

# Chapter 7

## PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE

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Figure 7.1 Sale on Shrimp!

Take a look at Figure 7.1. See anything odd? I was wheeling my cart around Dominicks, a popular supermarket chain in Chicago, when I noticed the sign depicted in Figure 7.1. At first, it caught my eye because I'm not accustomed to paying \$33.98 for items at the

Authors' Note: Portions of this chapter were adapted from Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

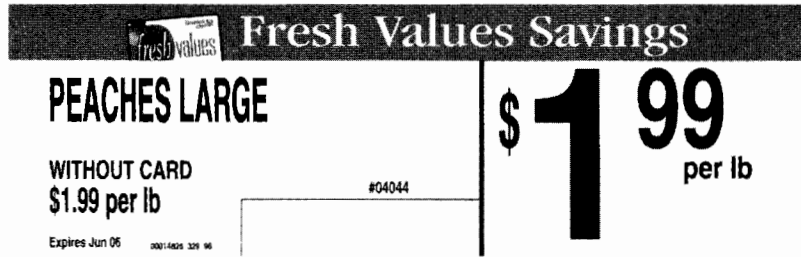


Figure 7.2 And Sale on Peaches!

grocery store. Then I noticed something else: The sale price (“fresh value price”) was identical to the original price! I chuckled to myself at all the fools who had mindlessly bought 2 pounds of shrimp, thinking they were getting a bargain. Alas, my smugness was short-lived. When I examined my own shopping cart, I discovered that I, too, had fallen prey to a less than generous sale. The evidence? A plastic bag stuffed with fresh peaches, purchased at a savings of exactly \$0.00 per pound (Figure 7.2). (Brad J. Sagarin)

The unwitting buyers of shrimp and peaches are in good company. Zimmatore (1983) documented a case of a tire company that distributed coupons that, due to a printing error, offered no savings whatsoever. Nevertheless, these valueless coupons produced just as much customer response as did error-free coupons that offered a substantial savings. In both of these instances, consumers responded mindlessly when presented with stimuli (e.g., sale signs, discount coupons) that typically offer savings.

In an elegant demonstration of this type of automatic response (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978), a researcher asked a small favor of people waiting in line to use a library copy machine: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I’m in a rush?” Fully 94% of those who were asked let the researcher slip ahead of them in line. Those who were approached with the same request but without a reason (“Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?”) let the researcher ahead of them only 60% of the time. 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, it was not the whole series of words but rather just the first one, “because,” that made the difference. Instead of including a real reason, Langer and colleagues’ (1978) third type of request 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%) of those who were asked agreed to let the researcher ahead of them. Many of the influence techniques discussed in this chapter capitalize on our tendency to respond automatically to certain cues in a persuasive message or influence situation. Although we can also be persuaded when processing in a deliberate thoughtful manner (Petty, Cacioppo, Strathman, & Priester, chap. 5, this volume), we are particularly vulnerable to techniques that elicit automatic responses due to the difficulty in defending against them.

The scientific study of the interpersonal influence process has been with us for nearly half a century, beginning with the government public information and persuasion programs of World War II (e.g., Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; see also Green & Brock, chap. 6, this volume). Since that time, numerous social scientists have investigated the ways in which one individual can influence another individual's attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and/or behaviors. This chapter focuses on a certain type of behavior change, *compliance*, which can be defined as action that is taken only because it has been requested. The process of generating compliance, then, refers to the process of getting others to say yes to a request. In other words, it is the science of getting what you ask for.

When the first author of this chapter began to research compliance, he did so (a) to determine the most powerful influences on our everyday decisions to say yes to a request and (b) to understand why these powerful influences work so successfully. Very quickly, a critical question arose: How does one determine which are the most powerful compliance principles and tactics? After a while, an answer emerged: by observing systematically what the commercial compliance professionals do. That is, one can determine these compliance techniques by observing the people who have been using these principles and tactics on us all our lives.

## THE EVOLUTION OF POWERFUL COMPLIANCE PRINCIPLES WITHIN COMPLIANCE PROFESSIONS

Who are the commercial compliance professionals, and why should we study their actions for clues to the factors that influence everyday compliance decisions? *Compliance professionals* can be defined as those individuals whose business or financial well-being is dependent on their ability to induce compliance (e.g., salespeople, fund-raisers, advertisers, political lobbyists, cult recruiters, con artists). With this definition in place, one can begin to recognize why the regular and widespread practices of these professionals would be noteworthy indicators of the powerful influences on the compliance process. A law not unlike that of natural selection may be working in the following way. Because the livelihoods of commercial compliance professionals depend on the effectiveness of their procedures, those professionals who use procedures that work well to elicit compliance responses will survive and flourish. Furthermore, they will pass on these successful procedures (somewhat like the way in which genes are passed on) to succeeding generations (e.g., trainees). However, those practitioners who use unsuccessful compliance procedures either will drop them or will quickly go out of business. In either case, the procedures themselves will not be passed on to succeeding generations.

Several years ago, I resolved to become a careful observer of commercial compliance pros. Accordingly, I took training or employment in a host of compliance professions, keeping my true identity and purposes unknown to those around me.<sup>1</sup> In this fashion, it was possible to learn which compliance procedures were being used and taught across an array of merchandising, advertising, direct sales, promotion, and fund-raising concerns. These firsthand experiences were supplemented with information from other sources such as instructional materials (e.g., sales training texts, handbooks on lobbying techniques) and personal interviews with especially successful practitioners. In the process, I looked for overarching compliance principles, that is, those principles that (a) occurred in a multitude

of versions, (b) appeared across the range of compliance professions, (c) were employable by the greatest number of compliance practitioners, and (d) had been used successfully in the past. (Robert B. Cialdini)

Which were the pervasive principles of influence that emerged from this analysis? Six stood out from the rest: reciprocity, social validation, commitment/consistency, friendship/liking, scarcity, and authority. A full account of the origins, workings, and prevalence of the six principles is available elsewhere (Cialdini, 2001). However, the material presented in the following sections offers a summary of the results of these investigations. It is organized around the six social psychological principles that appeared to be most implicated in naturally occurring compliance.<sup>2</sup> The implications for compliance that come from each principle are also discussed, as are the common tactics that activate the principles. In addition, the treatment of each principle includes an attempt to offer experimental data on the relevant “hows” and “whys” of the compliance process.

## RECIPROCITY

According to the sociologist Alvin Gouldner, who conducted an extensive review of the subject, every human society trains its members to live by the rule for reciprocity, which obligates people to give back the form of behavior they have received (Gouldner, 1960). So, gifts are to be met with return gifts, favors with return favors, benefits with return benefits, and so on. It is this sense of obligation to give back to those who have given first that forms a stimulus for compliance. People tend to say yes when they feel obligated to a requester who has previously provided them with some service or concession. To do otherwise would be to risk being labeled as a moocher, a taker, or an ingrate—labels everyone wishes to avoid.

Sometimes the effects of the rule for reciprocity are so great that we find people performing acts that would not have occurred under any other circumstances except an existing obligation to repay. For instance, in 1985, the Red Cross of Ethiopia—a country that could fairly lay claim to the greatest privation, suffering, and need in the world—donated \$5,000 to the victims of that year’s earthquake in Mexico City. When stunned reporters asked why, the answer came back clearly: because when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Mexico had sent aid. The rule for reciprocity and its attendant sense of obligation can be as forceful, elemental, and long-lasting as that.

A widely shared feeling of future obligation made an enormous difference in human social evolution because it meant that one person could give something (e.g., food, energy, care) to another person with confidence that it was not being lost. For the first time in evolutionary history, one individual could give away any of a variety of resources without actually giving the resources away. Thus, a person could provide help, gifts, defense, or trade goods to others in the group knowing that, when the time came, he or she could count on their repayment. Sophisticated and coordinated systems of gift giving, defense, and trade became possible, bringing immense benefit to the societies that possessed them. With such clearly adaptive consequences for the culture, it is not surprising that the norm for reciprocation is so deeply implanted in us by the process of socialization that we all undergo.

A reciprocation principle for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously provided a favor or concession.* Under this general principle, then, people will sometimes be willing to return

a favor with a larger favor (e.g., Regan, 1971). A number of sales and fund-raising tactics use this factor to their own advantage. The compliance professional initially gives something to the target person, thereby causing the target to be more likely to give something in return. This “something in return” often is the target person’s compliance.

For example, survey researchers have discovered that sending a monetary gift (a silver dollar or a \$5 check) in an envelope with a mailed questionnaire greatly increases survey completion rates compared with offering the same monetary amount as an after-the-fact reward (Church, 1993; Warriner, Goyder, Gjertsen, Horner, & McSpurren, 1996). Indeed, one study showed that mailing a \$5 “gift” check along with an insurance survey was twice as effective as offering a \$50 payment for sending back a completed survey (James & Bolstein, 1992). Similarly, food servers have learned that simply giving customers pieces of candy or mints along with their bills increases tips significantly (Lynn & McCall, 1998).

The unsolicited gift, accompanied by a request for a donation, is a commonly used technique that employs the norm for reciprocation. Many organizations send free gifts through the mail. Legitimate and less than legitimate missionary and disabled veterans organizations often employ this highly effective device. These organizations count on the fact that most people will not go to the trouble of returning the gifts and will feel uncomfortable about keeping them without reciprocating in some way. The organizations also count on the willingness of people to send contributions that are larger than the costs of the gifts they received.

Retail stores and services also make use of the powerful social pressure for reciprocation in their sales techniques. It is not uncommon to find exterminating companies that offer free home inspections. These companies bargain on the fact that a consumer, when confronted with the knowledge that his or her home is infested with termites, will not delay action until he or she has done some comparison shopping. A customer who feels indebted to a particular company will buy its services to repay the favor of a free examination. Certain companies, knowing that customers are unlikely to comparison shop, have been known to raise the quoted price of extermination above normal for those who have requested free inspections. In general, business operators have found that customers, after accepting gifts, are willing to purchase products and services they would have otherwise declined (Gruner, 1996).

Reciprocal obligations also influence our behavior in a number of other important persuasive settings. For example, research has demonstrated that if a woman allows a man to buy her drinks instead of paying for them herself, she is immediately judged (by both men and women) as more sexually available to the man (George, Gournic, & McAfee, 1988). Finally, it appears that persuasion itself is subject to reciprocation. In a series of studies, Cialdini, Green, and Rusch (1992) demonstrated that experimental participants who believed they had successfully persuaded another participant were significantly more likely to respond positively to the participant’s subsequent attempts to persuade them. However, this reciprocal persuasion led to true attitude change only if the arguments were strong.

## Reciprocal Concessions

A variation of the norm for reciprocation of favors is that for reciprocation of concessions. A reciprocal concessions procedure (or *door-in-the-face technique*) for inducing compliance was documented by Cialdini and colleagues (1975). A requester uses this procedure by beginning with an extreme request that is nearly always rejected and then retreating to a more moderate favor—the one the requester had in mind from the outset. In so doing, the requester hopes that the retreat from the extreme request to the moderate request will spur the target person to make



**Figure 7.3** The Door-in-the-Face Technique, Where Sequence Is Everything

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a reciprocal concession—by moving from initial rejection of the larger favor to acceptance of the smaller one (Figure 7.3). This reciprocal concessions strategy has been used successfully in fund-raising contexts where, after refusing larger requests for donations, people are substantially more likely than before to give average-size contributions (e.g., Reingen, 1978).

Cialdini and Ascani (1976) also used this technique in soliciting blood donors. The solicitor first requested a person's involvement in a long-term donor program. When that request was refused, the solicitor made a smaller request for a one-time donation. This pattern of a large request (which is refused) followed by a smaller request increased compliance with the smaller request significantly as compared with a control condition of people who were asked only to perform the smaller one-time favor (50% vs. 32% compliance rate). Furthermore, those who donated blood due to the door-in-the-face technique were nearly twice as likely as other donors to give their phone numbers so that they could be called on to donate in the future. This result highlights a powerful side effect of reciprocal concessions, namely, that the persuasive target actually leaves the transaction feeling better about the outcome (see also Benton, Kelley, & Liebling, 1972). As one study of retail sales showed, feeling responsible for getting a better deal led to more satisfaction with the process and more repurchases of the product (Schindler, 1998).

Of special interest to college students is evidence that the door-in-the-face technique can greatly increase a university professor's willingness to spend time helping a student. In a study by Harari, Mohr, and Hosey (1980), only 59% of faculty members were willing to spend "15 to 20 minutes" to meet with a student on an issue of interest to the student when that was the only request the student made. However, significantly more faculty members (78%) were willing to agree to that same request if they had first refused a request to meet with the student for "2 hours a week for the rest of the semester."

## SOCIAL VALIDATION

The principle of social validation states that one means we use to determine what is correct is to find out what other people think is correct. Thus, we view a behavior as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it. Whether the question is what

to do with an empty popcorn box in a theater, how fast to drive on a certain stretch of highway, or how to eat the chicken at a dinner party, the actions of those around us will play an important role in defining the answer.

The tendency to see an action as more appropriate when others are doing it normally works quite well. As a rule, we will make many fewer mistakes by acting in accord with social evidence than by acting contrary to it. When a lot of people are doing something, it is usually the right thing to do. That is why the more people who are performing a behavior, the stronger is our likelihood of doing it as well. If you doubt that the seeming appropriateness of an action is importantly influenced by the number of others performing it, try a small experiment. Stand on a busy sidewalk, pick an empty spot in the sky or on a tall building, and stare at it for a full minute. Very little will happen around you during that time; most people will walk past without glancing up, and virtually no one will stop to stare with you. The next day, go to the same place and bring along four friends to look upward as well. Within 60 seconds, a crowd of passersby will have stopped to crane their necks skyward with the group. For those pedestrians who do not join you, the pressure to look up at least briefly will be nearly irresistible. If the results of your experiment are like those of one performed by three New York social psychologists, you and your friends will cause 80% of all passersby to lift their gazes to your empty spot (Milgram, Bickman, & Berkowitz, 1969).

What happens when we receive conflicting social information, that is, when what we see people doing in a situation conflicts with what we know they *ought* to do in that situation? Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren (1990) explored this question in a series of studies that sought to distinguish the impact of descriptive norms (information regarding what most others do in a situation) from injunctive norms (information regarding what most others approve or disapprove of in a situation). In the first study, participants returning to their cars in a parking garage found handbills on their car windshields. The garage floor was either cleaned of all litter (an anti-littering descriptive norm) or heavily littered with an assortment of handbills, candy wrappers, cigarette butts, and paper cups (a pro-littering descriptive norm). In addition, each participant's attention was either focused on the descriptive norm (a confederate conspicuously littered a handbill within sight of the participant) or not specifically focused (the confederate walked by the participant). Participants littered more in a littered environment (32% of participants) than in a clean environment (14%), and this effect increased when participants' attention was focused on the descriptive norm (54% vs. 6%).

In a subsequent study, the text of the handbill was varied. Littering rates were significantly lower when the handbill focused participants on the relevant injunctive norm ("Please do not litter") than when the handbill had no injunctive normative message ("Please visit your local art museum") (10% vs. 25%). Finally, a study examined the impact of competing norms. In this study, the parking garage contained either unswept litter (a pro-littering descriptive norm) or litter swept into piles (a pro-littering descriptive norm with an anti-littering injunctive norm). When a confederate's conspicuous littering focused participant attention on the normative information, the injunctive norm triumphed; despite the presence of a substantial amount of litter, substantially fewer participants littered in an environment containing a clear anti-littering injunctive message (45% with unswept litter vs. 18% with swept litter). A subsequent study by Reno, Cialdini, and Kallgren (1993) implemented the injunctive norm by having the confederate pick up a piece of litter in front of the participants. On seeing this, few participants littered regardless of the state of the environment (7% in a clean environment vs. 4% in a littered environment).

This important distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms was highlighted in a field study in the Petrified Forest National Park. The staff members at the park face an enormous problem with the theft of petrified wood. Unfortunately, the park's existing signs often focused visitors on the pro-theft descriptive norm (e.g., "Your heritage is being vandalized every day by theft losses of petrified wood of 14 tons a year, mostly a small piece at a time"). The creator of this sign clearly intended it to communicate an injunctive normative message, but the louder message may have been the descriptive norm (e.g., "Fourteen tons a year? I'd better grab some before it's all gone!"). Cialdini and colleagues (Cialdini, 2003; Cialdini et al., 2003) tested this theory by creating signs that contained either an explicit descriptive normative message or an explicit injunctive normative message. They then placed these signs in specified areas of the park and seeded the areas with petrified wood. By the end of the study, 8% of the petrified wood had been stolen in the presence of the sign containing information about the large amount of petrified wood that other visitors steal from the park (the descriptive normative message) compared with 2% in the presence of the sign requesting visitors to not remove the wood from the park (the injunctive normative message).

The *similarity* of others to us also plays an important role in determining how we will see the correctness of an action (Festinger, 1954). Powerful modeling effects of similar others have been found in diverse activities such as altruism (e.g., Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968), paint store purchases (Brock, 1965), and suicides (Phillips, 1974). In each case, the more similar an observer was to someone taking an action, the more likely it was that the observer would follow suit.

The social validation rule for compliance can be stated as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with a request or behavior if it is consistent with what similar others are thinking or doing.* Our tendency to assume that an action is more correct if others are doing it is exploited in a variety of settings. Bartenders often "salt" their tip jars with a few dollar bills at the beginning of the evening to simulate tips left by prior customers and to give the impression that tipping with folding money is proper barroom behavior. Church ushers sometimes prime collection baskets for the same reason and with the same positive effect on proceeds. Evangelical preachers are known to seed their audiences with "ringers," who are rehearsed to come forward at a specified time to give witness and donations. For example, an Arizona State University research team that infiltrated the Billy Graham organization reported on such advance preparations prior to one of his crusade visits. "By the time Graham arrives in town and makes his altar call, an army of 6,000 await with instructions on when to come forth at varying intervals to create the impression of spontaneous mass outpouring" (Altheide & Johnson, 1977, p. 344). Advertisers love to inform us when their products are the "fastest growing" or "largest selling" because they do not have to convince us directly that the products are good; they need only say that many others think so, which seems like sufficient proof. The producers of charity telethons devote inordinate amounts of time to the incessant listing of viewers who have already pledged contributions. The message being communicated to the holdouts is clear: Look at all of the people who have decided to give; it must be the correct thing to do.

Among the multitude of clever ways in which compliance professionals have managed to exploit the principle of social validation on their behalf, one of the most straightforward is called the *list technique*. This technique involves asking for a request only after the target person has been shown a list of similar others who have already complied. Reingen (1982) conducted several experiments in which college students or homeowners were asked to donate money or blood to a charitable cause. Those individuals who were initially shown

a list of similar others who had already complied were significantly more likely to comply themselves. Moreover, the longer the list, the greater was the effect.

Although nearly everyone is at least somewhat susceptible to social validation-based influence techniques, the results of a cross-cultural study by Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, and Gornik-Durose (1999) suggest that such techniques may be most effective against people with a collectivistic orientation, that is, people who tend to define themselves in terms of their group memberships (Kim, 1994). In contrast, people with an individualistic orientation—that is, people who define themselves as autonomous and independent from their groups—may be particularly susceptible to commitment/consistency-based techniques (discussed in the next section).

In Cialdini and colleagues' (1999) study, university students were asked how likely they would be to comply with a request to participate in a marketing survey without pay. Half of the students were asked first to consider information regarding their peers' history of compliance with such requests (a social validation-based influence technique), whereas the other half were asked first to consider information regarding their own history of such compliance (a commitment/consistency-based influence technique). Peer information had greater impact on participants from a collectivistic-oriented culture (Poland), whereas information about one's own history of compliance had a greater impact on participants from an individualistic-oriented culture (the United States).

## COMMITMENT/CONSISTENCY

"Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." So goes a frequently heard quotation attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, but what a very odd thing to say. Looking around today, just the reverse appears to be the case. It seems that those among us who are *inconsistent* are the ones thought to be intellectually limited. The woman who changes her mind again and again is considered to be flighty or scatterbrained. The man whose opinions can be easily influenced is viewed as indecisive and weak-willed. The person whose beliefs, words, and deeds do not match is seen as confused at best. And disjointed behavior is regarded as a key symptom of mental illness.

Quite contrary to what Emerson seemingly suggested, consistency is normally associated with intellectual strength. A high degree of consistency is at the heart of logic, rationality, stability, and even honesty. Certainly, good consistency within one's thoughts, words, and actions is highly valued in American society—as well it should be. It provides us with a reasonable and adaptive orientation to the world. Most of the time, we will be better off if our approach to things is well laced with consistency.

Social psychologists have long understood the strength of the consistency principle to direct human action. Prominent theorists such as Leon Festinger (cognitive dissonance theory), Fritz Heider (balance theory), and Theodore Newcomb (strain toward symmetry theory) viewed the desire for consistency as a prime motivator of our behavior (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1953). More recently, other theorists (e.g., Baumeister, 1982; Tedeschi, 1981) have recognized that the desire to *appear* consistent exerts considerable influence over our behavior as well. If we grant that the power of consistency is formidable in directing human action, an important practical question immediately arises: How is that force engaged? Social psychologists think that they know the answer—commitment. If a person can get you to make



**Figure 7.4** The Four Walls Technique

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a commitment (i.e., to take a stand or go on record), that person will have set the stage for your consistency with that earlier commitment. Once a stand has been taken, there is a natural tendency to behave in ways that are stubbornly consistent with the stand (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Kiesler, 1971). Extracting such commitments from people has been shown to significantly increase their likelihood of volunteering (Sherman, 1980) and voting (Greenwald, Carnot, Beach, & Young, 1987; Spangenberg & Greenwald, 2001).

A commitment/consistency principle for compliance can be worded as follows: *After committing oneself to a position, one should be more willing to comply with requests for behaviors that are consistent with that position.* Any of a variety of strategies may be used to generate the crucial instigating commitment. One such strategy is called the *four walls technique* (Figure 7.4). To our knowledge, it has never been investigated experimentally. Yet it is a frequent practice of door-to-door salespeople, who use it primarily to gain permission to enter a customer's home. The technique consists of asking several questions to which the customer will be very likely to answer yes. To be consistent with the previous answers, the customer must then say yes to the crucial final question. In one encyclopedia sales situation, the technique proceeded as follows:

*First wall:* "Do you feel that a good education is important to your children?"

*Second wall:* "Do you think that a child who does his or her homework well will get a better education?"

*Third wall:* "Don't you agree that a good set of reference books will help a child do well on homework assignments?"

*Fourth wall:* "Well, then, it sounds like you'll want to hear about this fine set of encyclopedias I have to offer at an excellent price. May I come in?"

A similar "start small" procedure is embodied in the much more researched *foot-in-the-door technique* (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). A solicitor using this technique will first ask for a small favor that is virtually certain to be granted. The initial compliance is then followed by a request for a larger *related* favor. It has been found repeatedly that people who agree to the initial small favor are more willing to agree to the larger one (for a review, see Burger, 1999), seemingly to

be consistent with the implication of the initial action. For instance, homeowners who had agreed to accept and wear a small lapel pin promoting a local charity were, seemingly as a consequence, more likely to contribute money to that charity when they were canvassed during a subsequent donation drive (Pliner, Hart, Kohl, & Saari, 1974).

Freedman and Fraser (1966) argued that the foot-in-the-door technique is successful because performance of the initially requested action causes individuals to see themselves as possessing certain traits. For example, in Pliner and colleagues' (1974) study, after taking and wearing the charity pin, individuals would be expected to see themselves as favorable toward charitable causes, especially this particular one. Later, when asked to perform the larger related favor of contributing to that charity, these individuals would be more willing to do so to be consistent with the charitable trait they had assigned to themselves. Recent support for this interpretation comes from a study showing that children are not influenced by the foot-in-the-door technique until they are old enough to understand the idea of a stable personality trait (roughly 6 or 7 years of age). Once children are old enough to understand the meaning of a stable trait, the foot-in-the-door tactic becomes effective, especially among those children who prefer consistency in behavior (Eisenberg, Cialdini, McCreath, & Shell, 1986). Other research has shown that adults also vary in their preference for consistency and that adults who prefer consistency in themselves, and in those around them, are more susceptible to a variety of consistency-based phenomena (e.g., balance and cognitive dissonance [Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995], dissonance theory [Cooper, Mirabile, & Scher, chap. 4, this volume]) and commitment/consistency-based compliance techniques (e.g., foot-in-the-door technique [Cialdini et al., 1995; Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, & Cialdini, 2001]).

Other more unsavory techniques induce a commitment to an item and then remove the inducements that generated the commitment. Remarkably, the commitment frequently remains. For example, the *bait-and-switch procedure* is used by some retailers who may advertise certain merchandise (e.g., a room of furniture) at a special low price. When the customer arrives to take advantage of the special, he or she finds the merchandise to be of low quality or sold out. However, because customers have by now made an active commitment to getting new furniture at that particular store, they are more willing to agree to examine and consequently buy alternate merchandise there (Joule, Gouilloux, & Weber, 1989).

A similar strategy is employed by car dealers in the *low-ball technique*, which proceeds by obtaining a commitment to an action and then increasing the costs of performing the action. The automobile salesperson who "throws the low-ball" induces the customer to decide to buy a particular model car by offering a low price on the car or an inflated one on the customer's trade-in. After the decision has been made (and, at times, after the commitment is enhanced by allowing the customer to arrange financing, take the car home overnight, and so on), something happens to remove the reason why the customer decided to buy in the first place. Perhaps a price calculation error is found or the used car assessor disallows the inflated trade-in figure. By this time, however, the customer has experienced an internal commitment to that specific automobile and proceeds with the purchase.

Experimental research has documented the effectiveness of this tactic in settings beyond automobile sales. For example, in one study by Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, and Miller (1978), the low-ball procedure was directed at college students who were told of a 7:00 A.M. starting time only after they had agreed to be in a psychology experiment. On then learning of the starting time and being given the chance to cancel, these individuals remained more willing to make an appointment to participate than did individuals who had heard of the 7:00 A.M.

time from the outset. Furthermore, virtually all of the low-ball participants who agreed to participate appeared for the study as promised. Cialdini and colleagues interpreted these results in terms of participants' desire for consistency with their earlier verbal commitment. Additional research indicated that the tactic is effective primarily when used by a single requester (Burger & Petty, 1981) and when the initial commitment is freely made (Cialdini et al., 1978).

One thing that these procedures (and others like them) have in common is the establishment of an earlier commitment that is consistent with a later action desired by the compliance professional. The need for consistency then takes over to compel performance of the desired behavior. However, not all types of these earlier commitments are equally effective. There is research evidence suggesting that certain types of commitments lead to consistent future responding. The current context does not allow sufficient space for a thorough discussion of that evidence. Nonetheless, a fair summary of the research literature is that a commitment is most likely to produce consistent future behavior to the extent that it is active (Bem, 1967; Cioffi & Garner, 1996), effortful (Aronson & Mills, 1959), public (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), and viewed as being internally motivated (i.e., uncoerced) (Freedman, 1965).

Another approach to employing the commitment/consistency principle also has popularity among commercial compliance professionals. Rather than inducing a new commitment to their product or service, many practitioners point out existing commitments within potential customers that are consistent with the product or service being offered. In this way, desirable existing commitments are made to be more visible to the customers, and the strain for consistency is allowed to direct behavior accordingly. For example, insurance agents are frequently taught to stress to new homeowners that the purchase of a house reflects an enormous personal commitment to one's home and the well-being of one's family. Consequently, they argue, it would be consistent with such a commitment to home and family to purchase home and life insurance in amounts that befit the size of this commitment.

Research of various kinds indicates that this sort of sensitization to commitments, and to consequent inconsistencies, can be effective in producing belief and attitude change. One impressive program of work in this regard comes from Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, and Grube (1984), who demonstrated long-term behavioral effects from a television program that focused viewers on their personal commitments to certain deep-seated values (e.g., freedom, equality), on the one hand, and their current beliefs and behaviors, on the other. Uninterrupted viewers of this single program not only demonstrated enhanced commitment to these values but also were significantly more likely to donate money to support causes consistent with the values 2–3 months after the program had aired.

A more manipulative tactic than merely focusing people on their existing values is to put them in a situation where refusing a specific request would be inconsistent with a value that people wish to be known as possessing. One such tactic is the *legitimization of paltry favors technique* (or *even a penny would help technique*). Most people prefer to behave in ways that are consistent with a view of themselves as helpful and charitable individuals. Consequently, a fund-raiser who makes a request that legitimizes a paltry amount of aid ("Could you give a contribution? Even a penny would help") makes it difficult for a target to refuse to give at all; to do so risks appearing to be a very unhelpful person. Notice that this procedure does not specifically request a trivial sum; that would probably lead to a profusion of pennies and a small total take. Instead, the request simply makes a miniscule form of aid acceptable, thereby reducing the target's ability to give nothing and still remain consistent with the desirable

image of a helpful individual. After all, how could a person remain committed to a helpful image after refusing to contribute when “even a penny would help”?

Experimental research done to validate the effectiveness of the technique has shown it to be successful in increasing the percentage of charity contributors (Brockner, Guzzi, Kane, Levine, & Shaplen, 1984; Cialdini & Schroeder, 1976; Reeves, Macolini, & Martin, 1987; Reingen, 1978; Weyant, 1984). What’s more, in each of these studies, the even a penny would help procedure proved to be profitable because participants did not actually give a penny but provided the donation amount typically given to charities. Thus, the legitimization of paltry favors approach appears to work by getting more people to agree to give (so as to be consistent with a helpful image), but the decision of how much to give is left unaffected by the mention of a paltry amount. The consequence is increased proceeds.

## FRIENDSHIP/LIKING

A fact of social interaction to which each of us can attest is that people are more favorably inclined toward the needs of those individuals they know and like. Consequently, a friendship/liking principle for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to comply with the requests of friends or other liked individuals.*

A vivid illustration of the professional exploitation of the friendship/liking rule is the Tupperware home party. The power of the Tupperware party comes from a particular arrangement that trades on the friendship/liking rule. Despite the entertaining and persuasive salesmanship of the Tupperware representative, the true request to purchase the product does not come from this stranger; instead, it comes from a friend to every woman in the room. Oh, the Tupperware representative may indeed physically ask for each partygoer’s order, but the more psychologically compelling requester is a housewife sitting off to one side, smiling, chatting, and serving refreshments. She is the party hostess who has called her friends together for the demonstration in her home and who, as everyone in the room knows, makes a profit from each piece sold at her party.

The technique is simple. By providing the hostess with a percentage of the take, the Tupperware company arranges for its customers to buy from and for a friend rather than from an unknown salesperson. In this way, the attraction, warmth, security, and obligation of friendship are brought to bear on the sales setting (Frenzen & Davis, 1990). The results have been remarkable. It was recently estimated that Tupperware sales exceed \$2.5 million per day. Indeed, Tupperware’s home party sales concept has proven to be especially successful in Europe, Latin America, and Asia—societies where one’s place in a network of friends and family is more socially significant than it is in the United States (Triandis, 1995). As a result, more than three quarters of current Tupperware sales take place outside North America.

With so irresistible an ally as the friendship/liking rule operating, there is little wonder that the Tupperware company has abandoned retail sales outlets and has pushed the home party concept such that today a Tupperware party starts somewhere in the world every 10 seconds. But of course, all sorts of other compliance professionals recognize the pressure to say yes to someone we know and like. Take, for instance, the large number of charity organizations that recruit volunteers to canvass for donations close to their own homes. They understand perfectly how much more difficult it is for us to turn down a charity request when it comes from a friend or neighbor.

Compliance practitioners' use of the liking bond between friends tells us much about the power of the friendship/liking rule to produce assent. Still more informative in this regard is that such professionals seek to benefit from the rule even when already formed friendships are not present for them to employ. Under these circumstances, the professionals' compliance strategy is quite direct: They first get us to like *them*. But how do they do it? It turns out that the tactics that practitioners use to generate liking cluster around certain factors that also have been shown to increase liking in controlled research.

### Physical Attractiveness

Although it is generally acknowledged that good-looking people have an advantage in social interaction, recent findings indicate that we may have sorely underestimated the size and reach of that advantage. There appears to be a positive reaction to good physical appearance that generalizes to favorable trait perceptions such as talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence (e.g., Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Rich, 1975; for a review, see Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). As a consequence, attractive individuals are more persuasive both in terms of changing attitudes (Chaiken, 1979) and in terms of getting what they request (Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976).

For instance, a study of the 1974 Canadian federal elections found that attractive candidates received more than two and a half times the votes of unattractive candidates (Efran & Patterson, 1976). Equally impressive results seem to be obtained in the judicial system. In a Pennsylvania study, researchers rated the physical attractiveness of 74 separate male defendants at the start of their criminal trials. When the researchers checked the results of these cases in court records much later, they found that the better-looking men received significantly lighter sentences. In fact, the attractive defendants were twice as likely as the unattractive defendants to avoid incarceration (Stewart, 1980; for reviews, see Castellow, Wuensch, & Moore, 1990; Downs & Lyons, 1990). When viewed in the light of such powerful effects, it is not surprising that extremely attractive models are employed to promote products and services, that sales trainers frequently include appearance and grooming tips in their presentations, and that con men usually are handsome and con women usually are pretty.

### Similarity

We like people who are similar to us (Byrne, 1971). This fact seems to hold true whether the similarity occurs in the area of opinions, personality traits, background, or lifestyle. Consequently, those who wish to be liked so as to increase our compliance can accomplish that purpose by appearing to be similar to us in any of a wide variety of ways.

Dress is a good example. Several studies have demonstrated that we are more likely to help those who dress like us. In one study conducted during the early 1970s when young people tended to dress either in "hippie" or "straight" fashion, experimenters donned hippie or straight attire and asked college students on campus for a dime to make a phone call. When the experimenter was dressed the same as the student, the request was granted in more than two thirds of the instances; however, when the student and requester were dressed dissimilarly, a dime was provided less than half of the time (Emswiller, Deaux, & Willits, 1971). Another experiment showed how automatic our positive response to similar others can be. Marchers in an anti-war demonstration were found not only to be more likely to sign the petition of a

similarly dressed requester but also to do so without bothering to read it first (Suedfeld, Bochner, & Matas, 1971).

Even something as coincidental as a similar name can produce increased compliance. Garner (1999) was able to significantly increase the percentage of people who responded to a mailed survey by changing one small feature of the request. On a cover letter, he modified the name of the survey taker to be similar to that of the survey recipient. For example, Robert Greer received the survey from a survey center official named Bob Gregar, and Cynthia Johnson received hers from Cindy Johanson. In two separate studies, adding this little bit of similarity to the exchange nearly doubled the survey response rate.

## **Compliments**

Praise and other forms of positive estimation also stimulate liking (e.g., Byrne & Rhamey, 1965). The actor McLean Stevenson once described how his wife tricked him into marriage: “She said she liked me.” Although designed for a laugh, the remark is as much instructive as it is humorous. The simple information that someone fancies us can be a bewitchingly effective device for producing return liking and willing compliance. Although there are limits to our gullibility, especially when we can be sure that the flatterer’s intent is manipulative (Jones & Wortman, 1973), we tend to believe praise and to like those who provide it.

Evidence of the power of praise on liking comes from a study in which men received personal comments from someone who needed a favor from them (Drachman, deCarufel, & Insko, 1978). Some of the men got only positive comments, some got only negative comments, and some got a mixture of positive and negative comments. There were three interesting findings. First, the evaluator who offered only praise was liked the best. Second, this was so even though the men fully realized that the flatterer stood to gain from their liking him. Finally, unlike the other types of comments, pure praise did not have to be accurate to work. Compliments produced just as much liking for the flatterer when they were untrue as when they were true.

It is for such reasons that direct salespeople are educated in the art of praise. A potential customer’s home, clothes, car, taste, and the like all are frequent targets for compliments.

## **Cooperation**

Cooperation is another factor that has been shown to enhance positive feelings and behavior (cf. Aronson, Bridgeman, & Geffner, 1978; Cook, 1978). Those who cooperate toward the achievement of a common goal are more favorable and helpful to each other as a consequence. That is why compliance professionals often strive to be perceived as cooperating partners with target persons. Automobile sales managers frequently set themselves as “villains” so that salespeople can “do battle” on customers’ behalf. The cooperative, pulling together kind of relationship that is consequently produced between salespeople and customers naturally leads to a desirable form of liking that promotes sales.

## **Prior Interaction and Communication Mode**

Recent research by Guadagno and Cialdini (2002) suggested that women and men respond differently to influence attempts based on their prior interactions with the persuader and the

communication mode of the persuasive message. For women, face-to-face communication produced more persuasion than did more impersonal communication through e-mail. For men, on the other hand, communication mode did not influence persuasion. The importance to women of a relationship between the persuader and the target was highlighted in a second study in which the persuader and target engaged in a competitive interaction, a cooperative interaction, or no interaction prior to the persuasive attempt. For women, the condition that provided the least social interaction (the no prior interaction/e-mail condition) led to the least persuasion; however, for men, the condition that provided the most social challenge (the competitive prior interaction/face-to-face condition) led to the least persuasion. It appears that the friendship and liking that stem from social interaction have a particularly strong impact for women.

## SCARCITY

Opportunities seem to be more valuable to us when they are less available. Interestingly, this is often true even when the opportunity holds little attraction for us on its own merits. Take as evidence the experience of Florida State University students who, like most undergraduates, rated themselves as dissatisfied with the quality of the campus cafeteria food. Nine days later, they had changed their minds, rating that food as significantly better than they had rated it before. It is instructive that no actual improvement in food service had occurred between the two ratings. Instead, on the day of the second rating, the students had learned that, as a result of a fire, they could not eat at the cafeteria for 2 weeks (West, 1975).

Collectors of everything from baseball cards to antiques are keenly aware of the influence of scarcity in determining the worth of an item. As a rule, if an item is rare or becoming rare, it is more valuable. Especially enlightening as to the importance of scarcity in the collectibles market is the phenomenon of the "precious mistake." Flawed items, such as blurred stamps and double-struck coins, are sometimes the most valued of all. Thus, a stamp carrying a three-eyed likeness of George Washington is anatomically incorrect, aesthetically unappealing, and yet highly sought after. There is instructive irony here: Imperfections that would otherwise make for rubbish make for prized possessions when they bring along an abiding scarcity.

There appear to be two major sources of the power of scarcity. First, because we know that the things that are difficult to possess are typically better than those that are easy to possess, we can often use an item's availability to help us quickly and correctly determine its quality. Thus, one reason for the potency of scarcity is that, by assessing it, we can get a shortcut indication of an item's value.

In addition, there is a unique secondary source of power within scarcity: As the things we can have become less available, we lose freedoms—and we *hate* to lose the freedoms we already have. This desire to preserve our established prerogatives is the centerpiece of *psychological reactance theory* (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981), which was developed to explain the human response to diminishing personal control. According to the theory, whenever our freedoms are limited or threatened, the need to retain them makes us want them (as well as the goods and services associated with them) significantly more than we did before. So, when increasing scarcity—or anything else—interferes with our prior access to some item, we will *react against* the interference by wanting and trying to possess the item more than we did before.

One naturally occurring example of the consequences of increased scarcity can be seen in the outcome of a decision by county officials in Miami, Florida, to ban the use and possession of phosphate detergents. Spurred by the tendency to want what they could no longer have, the majority of Miami consumers came to see phosphate cleaners as better products than they did before. Compared with residents in Tampa, Florida, who were not affected by the Miami ordinance, the citizens of Miami rated phosphate detergents as gentler, more effective in cold water, better whiteners and fresheners, more powerful on stains, and so on. After passage of the law, they had even come to believe that phosphate detergents poured easier than the Tampa consumers believed they poured (Mazis, 1975).

This sort of response is typical of individuals who have lost an established freedom and is crucial to an understanding of how psychological reactance and scarcity work on us. When our freedom to have something is limited, the item becomes less available and we experience an increased desire for it. However, we rarely recognize that psychological reactance has caused us to want the item more; all we know is that we want it. Still, we need to make sense of our desire for the item, so we begin to assign it positive qualities to justify the desire. After all, it is natural to suppose that if one feels drawn to something, it is due to the merit of the thing. In the case of the Miami anti-phosphate law, as well as in other instances of newly restricted availability, that is a faulty supposition. Phosphate detergents clean, whiten, and pour no better after they are banned than they did before. We just assume that they do because we find that we desire them more.

Other research has suggested that, in addition to commodities, limited access to information makes the information more desirable—and more influential (Brock, 1968). A test of Brock's thinking by Knishinsky (1982) found good support in a business setting. Wholesale beef buyers, who were told of an impending imported beef shortage, purchased significantly more beef when they were informed that the shortage information came from certain "exclusive" contacts that the importer had. Apparently, the fact that the news was itself scarce made it more valued and persuasive.

A scarcity principle for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should try to secure those opportunities that are scarce or dwindling.* With scarcity operating powerfully on the worth assigned to things, it should not be surprising that compliance professionals have a variety of techniques designed to convert this power to compliance, as the first author discovered during his undercover investigation of compliance tactics:

Probably the most frequently such used technique I witnessed was the limited number tactic, in which the customer is informed that membership opportunities, products, or services exist in a limited supply that cannot be guaranteed to last for long. In some instances I observed, the limited number information was true; in others, it was not. In each case, however, the intent was to convince prospects of an item's scarcity and thereby increase its immediate worth in their eyes. At one appliance store where I worked, it was not uncommon for salespeople to raise the value of a particular sale item for a customer by announcing, "The last one has just been sold, and I'm sure we have no more in the back; however, I can check with our other store, and if I can get it for you at the sale price, would you like to buy it?" In this way, customers were induced to make a commitment at a time when the scarcity principle would render the merchandise most attractive. Many of the customers eagerly agreed and were uniformly pleased (even relieved) when the salesperson invariably reported that, yes, the other store location still had one in stock. (Robert B. Cialdini)

Related to the limited number tactic is the *deadline technique*, in which an official time limit is placed on the customer's opportunity to get what is being offered. Newspaper ads abound with admonitions to the customer regarding the folly of delay—"last three days," "limited time offer," "one week only sale." One rather single-minded movie advertiser managed to load three separate appeals to the scarcity principle into just five words of copy in a newspaper ad: "exclusive, limited engagement, ends soon."

The purest form of a decision deadline—right now—occurs in a variant of the deadline technique in which customers are told that unless they make an immediate purchase decision, they will have to buy the item at a higher price or will not be able to purchase it at all. This tactic is used in numerous compliance settings. One large child photography company urged parents to buy as many poses and copies as they could afford because "stocking limitations force us to burn the unsold pictures of your children within 24 hours." A prospective health club member or automobile buyer might learn that the deal offered by the salesperson is good for that one time only; if the customer leaves the premises, the deal is off. One home vacuum cleaner sales company instructed a trainee (the first author) to claim to prospects, "I have so many other people to see that I have the time to visit a family only once. It's company policy that even if you decide later that you want this machine, I can't come back and sell it to you." For anyone who thought about it carefully, this was nonsense; the company and its representatives were in the business of making sales, and any customer who called for another visit would be accommodated gladly. The real purpose of the "can't come back again" claim was to evoke the scarcity rule for compliance.

## AUTHORITY

Legitimately constituted authorities are extremely influential persons (e.g., Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Milgram, 1974). Whether they have acquired their positions through knowledge, talent, or fortune, their positions bespeak superior information and power. For each of us, this has always been the case. Early on, these people (e.g., parents, teachers) knew more than we did, and we found that taking their advice proved to be beneficial—partly because of their greater wisdom and partly because they controlled our rewards and punishments. As we became adults, the authority figures changed to employers, judges, police officers, and the like, but the benefits associated with doing as they say did not change. For most people, then, conforming to the dictates of authority figures produces genuine practical advantages. Consequently, it makes great sense to comply with the wishes of properly constituted authorities. It makes so much sense, in fact, that people often comply when doing so makes no sense at all.

Take, for example, the strange case of the "rectal earache" reported by two professors of pharmacy, Michael Cohen and Neil Davis (Cohen & Davis, 1981). A physician ordered eardrops to be administered to the right ear of a patient suffering pain and infection there. But instead of writing out completely the location "right ear" on the prescription, the doctor abbreviated it so that the instructions read, "Place in R ear." On receiving the prescription, the duty nurse promptly put the required number of eardrops into the patient's anus. Obviously, rectal treatment of an earache made no sense. Yet neither the patient nor the nurse questioned the instructions.

An authority principle for compliance can be worded as follows: *One should be more willing to follow the suggestions of someone who is a legitimate authority.* Authorities may be

## DILBERT



**Figure 7.5** Not So Far-Fetched: The Earnings and Leadership Advantages Enjoyed by Taller Men

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seen as falling into two categories: authorities with regard to the specific situation and more general authorities. Compliance practitioners employ techniques that seek to benefit from the power invested in authority figures of both types.

In the case of authority relevant to a specific situation, we can note how often advertisers inform their audiences of the level of expertise of product manufacturers (e.g., “Fashionable Men’s Clothiers since 1841,” “Babies are our business, our only business”). At times, the expertise associated with a product has been more symbolic than substantive, for instance, when actors in television commercials wear physicians’ white coats to recommend products. In one famous Sanka commercial, the actor involved, Robert Young, did not need a white coat because his prior identity as television doctor Marcus Welby, M.D., provided the medical connection.

It is instructive that the mere symbols of a physician’s expertise and authority are enough to trip the mechanism that governs authority influence. One of the most prominent of these symbols, the bare title “doctor,” has been shown to be devastatingly effective as a compliance device among trained hospital personnel. In what may be the most frightening study of which we are aware, a group of physicians and nurses conducted an experiment that documented the dangerous degree of blind obedience that hospital nurses accorded to an individual whom they had never met but who had claimed in a phone call to be a doctor (Hofling, Brotzman, Dalrymple, Graves, & Pierce, 1966). Fully 95% of those nurses were willing to administer an unsafe level of a drug merely because that caller had requested it.

In the case of influence that generalizes outside of a specific situation, the impact of authority (both real and symbolic) appears to be equally impressive. (See Figure 7.5 for an illustration that might not be so far-fetched; research suggests that tall men are more likely than their shorter counterparts to rise to positions of leadership [Chaiken, 1986; Stogdill, 1948].) Bickman (1974) found that a requester, when wearing a security guard’s uniform, could produce more compliance with requests (e.g., to pick up a paper bag on the street, to stand on the other side of a bus stop sign) that were irrelevant to a security guard’s domain of authority. Less blatant in its connotation than a uniform—but nonetheless effective—is another kind of attire that has traditionally indicated authority status in our culture, that is, the well-tailored business suit. It also can mediate influence. Take as evidence the results of a

study by Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton (1955), who found that three and a half times as many people were willing to follow a jaywalker into traffic when he wore a suit and tie than when he wore a work shirt and trousers.

Con artists frequently make use of the influence inherent in authority attire. For example, a gambit called the *bank examiner scheme* depends heavily on the automatic deference most people assign to authority figures or those merely dressed as such. Using the two uniforms of authority that we have already mentioned, a business suit and a guard's outfit, the con begins when a man dressed in a conservative three-piece business suit appears at the home of a likely victim and identifies himself as an official of the victim's bank. The victim is told of suspected irregularities in the transactions handled by one particular teller and is asked to help trap the teller by drawing out all of his or her savings at the teller's window. In this way, the examiner can catch the teller red-handed in any wrongdoing. After cooperating, the victim is to give the money to a uniformed bank guard waiting outside, and the guard will then return it to the proper account. The appearance of the bank examiner and uniformed guard often is so impressive that the victim never thinks to check on their authenticity and proceeds with the requested action—never to see the money or those two individuals again.

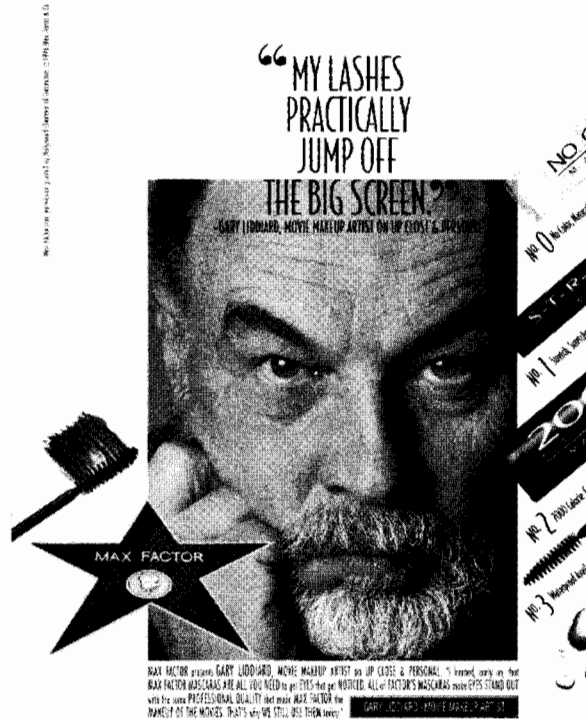
## RESISTANCE TO PERSUASION

Throughout this chapter, we have discussed a series of influence techniques shown in the scientific laboratory and in the marketplace to be quite effective in getting us to comply with requests. Given their power, an important question remains: Under what circumstances is it acceptable to employ these techniques? In other words, what distinguishes an ethically acceptable use of these principles from an objectionable one?

Cialdini (1996, 1999) argued that a key to determining the ethical use of the principles of influence comes from the following central realization: The principles work for compliance professionals precisely because they work for the targets of influence. It is normally adaptive to follow the suggestions of an authority or a friend or similar others, to repay benefits in reciprocal fashion, to seize rare opportunities, or to be consistent with one's attitudes, beliefs, and actions. It would make little sense for people to have become especially receptive to principles of this sort unless such evolved receptivities were adaptive.

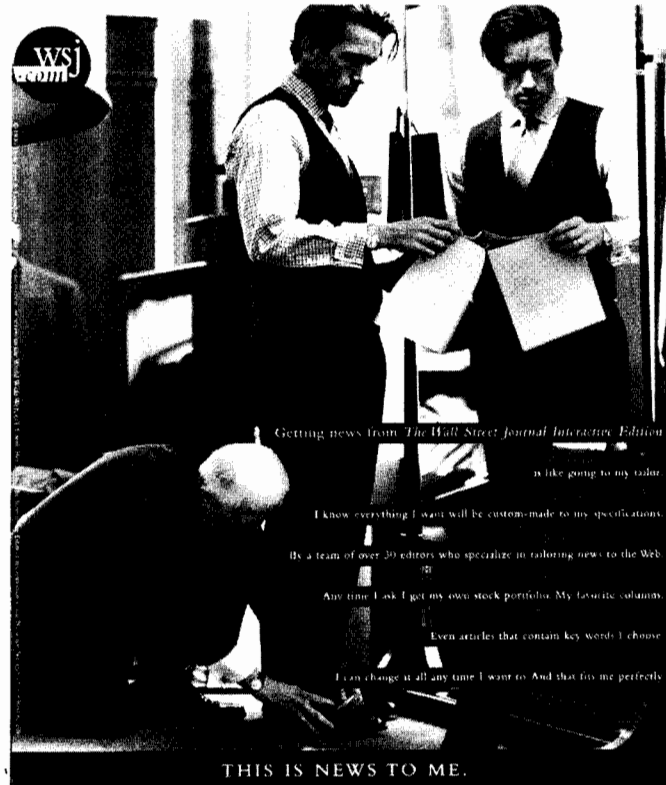
Consequently, to the extent that one or another of these principles is a natural part of the influence situation (e.g., the communicator does have pertinent expertise, there is a strong consensus among others who are similar to the influence target), the principle should counsel well. Moreover, under such circumstances, it would be ethically acceptable for a compliance professional to engage the principle (e.g., by making the expertise or consensus a focal feature of the influence attempt). However, a compliance professional who fabricates the presence of a principle that is not a natural feature of the situation (e.g., connoting medical expertise in an ad by hiring an actor to wear a lab coat) exploits the logic of the system that works well for influence targets, thereby abusing the interest of those targets. Cialdini (1996, 1999) argued further that organizations that employ the principles of influence unethically may suffer a number of hidden costs, including poor customer relationships and a work environment that favors dishonest employees (with the attendant costs of increased workplace surveillance).

Fortunately, influence targets can also use this distinction to help determine which influence attempts should be accepted and which should be resisted. Across three studies,



**Figure 7.6** A Legitimate Authority on Makeup

Sagarin, Cialdini, Rice, and Serna (2002) taught undergraduate students to distinguish legitimate authorities (i.e., true experts speaking within their areas of expertise [Figure 7.6]) from illegitimate authorities (i.e., experts speaking outside their areas of expertise or faux experts dressed in the trappings of authority [Figure 7.7]). In the first two studies, participants who learned this distinction were more persuaded by advertisements containing legitimate authorities and were somewhat more resistant to ads containing illegitimate authorities. It appeared, however, that the attempt to instill resistance was hampered by participants' illusions of invulnerability. Although participants recognized that their fellow students could be fooled by illegitimate authorities, they believed that they were personally invulnerable to such manipulation (Perloff, 1999). In the final study, a commitment/consistency technique was used to dispel participants' illusions of invulnerability. Before learning the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate authorities, participants examined an ad containing an illegitimate authority. Half of the participants were then instructed to write down how convincing they had found the ad to be. The other half just examined the ad without recording their reactions. Both sets of participants were then shown how they had been fooled if they had found the ad even somewhat convincing. The results showed that those participants who had made a written commitment regarding their reactions to the ad developed significant resistance to subsequent ads containing illegitimate authorities. Participants who had not



**Figure 7.7** The Trappings of Authority

made the written commitment retained their illusions of invulnerability and failed to develop resistance. It appears, then, that the first step in learning to resist illegitimate influence attempts is to recognize that we all are vulnerable to them.

## SUMMARY

At the outset of this chapter, it was suggested that anyone interested in understanding, resisting, or harnessing the process of interpersonal influence must ask the question: Which are the most powerful principles that motivate us to comply with another's requests? It was also suggested that one way of assessing such power would be to examine the practices of commercial compliance professionals for their pervasiveness. That is, if compliance practitioners made widespread use of certain principles, this would be evidence of the natural power of these principles to affect everyday compliance.

Six psychological principles emerged as the most popular in the repertoires of compliance professionals: reciprocity, social validation, commitment/consistency, friendship/liking, scarcity, and authority. Close examination of the principles revealed broad professional use that could

be validated and explained by controlled experimental research. As with most research projects, additional work needs to be done before we can have high levels of confidence in the conclusions. Until that time, however, our own best guess is that these six principles engage central features of the human condition in the process of motivating us to say yes.

## NOTES

1. In certain cases, a highly placed individual within an organization was informed of my research and cooperated both to conceal my identity and to arrange for a proper placement. In most instances, however, I remained incognito to everyone in an organization throughout my association with it. On leaving an organization, I gave a full revelation of my intent and identity along with a promise that I would protect the organization's anonymity.

2. It should be noted that evidence of the pervasiveness of a seventh principle, material self-interest, was also abundant. Practitioners of all sorts frequently appeal to the desire to maximize one's material benefits and minimize one's material costs in their campaigns for compliance. However, this principle was not treated in separate detail because it was considered a motivational given and, therefore, less interesting.

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