a potential customer is told that a certain product is sold out but asked if they would have wanted to buy if it hadn't been. After the customer says "yes" the salesperson makes further enquiries and miraculously it turns out that the product in question has not actually sold out and a final one remains – which the customer eagerly commits to buy on the spot. If you look for a hotel room online, you will find that there are normally "only two remaining" at that price.

Now of course we're not suggesting that you employ such obvious "sales" techniques in selling professional services, but don't instantly discount the idea of creating a bit of scarcity. If clients and contacts think that something you have to offer them is in scarce supply, that can help to increase its perceived value in their eyes.

¹¹ Amram Knishinski (1982) from unpublished dissertation, Arizona State University

In relation to your external contacts and clients, if you're arranging a client seminar consider capping the number who can attend and setting a deadline for replying in order to secure a place. Turn some people down for a place if they're too late in accepting your invitation, telling them that the event has proved really popular and is now over-subscribed. You can always run a repeat session soon after and give them a place at that. They're far more likely to value your seminar invitations in the future and you should get less "no-shows". Of course do make sure that the seminar really is fantastic and well worth their while coming along to!

Here are some final thoughts on using the power of scarcity:

- We appreciate that client expectation of instant access to their professional advisers is intense, but do value your time: the best experts are in demand, busy and therefore not always instantly available.
- Have someone else be the touch point with your contacts and clients sometimes on the basis that you are otherwise engaged in some suitably impressive project.
- Try out the seminar delegate limit on numbers and the reply deadline ideas: they work.
- If you really are (properly, ethically and within the rules of course) giving your contact or client information not otherwise widely available do make sure you mention that fact to them.

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