

The Seven Core Principles Behind the Art of Influence That Can Benefit Your Business with Dr. Robert Cialdini

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Dr. Robert Cialdini

New York Times Bestselling Author of
"Influence" and "Pre-Suasion"

Full transcript

Gene Marks:

Hey, everybody this is Gene Marks. And welcome back to the Paychex Business Series podcast. Really happy to have you here and really excited and thrilled to have one of my heroes in business. On the line with me today, it's Dr. Robert Cialdini, Dr. Cialdini is the three-time New York Times author of Influence, and Pre-Suasion. Collectively, his books have sold over 7 million copies. Dr. Cialdini is an award-winning professor emeritus of psychology and marketing, and has spent over 30 years designing, conducting, and publishing peer reviewed research on the ethical applications of influence and why people say yes to requests. And I think Dr. Cialdini as I'm saying this, you're probably feeling pretty old. So I don't mean to make you feel old here, but it's your bio, it's your introduction. And Dr. Cialdini, who I'm going to call Bob as we go forward, he's just published his newest book, "Influence, New and Expanded." So Bob, Dr. Cialdini, thank you very much for joining us.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Well, I'm looking forward to it, Gene. I have to say.

Gene Marks:

Good. I'm glad. Like we just talked about before we actually started recording this, our audience here are small business owners. Bob, I'm a small business owner myself, I have a 10-person company outside of Philadelphia. I've revisited your book many times because I do find myself constantly caught up in negotiations and not just professionally, but also personally. And your book has had a huge influence on me. So, first of all, let's start at the beginning. Tell us a little bit about "Influence" and your newest book "Influence, New and Expanded."

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Well, there are a lot of ways to be influential. We can pay people to move in our direction. We can punish them if they don't, we can order them if we're in charge of them, we can even trick them into compliance with our wishes. All of those though carry costs either financial or social capital costs. My preference is to use a route to influence that is costless, persuasion. We just change the way we present our case to our audience in ways that the research literature shows will be more effective than presenting it in some other way.

Gene Marks:

It's a powerful statement to make because being a person that spends a lot of time in sales and marketing as a lot of business owners do, you quickly learn that you can't put a gun to somebody's head and say, buy from me or side with me on this issue. These things do take time and not only do they take time, but decision-making takes a lot of effort and it takes us to have some skill, to be able to persuade people, to do what we think is what's best. Now, your books, you discuss about six core factors, six core principles, really that are behind the art of influence and persuasion. There's reciprocity, there's scarcity, there's authority, there's our commitment and consistency, there's liking, and there's consensus.

Gene Marks:

And in your new book, you actually added another principle called unity. So, what I'd like to do in the time that we have, and I think we've got three or four hours to spend together on this, I'm just kidding. I'd like to go through each one of these principles and have you explain each one. So, let's start with reciprocity. How does reciprocity factor into influencing a person?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Well, reciprocity has to do with a rule that is installed in children in every human culture on earth. It's a rule that says, we are obligated to give back to those who have first given to us. We have to say yes to those we owe. So, the implication is if we go first and give benefits, advantages, services, favors, gifts, information, valuable information to people they will want to say yes to us when we ask for something from them. There's a wonderful little study that was done in McDonald's restaurants, for example, that showed that when they were doing a study in Brazil and Columbia at certain McDonald's locations, when families came in, the children received a balloon, a little gift for the kids. Half of them got the balloon as they were entering, the other half got the balloon as they were leaving. Those families who got the balloon when they were entering, bought 25% more food. You have to go first and if you do, people are ready to give back. So that's the principle of reciprocation.

Gene Marks:

I liken it to my own situation where if I'm asking a client of mine, for example, to give to a charity that I support and so I'm asking them to do something, I guess I'm more inclined in the future, if that same client comes back to me months later and asked for something from me. I've already asked them for something, I feel an obligation to reciprocate. Does that make sense?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

It does. And it even applies to concessions. If you're in a negotiation and you make a concession to somebody else, they will make a concession back to you as a consequence. So, it's a way to make things work for people so they can agree.

Gene Marks:

You really can't get without giving, I think is what the takeaway is on reciprocity. And that makes complete sense to me. Let's go to the second core factor and that's scarcity. What do you mean by scarcity?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

People want more of those things they can have less of. If things are rare, scarce, dwindling in availability, that makes them more attractive to others. And so, for limited time appeals or limited supply of certain kinds of things, we only have a certain number of this product at this price, that sort of thing. Those are very successful. That's actually, that last one limited supply, the single most powerful approach, persuasive approach online, giving people that evidence. But what if you have a lot of product and so on, what can you use to get scarcity working for you? You point out what is unique or uncommon about your offer, your organization, what your case to make. And it may not be any one feature, it may be a combination of features that nobody else can provide, bring that to the surface and people want what you have significantly more.

Gene Marks:

And would this be the reason why so many retailers for so long have clearance sales or special bargains that they're offering for only a limited period of time?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Exactly. Because within that limited period of time, you've given people a special reason to move in your direction that they may not have had before.

Gene Marks:

Got it. All right. Third factor is authority. What do you mean by authority?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

What I mean by authority is expertise, knowledge, credentials on a particular topic. And we all have those, but it's not easy to make them available to people because we seem boastful if we do. So, what I'd like to do is be sure that people who have genuine expertise and authority in an area, show that before they try to be influential, but not in a face-to-face conversation, you can send people a message, an email, or a letter, ahead of your interaction with them saying, I'm looking forward to our meeting on Thursday on the topic of X, my background and credentials on X are as follows. And you can give them a copy of your resume, or you can link them to your LinkedIn profile and so on. So, before they begin, they know your genuine authority and they differ as a consequence.

Gene Marks:

Does being prepared for a conversation, doing your research, having knowledge, does that also tie into helping you appear to be authoritative on a topic?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

It does. And there's a particular way to show that preparation that seems counter intuitive. That is, let's say you're in negotiation, you're making an offer based on the requirements that it's going to cost you to present to the other side. All right. And let's say it's \$75,000 is what's going to be there, but you've done your homework and you realize that the costs to you are \$75,078, you typically lop off the \$78 in your budget request. That's a mistake because if its there, people say, oh, this person is an authority on the pros and cons, the costs and expenses. This person has done his or her homework. And even though it's more money, research shows you get more ascent to that number, less pushback, because it's not a round number, it's a specific number saying you've done your homework. You know what you're talking about here.

Gene Marks:

You know it's funny, Bob, one of my kids is an engineer. And he works for a big engineering firm. And he's a technical guy, more so than anybody else in our family and yet, but he also has really good social skills. He's a social guy, he has a lot of friends, and he has these skills that I don't ever see him being a lifelong engineer. I see him selling engineering services because he, I do believe he will have a technical authority to go out and speak to prospective clients because he knows what he's talking about and that will come across. And that combined with the social skills, obviously I think will help him in those conversations. So, I guess authority, it's about knowledge, isn't it? And about doing your homework.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

It's about knowledge and showing your knowledge and one way to do it is confidence. And it sounds like your son knows how to do that.

Gene Marks:

Yeah, it makes sense. Okay. So, to recap, for all of you guys listening so far, to influence a conversation, we've talked about three core factors so far, are reciprocity, which means giving. If you want to influence a conversation, you have to be prepared to give up just as well as getting. Number two is to influence a conversation you have to show scarcity of what you're selling as it is, to drive up that desire to buy from you or to take your word on something. And finally, the third of the seven core factors is authority, which in the end means, knowing what you're talking about, and you can do that in advance of a conversation, or by the way you conduct your conversation, doing your homework. All of those things will influence somebody else to work with you, to buy with you, to partner with you. If those three core factors are in place, but we still have four more to go. So, the next factor Bob is commitment and consistency. So, what do you mean by that?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

People want to be consistent with what they have already committed themselves to, especially in public, by what they have said or done previously. So, for example, there was a study done in a restaurant in Chicago that was having a problem of no-shows, people who would book a table and then wouldn't appear. And the proprietor of the restaurant, a man named Gordon Sinclair was a student of the influence process. And he asked his receptionist to change two words in what she said when she took a booking for a table. Previously, she had said, "Please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation." We've heard that many times. Gordon asked her to add two words, "Will you please call if you have to change or cancel?" And everybody said, "Yes, of course, sure. Glad to." They made a commitment and no shows dropped by 67% immediately.

Gene Marks:

So it's funny, I misread this a little bit at first, when I thought, when I saw commitment and consistency, at first I thought, okay, we have to demonstrate our commitment and consistency, which I'm sure is very important, but is what you're saying, that you should be talking, asking the other party to commit to what you're trying to do?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Exactly. There's a motivation inside all of us to be congruent with what we have said or done in order to have a good image and also to feel good about ourselves. So for example, if you're ever leading a meeting for your team and you're assigning tasks for people before the next meeting, don't let anybody out of that meeting until you say, will you be able to properly finish this task by our next meeting? And pause, let them say yes. If they say, no, that's good too. That tells you, oh, you've got to give them more time or more resources. But if they say, yes, you have significantly increased the likelihood that they will follow through because they've committed in public.

Gene Marks:

It's powerful. People generally like to do what they say they're going to do. And not all of us follow through, but most of us do. And you're right, when we come out, particularly in front of a group or at least a witness and say, yeah, I do commit to doing that, you've influenced that person by having them agree. The next factor, five out of seven, is liking. I think I know what this one is, but tell us what that's about.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

You know what it is, because everybody knows that we prefer to say yes to those people we like. But there are two very small things you can do to significantly increase the probability that people will feel a sense of rapport with you. One is to point to genuine commonalities that exist, similarities, parallels between you. There was a study done of negotiators who were bargaining over email. And because email is such a bloodless communication channel, in 30% of the cases, they were deadlocked. Everybody walked away, nobody won from that negotiation until the researchers asked them to send some information back and forth to one another about themselves, tell us where you went to school, tell us what your hobbies are, what are your interests? And so on.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

They passed that information back and forth and once they got that information, stymied negotiations dropped from 30% to 6%. And when the researchers look inside the information that they sent, it wasn't the amount of information that they sent that was the key, it was whether there were commonalities in there. Oh, you're a runner? I'm a runner. You're an only child? I'm an only child, whatever it was, it was those commonalities that led to the connection that led to a cent.

Gene Marks:

So, I live in the Philadelphia area and I was born and raised in Philadelphia, my clients are in the Philadelphia area. So, when I go out to see people, prospective clients and existing clients, one of the first things I do when I walk into someone's office is I look around to see where they went to school. In Philadelphia when you say, where did you go to school? You pretty much mean where you went to high school, not college. So sometimes I can tell if it's a local high school or a college I know. One client, I was just at a few weeks ago, had a picture of himself and his kids when the Phillies won the world series a thousand years ago. And yeah, you look for those connections with people. I always thought it must be tough if I were to move to a different city, like if I were to move to Denver, I would have to be more hard pressed to find those commonalities with somebody.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

But you know what allows us to do it now, is the internet—

Gene Marks:

It does LinkedIn.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Where we'll have, on social they tell us all kinds of things about themselves, on LinkedIn they have profiles. We can find that information and find something that is in common.

Gene Marks:

Yeah. I agree. I'd say it's on the top, before we move on from liking. I close more deals and I have much better rapport with clients that I see face-to-face. I mean, there is, and I don't know if that's old school or just a reflection of my age, but I feel like there is very little that can be done to replace just face-to-face human contact. And I think that is part of your core factor of liking. What are your thoughts on that?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

I believe that's the case because that's how we evolved as a species to interact with people. That's the people we know, we are familiar with. We can predict and we trust. So, if we separate us, there's a wall of unfamiliarity and a lack of confidence that breaks down when we get to meet and know people better.

Gene Marks:

I have two more, well, actually have one more core factor and then our bonus one that was included in your new book. But the next one that was from the original set of six is consensus or social proof. So, what do you mean by consensus and how it impacts influence?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Yeah. So, when people are uncertain, they don't look inside themselves for answers of what to do next, they look outside. One place they look that we've already mentioned is to authorities, to genuine experts on a topic. So, if we can give people evidence that we're an authority or existing, highly credible authority, voices are recommending our product or our idea, that's a step up. But there's another place we look, our peers, people around us like us, all right, their information, the number of stars they've given to a particular product, the number of people who are buying this product, the popularity of it, all those kinds of things, significantly increase the likelihood that we will use that piece of information as a shortcut to what is likely to be a good choice for us to do in that situation. So that's what we call social proof or consensus.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

I can give you an example, for example, in a study done in China of people in certain restaurants, the proprietors put little asterisks next to certain items on the menu, and that caused the purchase of those items to go up by 13 to 20% for each item. What did the asterisk stand for? It said, "This is one of our most popular items." That's all, they became more popular for their popularity. But we all have most popular models, most popular features, most popular payment plans, we just need to point to them, it's a shortcut now for people to move in that direction.

Gene Marks:

What is the impact of media have on that? In other words, do you feel that if my company gets mentioned in a newspaper article or in a news report, does that figure into having that acceptance level that you're talking about, that social acceptance?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

It does. It says you have a profile that's high enough for the media, the news people to want to come and talk to you or talk about you. It also says something about your level of expertise or competence or success. So, you get the authority principle working there as well.

Gene Marks:

Okay guys. So, I'm going to recap our six core factors before I have Bob talk about his newest one. Again, to influence a conversation, reciprocity is one thing. Again, if you want to get something from somebody, you have to be prepared to give it up. Scarcity of what you're talking about also influences a conversation. So, if you're trying to convince somebody to buy something from you, showing that it's scarce or that it's only available for a limited time, that has an impact on people's decisions. Having authority in your conversation also impacts. So, when people are talking to you, they get the sense that you're knowledgeable and that you know what you're doing, and you've done your homework. Asking for the participant for the other person you're speaking to, to show their commitment and consistency. As Bob had pointed out, if you're in a meeting and you're asking for people to do certain things, you don't just tell them, but you do ask them and you ask them to respond. You wait. So, they actually verbally say hopefully in front of other people, yes, I am committed to doing this.

Gene Marks:

Being likable is important and looking for common things that you can find that will happen to connect you in some level, maybe that's something that you find about them on social media, or in my example, when I'm in somebody's office, I tend to look around for certain things that I can make a connection to, like, oh, you play softball, I play softball too. And consensus, having other people that agree or that if you're speaking to somebody, they can tell that other people have used your product or worked with you before. They've given you likes on social media. You've been mentioned in the newspaper before, that also shows authority. Having a social consensus also will have an influence on the person that you're talking to. So those are the six core factors, Bob, that you had been working with for a number of years, but in your new book, you now talk about a seventh core factor called unity. So, what do you mean by unity?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Unity is the sense of belonging to the same category or partnership. It's the sense of togetherness with somebody else that we share a category membership. And so, for example, people are much more willing to say yes to a request for a survey that comes from a university that's in their State compared to one that's from out of their State. If they feel like they're part of the same unit they want to say yes. And there's a very interesting way for us as business owners, to use that strategy. And it has to do with co-creation, the idea that we ask our customers, our clients, even our future prospects who help us create the newest version of our products and services. We have a new model, or we want to improve an existing model. And we ask for our customers to weigh in and tell us what they think would be best. And they partner with us in that process. That has been wildly successful as a marketing strategy, but it turns out there's one word that we can use to optimize the effect of that co-creation experience.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

When we ask people to give us their input on this new product or service or improvement, we typically make the mistake of saying, can you give us your opinion on this? Here's why that's a mistake. When we ask for someone's opinion, we get a critic. I'm going to suggest we change one word, and instead of asking for their opinion, we ask for their advice. When we ask for someone's advice, we get a partner, we get somebody who's working with us in a collaborative way toward that goal. And the research shows if we use the word advice, instead of opinion, or even feedback, written, the newest research shows, same thing happens with feedback. We get critics. If we ask for advice, we get a partner who gives us a more favorable and more helpful set of comments about our idea, our new product.

Gene Marks:

That means that if you do accept unity as a big factor in influence, you also have to accept that you're going to have to collaborate with somebody, maybe even compromise if you're going to be involving somebody else and asking for their advice, is that true?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Of course. You have to take their advice. And I mean, you don't have to count noses but you have to take into account what the people are saying and be sure to employ the best of those ideas.

Gene Marks:

And does this tie into, when we're doing projects, I do at technology we sell software, and sometimes we sell into big organizations and you might have the VP of sales who has to sign off on the project, but we're working with some of their reports, like a sales manager. And I always thought it's important to bring in the sales manager and collaborate with them on the proposal that we're doing. So, when it ultimately gets presented to the decision maker, if we want to influence the decision makers decision, it's a collaborative effort, in other words. We're presenting almost a joint document. Is that what you mean by unity too?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

I do. That's a brilliant way to arrange for unity. And that is if you've got the sales manager collaborating with you, partnering with you and you're presenting it to the vice president. Now, one of the people who is presenting that is one of them, that person is of them. That's what I mean by unity. It's not just being similar to somebody, in pace or preferences or styles, it's being, sharing an identity or a category, because we say yes to people who are one of us. But you've just arranged for one of the vice presidents core members in that company to be an advocate. Brilliant.

Gene Marks:

I know we have limited time left. So, I have two questions for you to wrap this up. Number one, your first book came out in 1984, the average age, I know, I'm dating you again.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Yeah, it's cool.

Gene Marks:

The average age of the US, the majority of business owners in this country, according to SCORE and the Small Business Administration, the majority are over the age of 55 still, I mean, that is just the demographic. And I think a lot of business owners read your books back in the 80s, but we're still out here and still doing our thing. How has your model of persuasion changed since 1984? What is different today versus 30 years ago, 40 years ago?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

So I'm going to give you two quick answers. One says, it hasn't changed. And one says it has. The way it hasn't changed is that those principles that we just talked about, they're still the same. The book Influence is called by many people, the Bible of e-marketing. Electronic commerce. Electronic commerce didn't exist when it was written. And people say, well, how could you look far ahead and see this? I didn't look ahead, I looked in, what are the things that have always moved people have always moved members of our species in a fundamental way toward, yes? Those are still the things that are going to be in the future because they're features of the human condition. So that's how they're the same, but here's how it's different. The internet has made one of those principles much more accessible and available to us to use. And that's the principle of social proof or consensus.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

We now have the ability to look at the responses of people from all over the world in the way that they have experienced a product or service, how they've rated it, what they've said about it and so on, on various review sites. And because of that, I saw an article that said the people who are regular shoppers on the internet, that always buy by electronic means, 98% of them check the product reviews before they buy. Gene 98%, we can't get 98% of the people in the world to believe that the earth is round, but we get 98% piling into this principle because it is now so available to us in ways it didn't exist before the internet.

Gene Marks:

My final question, I've read your books a number of times and the main reason why, don't take this the wrong way, it's not that, your Influence book is so great, which it is a great book. It's just, I forget, I mean, I read it and I want to make notes to myself and remember, and then you go back to your life or running your business and you don't have those core principles in your mind. It was hard enough remembering six and now you just added a seventh. What advice do you give to your students for employing these principles in their day-to-day lives? Are there exercises, are there any tools that we can use that would help us keep these front of mind?

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Yes, but it is not a quick thing, we have a workshop that's online, on demand, it's called the principles of persuasion workshop, where we teach people how to use these principles most effectively, while being ethical at the same time, in ways that are built in to their strategies in performing their everyday business interactions. So, if you went online to our site influence@work.com, there would be availability for a workshop that allows you and even your employees to learn how to be automatically effective in what you do. So, it's the first thing you think about and the first thing you prioritize in your business interactions.

Gene Marks:

Dr. Robert Cialdini is the three-time New York Times, author of Influence and Pre-Suasion. His newest book is Influence, New and Expanded, adding to the over 7 million copies of his books that he's sold so far. And I'm sure many more to be sold in the future. Bob, thank you very much for this conversation. Again, as I said earlier, you've always been one of my heroes. I love your book and will continue to read and reread it. So, thank you very much.

Dr. Robert Cialdini:

Well, I enjoyed it, Gene, I have to say.

Gene Marks:

I'm glad. And I always, as usual, always learn a lot. I always learn a lot. Everyone if you'd like more advice and tips for running your business, please visit us at the Paychex Business Series podcast or at paychex.com/worx. That's W-O-R-X. Again, my name is Gene Marks. Thank you for joining us on this episode. And we look forward to joining us on our next. Take care.

Speaker 3:

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