

Influence Shouldn't Be a Crapshoot!

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As a child, many of us crossed our fingers in the hopes that we could persuade our mothers to allow us to do something, maybe go to a movie, stay up late or come in after curfew. As business people, we can't afford to go into that all-important meeting "hoping" our client or our boss will make a favorable decision. Influencing others shouldn't be a crapshoot; instead, we need strategies that work. Joseph Cialdini in his book, *The Six Principles of Influence*, identifies universal elements that affect persuasion. He says that people who apply these principles can create a strategic approach that ultimately pays huge dividends.

1. **Liking.** The old adage that people like to do business with people like themselves is true. If your customers genuinely like you, they are more likely to see you as someone who will keep their best interests in mind, and someone they can trust. Their assumption is any products or services they buy from you will do what you have said. You will not cheat them, but rather, go the extra mile for them. **Tip:** Be nice, easy going and friendly. Your customers will notice.
2. **Authority.** Certifications, awards, and experience in the industry matter. They allow you to be seen as someone who knows his stuff, a subject matter expert, not someone making things up on the fly. If you notice, most technology and healthcare companies now routinely have subject matter experts making presentations along with their sales teams. **Tip:** Let people in on who you are. Weave your credentials into the conversation or have others on the team do it for you.
3. **Reciprocity.** People tend to return a favor. If you do something for someone, that person is more likely to do something for you. Little things matter. For example, if you have gone out of your way to get a part to a customer who needed it ASAP, that individual is likely to say "Yes," when you ask. **Tip:** Don't just call

your customers when you want a sale. Email them the latest research. Provide tips to help their business to grow. Send them "freebies." Touch base with them frequently so that they know you care.

4. **Social Proof.** There's no doubt that people talk to others. They want what others have because they assume that others have made the choice for good reason. **Tip:** Be sure to provide references or specific names so that your customer or boss knows what other like-minded people are doing.
5. **Scarcity.** Think about Black Friday or the day after Thanksgiving. People line up at 4:30 a.m. because they know the early bird deals only last for a few hours. Before that 65 in TV is sold out, they want to buy it. **Tip:** Dwindling availability is definitely much more alluring than what is easily attainable. Make sure your customer knows, for example, that an expiring service contract will put their company in jeopardy.
6. **Consistency/commitment.** People have a tendency to accept ideas if they go along with what they value. For example, if your proposal answers a key priority, say on efficiency, they are likely to listen intensely. **Tip:** Be sure you clearly understand priorities. If unsure, ask others who might know. Do your homework. Read annual reports and 10 K's.

Influencing others should not be a crapshoot where sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. Keying into Cialdini's six universal suggestions will give you the insights you need to make yourself more successful.

***Question:** What additional tips do you have regarding influence? What has worked for you? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

Continued on page 2

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