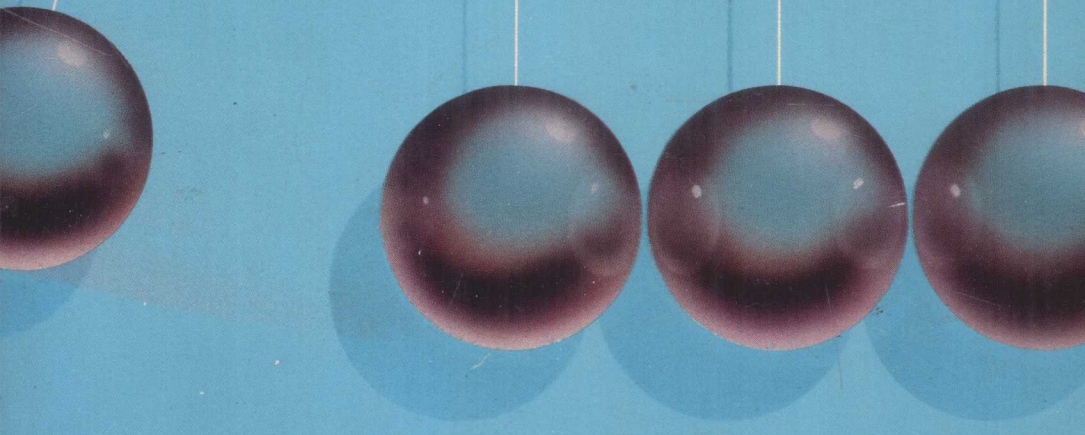
INFLUENCE

Science and Practice

Second Edition



Robert B. Cialdini

INFLUENCE

Science and Practice

Second Edition

Robert B. Cialdini

Arizona State University

Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown College Division
Scott, Foresman and Company
Glenview, Illinois
Boston
London

Literary and photo credits are listed on pp. 289–290, which constitute a legal extension of the copyright page.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cialdini, Robert B.
Influence.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Influence (Psychology) 2. Persuasion (Psychology)
I. Title
BF774.C53 1988 153.8'52 87-28840
ISBN 0-673-18942-2 (pbk.)

3456 EBI 9291908988

PREFACE

I can admit it freely now. All my life I've been a patsy. For as long as I can recall, I've been an easy mark for the pitches of peddlers, fund raisers, and operators of one sort or another. True, only some of these people have had dishonorable motives. The others—representatives of certain charitable agencies, for instance—have had the best of intentions. No matter. With personally disquieting frequency, I have always found myself in possession of unwanted magazine subscriptions or tickets to the sanitation workers' ball. Probably this long-standing status as sucker accounts for my interest in the study of compliance: Just what are the factors that cause one person to say yes to another person? And which techniques most effectively use these factors to bring about such compliance? I wondered why it is that a request stated in a certain way will be rejected, when a request that asks for the same favor in a slightly different fashion will be successful.

So in my role as an experimental social psychologist, I began to research the psychology of compliance. At first the research took the form of experiments performed, for the most part, in my laboratory and on college students. I wanted to find out which psychological principles influenced the tendency to comply with a request. Right now, psychologists know quite a bit about these principles—what they are and how they work. I have characterized such principles as weapons of influence and will be discussing some of the most important of them in this book.

After a time, though, I began to realize that the experimental work, while necessary, wasn't enough. It didn't allow me to judge the importance of the principles in the world beyond the psychology building and the campus where I was examining them. It became clear that if I was to understand fully the psychology of compliance, I would need to broaden my scope of investigation. I would need to look to the compliance professionals—the people who had been using the principles on me all my life. They know what works and what doesn't; the law of survival of the fittest assures it. Their business is to make us comply, and their livelihoods depend on it. Those who don't know how to get people to say yes soon fall away; those who do, stay and flourish.

Of course, the compliance professionals aren't the only ones who know about and use these principles to help them get their way. We all employ them and fall victim to them to some degree in our daily interactions with neighbors, friends, lovers, and family. But the compliance practitioners have much more than the vague and amateurish understanding of what works than the rest of us have. As I thought about it, I knew that they represented the richest vein of information about compliance available to me. For nearly three years, then, I combined my experimental studies with a decidedly more entertaining program of systematic immersion into the world of compliance professionals—sales people, fund raisers, advertisers, and others.

My purpose was to observe, from the inside, the techniques and strategies most commonly and effectively used by a broad range of compliance practitioners. That program of observation sometimes took the form of interviews with the practitioners themselves and sometimes with the natural enemies (for example, police bunco-squad officers, consumer agencies) of certain of the practitioners. At other times it involved an intensive examination of the written materials by which compliance techniques are passed down from one generation to another—sales manuals and the like.

Most frequently, though, it took the form of participant observation. Participant observation is a research approach in which the researcher becomes a spy of sorts. With disguised identity and intent, the investigator infiltrates the setting of interest and becomes a full-fledged participant in the group to be studied. So when I wanted to learn about the compliance tactics of encyclopedia (or vacuum cleaner, or portrait photography, or dance lesson) sales organizations, I would answer a newspaper ad for sales trainees and have them teach me their methods. Using similar but not identical approaches, I was able to penetrate advertising, public relations, and fund-raising agencies to examine their techniques. Much of the evidence presented in this book, then, comes from my experience posing as a compliance professional, or aspiring professional, in a large variety of organizations dedicated to getting us to say yes.

One aspect of what I learned in this three-year period of participant observation was most instructive. Although there are thousands of different tactics that compliance practitioners employ to produce yes, the majority fall within six basic categories. Each of these categories is governed by a fundamental psychological principle that directs human behavior and, in so doing, gives the tactics their power. This book is organized around these six principles. The prin-

ciples—reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity—are each discussed in terms of their function in the society and in terms of how their enormous force can be commissioned by a compliance professional who deftly incorporates them into requests for purchases, donations, concessions, votes, or assent. Finally, each principle is examined as to its ability to produce a distinct kind of automatic, mindless compliance from people, that is, a willingness to say yes without thinking first. The evidence suggests that the ever-accelerating pace and informational crush of modern life will make this particular form of unthinking compliance more and more prevalent in the future. It will be increasingly important for the society, therefore, to understand the how and why of automatic influence.

The initial (trade) version of *Influence* was designed for the popular reader and, as such, an attempt was made to write it in an engaging style. In the classroom version, that style is retained but, in addition, I present the research evidence for my statements, recommendations, and conclusions. Although they are dramatized and corroborated through such devices as interviews, quotes, and systematic personal observations, the conclusions of *Influence* are based on controlled, psychological research. This allows the instructor and the student to feel confident that the book is not "pop" psychology but represents work that is scientifically grounded. The classroom version also provides new and updated material, chapter summaries, and study questions to enhance its classroom utility.

A potentially attractive feature of the present version of *Influence* lies in its ability to serve as an enjoyable, practical, yet scientifically documented text for students. Perhaps one way to view the book, then, is to see it as a refreshing change of pace (from standard text material) that does not retreat from scientific respectability. In a related vein, the book might be seen as a way to demonstrate that what often seems like dry science can be shown to be lively, useful, and relevant to students' personal interests.

Robert B. Cialdini

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An array of people deserve and have my appreciation for their aid in making this book possible. Several of my academic colleagues read and provided perceptive comments on the entire manuscript in its initial draft form, greatly strengthening the subsequent version. They are Gus Levine, Doug Kenrick, Art Beaman, and Mark Zanna. In addition, the first draft was read by a few family members and friends—Richard and Gloria Cialdini, Bobette Gorden, and Ted Hall—who offered not only much-needed emotional support but insightful substantive commentary as well.

A second, larger group provided helpful suggestions for selected chapters or groups of chapters: Todd Anderson, Sandy Braver, Catherine Chambers, Judi Cialdini, Nancy Eisenberg, Larry Ettkin, Joanne Gersten, Jeff Goldstein, Betsy Hans, Valerie Hans, Joe Hepworth, Holly Hunt, Ann Inskeep, Barry Leshowitz, Darwyn Linder, Debbie Littler, John Mowen, Igor Pavlov, Janis Posner, Trish Puryear, Marilyn Rall, John Reich, Peter Reingen, Diane Ruble, Phyllis Sensenig, Roman Sherman, and Henry Wellman.

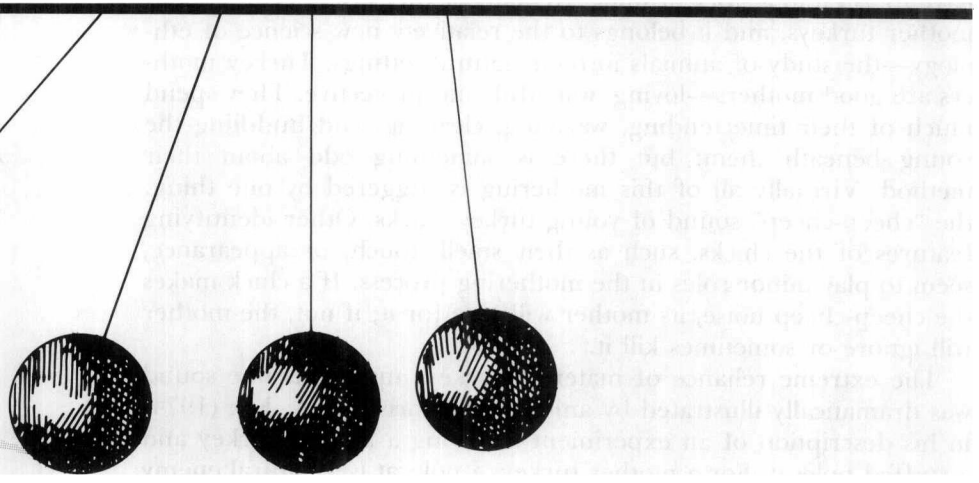
Certain people were instrumental at the beginning stages. John Staley was the first publishing professional to recognize the project's potential. Jim Sherman, Al Goethals, John Keating, Dan Wagner, Dalmas Taylor, Wendy Wood, and David Watson provided early, positive reviews that encouraged author and editors alike. My editors at Scott, Foresman and Company, Scott Hardy and Betty Slack, were consistently congenial, helpful, and insightful. The current edition benefited substantially from the reviews of Michael Leippe, Gene Smith, and Stephen Worchel as well as from the editorial efforts of Mary Lenart.

In addition, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the skill and efficiency of Sally Carney at manuscript preparation and the excellent counsel of my attorney, Robert Brandes.

Finally, throughout the project, no one was more on my side than Bobette Gorden, who lived every word with me.

CONTENTS

ONE



I got a phone call one day from a friend who had recently opened an Indian jewelry store in Arizona. She was giddy with a curious piece of news. Something fascinating had just happened, and she thought that, as a psychologist, I might be able to explain it to her. The story involved a certain allotment of turquoise jewelry she had been having trouble selling. It was the peak of the tourist season, the store was unusually full of customers, the turquoise pieces were of good quality for the prices she was asking; yet they had not sold. My friend had attempted a couple of standard sales tricks to get them moving. She tried calling attention to them by shifting their location to a more central display area; no luck. She even told her sales staff to "push" the items hard—again without success.

Finally, the night before leaving on an out-of-town buying trip, she scribbled an exasperated note to her head saleswoman, "Everything in this display case, price × ½," hoping just to be rid of the offending pieces, even if at a loss. When she returned a few days later, she was not surprised to find that every article had been sold. She was shocked, though, to discover that, because the employee had read the "½" in her scrawled message as a "2," the entire allotment had sold at twice the original price!

That's when she called me. I thought I knew what had happened but told her that, if I were to explain things properly, she would

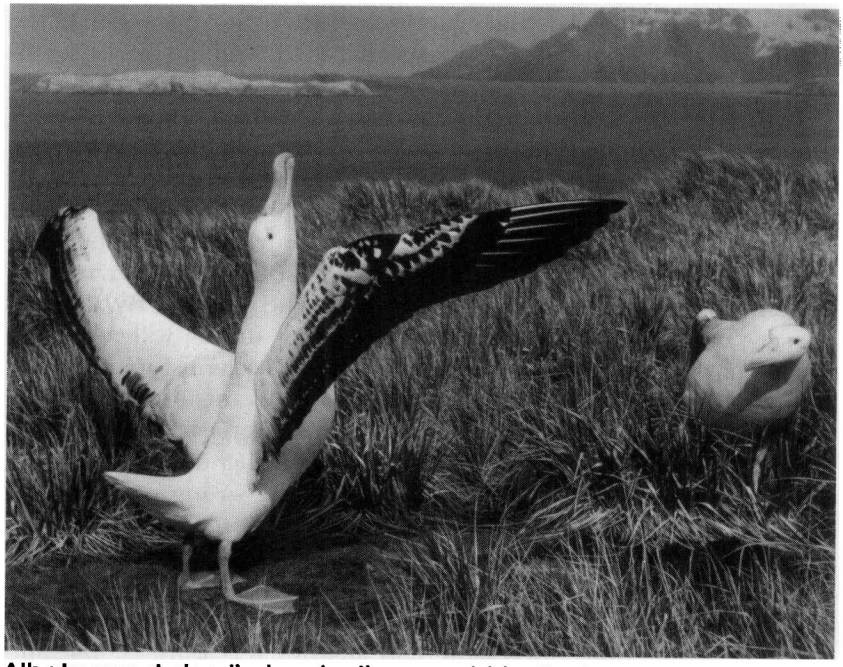
have to listen to a story of mine. Actually, it isn't my story; it's about mother turkeys, and it belongs to the relatively new science of ethology—the study of animals in their natural settings. Turkey mothers are good mothers—loving, watchful, and protective. They spend much of their time tending, warming, cleaning, and huddling the young beneath them; but there is something odd about their method. Virtually all of this mothering is triggered by one thing: the "cheep-cheep" sound of young turkey chicks. Other identifying features of the chicks, such as their smell, touch, or appearance, seem to play minor roles in the mothering process. If a chick makes the cheep-cheep noise, its mother will care for it; if not, the mother will ignore or sometimes kill it.

The extreme reliance of maternal turkeys upon this one sound was dramatically illustrated by animal behaviorist M. W. Fox (1974) in his description of an experiment involving a mother turkey and a stuffed polecat. For a mother turkey, a polecat is a natural enemy whose approach is to be greeted with squawking, pecking, clawing rage. Indeed, the experimenters found that even a stuffed model of a polecat, when drawn by a string to a mother turkey, received an immediate and furious attack. When, however, the same stuffed replica carried inside it a small recorder that played the cheep-cheep sound of baby turkeys, the mother not only accepted the oncoming polecat but gathered it underneath her. When the machine was turned off, the polecat model again drew a vicious attack.

CLICK, WHIRR

How ridiculous a mother turkey seems under these circumstances: She will embrace a natural enemy just because it goes cheep-cheep and she will mistreat or murder one of her chicks just because it does not. She acts like an automaton whose maternal instincts are under the automatic control of that single sound. The ethologists tell us that this sort of thing is far from unique to the turkey. They have begun to identify regular, blindly mechanical patterns of action in a wide variety of species.

Called *fixed-action patterns,* they can involve intricate sequences of behavior, such as entire courtship or mating rituals. A fundamental characteristic of these patterns is that the behaviors comprising them occur in virtually the same fashion and in the same order every time. It is almost as if the patterns were recorded on tapes within animals. When a situation calls for courtship, a courtship tape gets played;



Albatrosses during their springtime courtship rituals exemplify the concept of fixed-action patterns.

when a situation calls for mothering, a maternal behavior tape gets played. *Click* and the appropriate tape is activated; *whirr* and out rolls the standard sequence of behaviors.

The most interesting aspect of all this is the way the tapes are activated. When an animal acts to defend its territory for instance, it is the intrusion of another animal of the same species that cues the territorial-defense tape of rigid vigilance, threat, and if need be, combat behaviors; however, there is a quirk in the system. It is not the rival as a whole that is the trigger; it is, rather, some specific feature, the *trigger feature.* Often the trigger feature will be just one tiny aspect of the totality that is the approaching intruder. Sometimes a shade of color is the trigger feature. The experiments of ethologists have shown, for instance, that a male robin, acting as if a rival robin had entered its territory, will vigorously attack nothing more than a clump of robin redbreast feathers placed there. At the same time, it will virtually ignore a perfect stuffed replica of a male robin *without* red breast feathers (Lack, 1943). Similar results have been found in

another species of bird, the bluethroat, where it appears that the trigger for territorial defense is a specific shade of blue breast feathers (Peiponen, 1960).

Before we enjoy too smugly the ease with which trigger features can trick lower animals into reacting in ways wholly inappropriate to the situation, we should realize two things. First, the automatic, fixed-action patterns of these animals work very well most of the time. For example, because only normal, healthy turkey chicks make the peculiar sound of baby turkeys, it makes sense for mother turkeys to respond maternally to that single cheep-cheep noise. By reacting to just that one stimulus, the average mother turkey will nearly always behave correctly. It takes a trickster like a scientist to make her tapelike response seem silly. The second important thing to understand is that we, too, have our preprogrammed tapes; and, although they usually work to our advantage, the trigger features that activate them can dupe *us* into playing the tapes at the wrong times.[1]

This parallel form of human automatic action is aptly demonstrated in an experiment by social psychologist Ellen Langer and her co-workers (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978). A well-known principle of human behavior says that when we ask someone to do us a favor we will be more successful if we provide a reason. People simply like to have reasons for what they do. Langer demonstrated this unsurprising fact by asking a small favor of people waiting in line to use a library copying machine: "Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I'm in a rush?" The effectiveness of this request-plus-reason was nearly total: 94 percent of those asked let her skip ahead of them in line. Compare this success rate to the results when she made the request only: "Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?" Under those circumstances only 60 percent of those asked complied. At first glance, it appears that the crucial difference between the two requests was the additional information provided by the words *because I'm in a rush.* However, a third type of request tried by Langer showed that this was not the case. It seems that it was not the whole series of words, but the first one, *because,* that made the difference. Instead of including a real reason for compliance, Langer's third type of request

[1]Although several important similarities exist between this kind of automatic responding in humans and lower animals, there are some important differences as well. The automatic behavior patterns of humans tend to be learned rather than inborn, more flexible than the lock-step patterns of the lower animals, and responsive to a larger number of triggers.

used the word *because* and then, adding nothing new, merely restated the obvious: "Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make some copies?" The result was that once again nearly all (93 percent) agreed, even though no real reason, no new information was added to justify their compliance. Just as the cheep-cheep sound of turkey chicks triggered an automatic mothering response from mother turkeys, even when it emanated from a stuffed polecat, so the word *because* triggered an automatic compliance response from Langer's subjects, even when they were given no subsequent reason to comply. *Click, whirr!*[2]

Although some of Langer's additional findings show that there are many situations in which human behavior does not work in a mechanical, tape-activated way (Langer, 1978), what is astonishing is how often it does. For instance, consider the strange behavior of those jewelry store customers who swooped down on an allotment of turquoise pieces only after the items had been mistakenly offered at double their original price. I can make no sense of their behavior unless it is viewed in *click, whirr* terms.

The customers, mostly well-to-do vacationers with little knowledge of turquoise, were using a standard principle—a stereotype—to guide their buying: expensive = good. Much research shows that people who are unsure of an item's quality often use this stereotype (for a review, see Olson, 1977). Thus the vacationers, who wanted "good" jewelry, saw the turquoise pieces as decidedly more valuable and desirable when nothing about them was enhanced but the price. Price alone had become a trigger feature for quality, and a dramatic increase in price alone had led to a dramatic increase in sales among the quality-hungry buyers. *Click, whirr!*

BETTING THE SHORTCUT ODDS

It is easy to fault the tourists for their foolish purchase decisions, but a close look offers a kinder view. These were people who had been brought up on the rule "You get what you pay for" and who had seen that rule borne out over and over in their lives. Before long, they had translated the rule to mean expensive = good. The expensive = good stereotype had worked quite well for them in the

[2]Perhaps the common "because . . . just because" response of children asked to explain their behavior can be traced to their shrewd recognition of the unusual amount of power adults appear to assign to the word *because*.