

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

By Barry D. Caponi

One of my clients, Deb Newman, who is one of the country's foremost experts in long term care insurance, called me the other day to tell me how much she had gotten out of listening to Dr. Robert Cialdini's CD, *Influence, Science and Practice* over and over in her car and wanted to brainstorm with me how she might apply one of his principles on a policy delivery call she was going to make on a very prominent client that night. (We provide that CD in several of our workshops and recommend it highly.) We brainstormed it a little and I promptly forgot about it. An excited Deb Newman called me again that night on the way home from what turned out to be a very successful call. She told me that this client had been extremely pleased with some of the more creative things she had been able to accomplish for him and that he represented a new and very attractive market for her firm (Newman Long Term Care of Minneapolis, Minnesota, if you haven't taken care of your long term care insurance needs yet), so she wanted to ask him for his help in entering that market. She applied Cialdini's Principle of Reciprocity at the Moment of Power that occurred that evening, and was able to enlist his help in ways that went way beyond her highest expectations.

This is the first of a series of three articles covering those six principles and how we can apply them to our day to day selling efforts. This article will only cover the first principle, that of Reciprocity, as it will also cover some of his basic underlying philosophies that relate to all six. The remaining five principles will be covered in two additional installments.

Robert Cialdini is a professor of psychology at Arizona State University. I don't usually put a lot of stock in academics as they are usually, well, academic. Their theories don't seem to apply when it comes to reality. But Dr. Cialdini is an anomaly when it comes to academic psychologists. He has studied human nature and how it applies to the tendency of one person to comply with the request of another. His body of research not only includes fifty years of the clinically research into the psychology of persuasion you'd expect, but also his own studies of human nature in clinical 'controlled' environments. More importantly to how this applies to us in sales though, is that he has also gone out into the work place to see how people who must get others to comply with their requests for a living, use them. For instance, he went through the sales training programs of insurance companies, car sales companies, portrait photography (telesales), advertising companies, military recruiters, charity fund raising organizations, and even cults.



He has created a body of work that includes what he calls the six universal principles of influence and compliance. But before going into those six principles though, let me take you through four additional overriding manners of how sales people can apply these principles he says he discovered in his studies.

1. There are 'Moments of Power' that come about from time to time during our relationships with others. They are quite natural and therefore very powerful. I will talk about this phenomenon in each of the six principles and how we can predict and leverage them.
2. There are those of us who are 'bunglers' of influence – people who because they don't think through their situations, blow opportunities to leverage those moments of power that occur in the process of sales. In other words, they are not applying the leverage they actually create through the course of their efforts. This can be caused by being unaware of its existence, laziness, or just the lack of making the time to 'do it right'.
3. There are unfortunately 'smugglers' of influence – people who are dishonest or attempt to exploit those moments of power. And if we want our customers to buy from us again, we know this is not leveraging the full value of the effort we put into getting a sale in the first place. And besides, those that are dishonest with their customers are not likely to be the kind of people we want to be around ourselves anyway.
4. There are 'sleuths' or detectives of influence – people who look for natural occurrences of one of the six principles and then leverage it in a way that both parties benefit.

It is this fourth approach to which we subscribe and will describe throughout this series.

Principle No. One – The Principle of Reciprocity

From the time we are children, we are taught that we must not take without giving in return. Those that do not follow the 'rules' of society even have names such as moochers, or sponges, and none of us want a label like that.

To give you an example of how powerful that principle is, let me relate a couple of examples Cialdini uses in his book:

A professor at Brigham Young University, picked up a phone book and sent out 100 Christmas cards to absolute strangers, figuring he'd get a few responses. Instead he received a flood of return Christmas cards.

Another example was a study of waiters in restaurants. The concept behind this test was to see if the waiters could influence the size of their tips by providing something extra, or unexpected, to the diners in addition to good service. In a controlled test, they had waiters provide a mint on the tray they provided with the tab. They found that with



the tabs they supplied a mint; they got a little larger tip. As a matter of fact, they found that when they added additional mints for everyone at the table and personally delivered the mint to each diner, they got even greater tips. They also discovered that it was even more effective when it looked like it was spontaneous or unexpected. They also found that it was even more effective if delivered with sincerity. "I like to provide my *best* customers with something special (as the waiter would circle the table and place a mint in front of each diner, making eye contact with each). Thank you very much for dining with us tonight. You made it enjoyable to be your server tonight."

So how does this principle apply to us in sales?

Let's first think about the concept of 'Moments of Power'. We actually create them when we do something for the other person. Just be careful in asking for something in return. It should be of commensurate value.

1. At networking events – always make it a practice to be a giver. Always give prior to expecting to receive. Look for ways to provide leads for others, for instance, if you want them to do the same for you. And the more you get the reputation of being a giver, the more you will receive; even if it is not at that moment and even if it is not from that person.
2. In opening sales calls – always offer something of value in the beginning to get things started. In most cases I am referring to information, but in some circumstances it might be a small physical gift. Why do you think the route sales industry makes it a practice to offer a gift in order to get the appointment? It's because it works.

I always like to look at an initial meeting like this. I want to be able to provide some tidbit of information that the person I am seeing will find valuable, even if we agree not to move forward. I even incorporate a description of this valuable information into my script as the reason we should get together in the first place. The worst thing that should happen is that the person says to you, "I really don't think it makes sense for us to move forward, Barry, but this was a valuable investment of my time. Thank you for coming by." Remember, one of the reasons suspects agree to see us in the first place is that they know we bring information. The smart ones know they learn from us.

3. When providing a service that is appreciated by your prospect or customer you'll have a moment of power that is perfect, even if it is expected, but particularly when it seems like you went above and beyond. A good example of this is customer service to fix a problem.
4. When people say no to you, interestingly enough, you'll have a moment of power right at that point, so don't shortchange yourself when asking for the original sale. Ask for more than you think you'll get. Why?



- a. Sometimes you'll be surprised and get it
- b. Even if they say no to that offer, you then have a moment of power to ask for something lesser. "If solution 'A' doesn't work for you, you might want to choose what most of my clients opt for, which still covers what we've been talking about and allows for the flexibility to add to add the additional capabilities at a later date..."
- c. When you provide outstanding service, you also have a moment of power to ask for something in return – reference, referrals, a press release, etc. – be prepared to ask and don't 'bungle' those opportunities

So how do we prepare for these moments of power so as not to 'bungle' them away? Don't wing it. Think your sales calls through and use a simple call plan. (If you don't have one, we'll be more than happy to send you one.) Are you planning on delivering anything today to your customer that they will appreciate? Have you stepped in to solve a problem? Got them something that was in short supply?

If you did, be ready to ask for something in return. Remember my story of Deb Newman? She knew that what she had done for her client was greatly appreciated because he had told her that in a previous conversation. The challenge for her was how to get him back into that emotional and appreciative frame of mind before asking for what she wanted (an introduction into a specific individual in her case). This is the skill part. You must think of conversational questions to get the person to start thinking (and talking about) what you did for them in glowing terms. Sometimes you won't even need to ask as they'll bring it up as they say "Thank you". But sometimes you'll need to ask a question to 'prime the pump' so to speak. So think in terms of **what** and **how** type questions to get them talking about 'what' this will do (did do) for them and/or 'how' it will do (did) it.

Next month we'll talk about the Principles of Scarcity plus the Principle of Authority and Credibility. In the meantime, 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.

