

INCOGNITO INFLUENCE

Apply the new science of
persuasion to your
writing at work



Paul Jones | Magneto Communications



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SIX KEYS TO UNDER-THE-RADAR PERSUASION

In his million-copy bestseller, *'Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion'*, Dr Robert Cialdini describes six powerful insights into human psychology:

1. Liking
2. Scarcity
3. Social Proof
4. Authority
5. Reciprocity
6. Commitment & Consistency

This article explains how to apply these to your writing to get your way more often at work. The principles apply equally as well to selling widgets as to influencing your boss to your way of thinking.

It's called 'Incognito Influence' because, when you use the principles, people you use them on often don't consciously process the situation; they tend to go on 'autopilot.* This tendency can consistently give you fast, effective results.

Use it or lose it

To really absorb these principles, after reading each one, think how you could apply the principle to your regular 'influence' situations.

Enjoy,

Paul Jones
Director
Magneto Communications

* So use the principles ethically!



1. Fast friends:

LIKING

Naturally, the more someone likes you, the easier it is to persuade them to your way of thinking. Rapport is invaluable. To apply 'liking' to your writing:

- Check your **attitude**: Do you *really* have your readers' best interests at heart? If you do, they should sense it and trust you more.
- Think '**relationship**,' not 'one-night stand.' Don't try to get them over the line too quickly. By all means ask for the sale (or whatever your influence goal is), but show you care more about *them* than the deal. Trite but true: 'People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.'

- Ensure your writing **looks** good. How's your branding, layout, neatness, and correctness? People warm to 'classy,' not 'scruffy.'
- Get feedback on your **tone**. How does your writing sound to your intended audience? Sounding professional, helpful and/or friendly will win you more friends, and more 'yeses,' than sounding officious, abrupt or long-winded.



2. Make it 'rare' to get 'well done!':

SCARCITY

Cialdini describes an experiment in which two groups of people were asked to rate choc-chip biscuits.

Group A took theirs from a jar containing ten biscuits; Group B took from a jar with just two biscuits.

The result? Group B rated the biscuits higher on almost every measure – even though the biscuits were identical.

This is **scarcity** at work. And it's a very useful 'influence' technique.

BOOSTER 1: 'Scarcity' works better when people think something's *newly* scarce – i.e. when it hasn't always been in short supply, but suddenly becomes so. E.g. 'Unprecedented demand – now just 10 seats left!'

BOOSTER 2: 'Scarcity' works better again when people realise they're *competing* with others for scarce resources. A common real-estate sales ploy is to tell wavering buyers that someone else is also interested in the property.

Here are some ways to use scarcity to get better results from your writing:

- **Scarce time** – Imposing deadlines on your readers will motivate them to act sooner rather than later ('later' is probably 'never'), e.g. 'Offer ends 30 June' or 'Please do X by next Friday so [insert plausible reason]'.
- **Scarce amount** – What you're offering will be more attractive if it seems rare or exclusive, e.g. 'special edition,' 'Limited offer' or 'Exclusive release.' Be specific if you can – 'Just five left' trumps 'Just a few left.'
- **Scarce information** – Research shows if you limit access to a message people value it more and find it more persuasive. Can you structure your message so your readers believe it's restricted information, e.g. 'Exclusive members-only offer'?

BOOSTER 3: How you frame things can invoke 'scarcity.' Emphasising 'what you could lose' is more powerful than 'what you could gain,' because the former is a type of scarcity.



Feeling sheepish? Your readers are. Well, they (like all of us) can act like sheep when making decisions.

Ever catch yourself checking what others are doing when you're unsure what to do? We all take cues from others about whether to eat chicken with fingers or a fork, how fast to drive, and how to dress at work.

This is **Social Proof** in action. How much more 'sold' are you on an Amazon book when you see hundreds of others have 'rated' it highly? 'All those people can't be wrong!' (you think).

And the more **similar** your 'reference' is to your reader, the better. For example, a banker's testimonial will sway an accountant more than one from a plumber. See how [Salesforce](#) does this.

3. Writing for sheep: **SOCIAL PROOF**

Humans (especially time-poor ones in business) love shortcuts and often react based on only partial evidence. Here's how to leverage that in your writing:

- **Testimonials.** Ask for them straight after you've worked for clients, and include them in your marketing. But keep them short.
- **Case studies.** Especially powerful when you include specific, measured results you achieved. Keep these short, too.
- **Big names** have big impact, so highlight well-known and respectable companies who've used your business.
- **Pictures** of your typical target audience enjoying your product/service will reassure your clients they're in the right crowd.



4. You da man (or woman):

Here's how you can use 'Authority' to win your readers over.

To Cialdini, 'authority' is a powerful persuasive principle that leverages our 'deep-seated sense of duty.' (For shocking proof – literally – see the [Milgram Experiment](#)).

To build 'authority' in your writing, consider:

- Your **tone**: You're a professional recommending a solution, so don't beg your reader to take it; politely assume they will. How does a doctor make requests? (a) 'Would you like to remove your clothes now?' or (b) 'I need to examine you – please undress.' So instead of writing, 'Would you like to learn more about what we offer?' try: 'Probably the best next step would be to meet so I can learn more about your needs and see how we can help. How about 3pm next Tuesday?'

- Your **experience**: Been in business for a long time? Say so. Can you cite research (e.g. survey results) your company has conducted? This can position you as an authority in your field.
- Your **title**: If you have relevant qualifications and/or association memberships, consider adding the letters after your name to build credibility – but keep them small and understated. 'John Smith, MBA, CPA' trumps 'John Smith.'
- Your **branding**: Skimping on a professionally designed logo and quality collateral is like wearing a cheap suit. Make your logo, website, email signature, stationery and business cards *exceptional*.



5. The power of give & take:

RECIPROCITY

This rule is one of the most important, and applies to every culture.

It's a quirk of human nature that if someone does you a favour, you feel *obliged* to return that favour — even if you don't like them.

In fact, you can often get a 'yes' to requests that, except for them feeling they 'owe' you, would almost certainly have been refused. And you can harness these conditioned feelings of fairness when writing to prospects.

But check your **attitude** — this shouldn't be about *manipulation*, but a demonstration of your desire to help your clients. As famous motivational speaker and sales trainer, Zig Ziglar, says, 'You can get everything in life you want, if you just help enough other people get what they want.'

So what can you give your readers to increase your 'favour-bank' balance? Here are some ideas:

- Free samples of your product/service (but be generous — it must seem more a *gift*, not a cheap commercial sample)
- Articles, facts or websites you think will interest them
- Quality promotional items with your branding. (Sometimes these assume a life of their own, e.g. the Pirelli Tyres limited-edition celebrity calendars)
- Greeting cards, e.g. congratulating them on a win, End-of-Financial-Year, birthdays, Christmas, etc.
- Tickets to movies or sporting events



6. Get 'em committed: COMMITMENT & CONSISTENCY

This principle can literally change your readers' minds.

Cialdini tells of a researcher who surveyed residents, asking them to predict their response *if* they were asked to spend three hours collecting money for cancer research.

Many said they would. But they didn't know that a few days later the Cancer Society would knock, asking them to help. The result was a **700 per cent increase** in volunteers, compared to control groups.

Why? Because those 'surveyed' made a personal *commitment* – something we're driven to remain *consistent* with. And in the gap between visits, their self-image changed – they started seeing themselves as more community-minded.

To apply this to influential writing:

- Offer something **small** for a low price to get them thinking of themselves as your customer instead of your prospect. A bigger sale may be easier later.

- Ask for a **testimonial**. This is a powerful mind-changer, forcing people to think of your positive attributes, then commit to them in writing. It's also *public*, which greatly enhances the effect.
- Before sending a report or (internal) proposal, explain your key points to audience members verbally, and try to get them saying 'I agree,' or similar, in advance.
- Try to generate positive customer comments on your **blog**. Don't be afraid of negative comments — responding well to them can win you fans.
- **Survey** people as in the Cancer Society example above. (Third-party surveyors may be best!)
- **Remind** them what great customers they are and how much business they've done with you. At the very least, write and say thanks.
- **Affirm** behaviour you want. E.g. if you want someone to keep sending you reports on time, write, 'Thanks for sending the KPI report on time last week. We need more people like you around here! Do you think you could also have the sales figures to me by COB Friday?

A final note

USE YOUR POWERS FOR GOOD, NOT EVIL

Because these principles work so well, it can be fun seeing the effect you can have on others' behaviour. But don't be tempted to use them unethically; you'll only hurt yourself in the end.

One of Stephen Covey's 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' is to 'Think win-win.' Your ultimate long-term success will come from ensuring both you and the 'other' gain.

And that's even more fun.

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COURSES & RESOURCES

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