

The Six Principles of Influence and How They Apply to Sales – Part Three of Three

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This is the final article of a three part series on Dr. Robert Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence and how they apply to sales.

Principle No. Four – The Principle of Commitment and Consistency

Cialdini says that you can significantly increase the likelihood that you'll get a 'yes' to your final request (the sale) if you first get people to take small steps. Steps that require them to put some 'skin in the game' and will be logically consistent with the request we'll ask them to make later. People will tend to be consistent with past decisions, so get them to take small steps in the direction you want them to go. Additionally, the commitments need to be active, public and voluntary.

So how does that apply to sales?

1. Get prospects to make small commitments in the direction you want them to go. It's why we always want you to get a commitment to the next step (and the next calendar event) you want them to take while you're still on the phone or in a face-to-face meeting with them. It is easier for people to say no or ignore you if you're not talking to them (especially when you're face-to-face). It is also more difficult for people to cancel an appointment after they've agreed to the meeting **and** written it in their day timer. So if you ask them, "Do you have your calendar handy?" when setting the appointment and then getting them to write it down in their calendar, you will be making the appointment 'public'.
2. It is just as powerful if you get the commitment verbally in some instances. An example of a verbal public commitment was the restaurant in Chicago that reduced its no shows for reservations by 300% by simply adding two words to what they asked people to do if they changed their plans. Instead of saying, "If your plans change, please call...", they said, "If your plans change, WOULD YOU please call?..." When people said, "Yes, I will", they were making a public commitment to the restaurant and indeed, did more often call if they needed to cancel.
3. Before making an additional request, remind them of how what you'll ask for is consistent with their own values (these are internal priorities – so you better be asking questions to uncover those). People find it difficult to resist requests that are consistent with their own values.



In our appointment making workshops, we use some techniques that take advantage of this principle in the way we divide the opening of an appointment making call into segments that are designed only to get you to the next stage in the process, making it more difficult (but unfortunately not impossible) to say no to your request. For instance, by using the transitional phrase, "The reason I'm specifically calling you today..." it signals your intent to get right to the point. Most people will allow you to then continue to get through your value message.

During the buying process, asking them to do something that takes effort and commitment on their part (other than show up to a subsequent meeting) does three things. First, it gets them to do something that helps move them towards the decision you want them to make. Second, it is public if they have to perform some task, particularly if it requires others. And lastly, it provides you a chance to test their commitment to the process. Should they not agree, you can ask why, right while you're talking to them. That will shorten your buying cycles and discover those that will not buy from you earlier in the process, saving you the time and effort of additional work that could and should be invested with a different prospect.

Principle No. Five – Consensus and Proof

People decide what is appropriate for them, many times based on what others like them have done.

How do we apply this to sales?

1. Take the time to write up success stories and know them cold as they refer to the different situations and particularly, the 'groups' of prospects you call on. How many you need is totally dependent on the number of situations that occur in the course of your selling that you feel one of your existing success stories will not perfectly apply. It's one of the benefits of the 'post mortem' reports on why you lost a sale that most sales people feel are a waste of their time.
2. What if you're starting to call on a new group and you don't have any success stories that apply to this new group? Many times when making first contact calls in that situation, it is helpful to actually create affinity groups (if you don't have specific success stories that relate to them) that applies to the group you're calling on, such as, "others like you from the town of Lake Park", or "other companies like yours that are in the Midwest".
3. You have a moment of power right after receiving a 'thank you'. Be prepared to ask for referrals or a letter from peers.

In our Basic and Advanced Selling Skills workshop, we talk a lot about planning out your sales calls. One of the benefits of getting in the habit of thinking through *all* of your calls, sales or not, is that you will uncover moments of power



that you might have missed otherwise. Don't be a 'Bungler' and miss an opportunity to ask for something you'd like to have them do for you because you weren't prepared to do so.

Principle No. Six – The Principle of Liking

The final principle is that of the principle of liking. This is where I had an 'aha' moment. We all know that people buy from people they like. We've been taught that from the beginning of sales, right? But what was an interesting fact, is that Cialdini's research uncovered that people actually are more apt buy from people they think like them as individuals as well! Think about it. If you think that I like you, you're more willing to trust that I will do what is in your best interest. So what does this principle mean to us in sales?

1. The questions you ask in your sales calls must include questions that help you get to know your prospects on a personal level. Those kinds of questions show an interest in them. Be aware though, these must be genuine interest questions. If you are 'faking it', the results will be worse than not showing an interest.
2. Build relationships with your prospects and customers. When you uncover things that are important to them personally, jot it down. A perfect example of this was a cold call I made on an individual one time that told me he couldn't meet with me next week because he was going on a vacation at the end of that week and he'd be too busy trying to nail down some last minute things. I asked him if he was going anywhere special and he proceeded to tell me about a two week trip to Australia that he and his family had planned for years. We agreed for me to call him two weeks after his return. When I did so, the first thing I asked him was how Australia was. It was hard to get him to stop talking, but I got the appointment as we had broken through the impersonal barrier because I had taken the time to ask him about something that was truly important to him.
3. Plan your buying process well enough to build in the time to get to know your prospects. It will pay off in more sales, and who knows, perhaps some more friends. And friends continue to buy from friends.
4. This principle also applies to those moments of power after a 'thank you'. If you two like each other, it is easier for you to ask for a testimonial or a referral.

And one last thought on asking for referrals or testimonials. It is true that if we like one another, it is easier to ask for them. But to make it easier for them to comply, and there are two ways to accomplish that. First of all, ask questions that get them to reinforce the reasons why they decided to use your solution. If you did something special for them, ask them how that helped them. This will serve to bring back up the positive emotions of appreciation. Those emotions make it easier to then ask for what you want.



Second, once you get them to tell you the most important reasons why this was important to them, offer to write it up for them. Explain to them they can then edit it (as opposed to creating it) and put it on their stationery. Works every time!

If you're interested in going directly to the source, order Dr. Cialdini's CD, not the book. The CD is very engaging and the book is very, well, academic. You can order the CD at his website, www.influenceatwork.com.

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