

## **Persuasion Tactics**

- Door in the face (rule of reciprocity)
  - Foot-in-the-door (rule of commitment)
  - Scarcity principle (not in Hockenbury)
  - Appeal to fear (not in Hockenbury)
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- How do you defend yourself against these persuasion tactics?

## **Door in the face**

A strategy for gaining concessions after someone is first given the opportunity to turn down a large request (the door in the face). The same requester counter offers with a smaller request that you are more likely to accept than the large request.

The door in the face is a common compliance technique where you make a large request you know is likely going to be turned down. To appear that you are making a concession from this original request, you make a smaller counter offer. Compared to the original request, the second request appears to be moderate. The power of the door-in-the-face technique is due to the rule of reciprocity (you feel you need to make a concession, since they did) and the contrast principle.

Knowledge of compliance techniques can be used for personal gain or prevention. Good con artists and "negotiators" can use this to their advantage and appear to bargain in "good faith". Those who take advantage of the door in the face for personal gain can manipulate language to make you feel guilty about not accepting the concession.

It is difficult to distinguish between genuine concessions and false concessions (concessions are made to the original target, and an inflated request is made).

The rule of reciprocity is important to understand because if you are nice to someone, it is much more likely that you will “unconsciously return the favor”.

- This makes it likely that reporters will actually cover the President if he is nicer to them (although reporters will deny this).
- This is why some businesses ban gifts to managers and employees or gifts from outside contractors. You feel compelled to reciprocate with favors or contracts. The way to avoid the rule of reciprocity is to reframe the transaction from a social exchange to an economic exchange.
- Political influence and money: Politicians are more likely to give contributors the benefit of the doubt or give favors for people who helped their political campaign.
- Drug companies and physicians prescriptions. Drug companies spend \$13,000/doctor in “gifts” such as dinners, books, computers, trinkets with the drug companies logo on it, etc. (go to Listen to me! on my web site). Are they more likely to prescribe drugs from that company?

### Other examples of door in the face:

- Gaining donations for political parties. They first ask if you are willing to donate \$100. They follow up by asking if you can't donate \$100, if you can donate \$20.
- G. Gordon Liddy (page 53, Influence by Robert Cialdini): Most experts believe that the Watergate break-in was a huge blunder with a high risk and low pay-off. However, the proposal G. Gordon Liddy made to Magruder and Mitchell to do this was not the first.
- In the 70's series "Happy Days", you couldn't say the word "virgin". To get it past the censors, Gary Marshall would deliberate include it seven times in their scripts, and make a "concession" to bring it down to one—the real target. Likewise, it was difficult to say "lose my lust", so get it in the script, they put a much stronger phrase, knowing it would get censored.

## **Foot-in-the-door**

The tendency for people who have agreed to a request to later comply with a another request. This generally occurs with a small original request and a subsequent larger request that is sometimes unrelated.

This compliance technique is used to increase the chance that someone to comply with a request after you approach them with another request--regardless if the first request is related to the subsequent request. The original requests are usually relatively small and never coerced by threat or bribe.

### Examples of foot-in-the-door technique

- The foot-in-the-door technique can be used to slowly train people to do cruel acts, such as learning to torture people. People are pre-selected on their tendency to be submissive to authority. These people would first start out small and then their assignments would be slowly escalated. They would be
  - guard a prisoner,
  - participate in arrest squads,
  - ordered to occasionally hit the prisoner,
  - observe a torture, and finally
  - practice it.
- From the book Can't Buy my Love by Jean Kilbourne, she argues that it is easier for adolescents to accept a cigarette if they have accepted other tobacco related products (t-shirts, lighters, baseball caps, etc.).
- The Register Guard asked of I would subscribe to them for 8 weeks. When I said no, they asked if I would accept a free week of service.

## Scarcity principle

The subjective value of a commodity increases as its availability decreases.

Examples:

- When Dade county banned phosphate based soaps, citizens smuggled phosphate soaps in from neighboring counties. They claimed that the phosphate based soaps cleaned their laundry better, and made their clothes smell fresher.
- A misprint of a \$1 bill is worth more than \$1.
- Music by Kurt Cobain, Elvis, The Doors is valued more after their deaths.
- Paintings by Van Gogh, Monet, Picasso are valuable because they are scarce.
- The subjective value of Cabbage Patch dolls, Tickle me Elmo, and Play Station 2 were inflated when the demand was high and the availability is low.
- In the Scientific American Frontiers video Fat and Happy, children are more likely to binge on junk food when they are provided the opportunity if they are restricted at home.

James Burke, the author of Connections series, says that the production line has had the benefit of making more products available to more people, thus driving down the cost.

- According to the scarcity principle, what are the psychological consequences of the production line?
- How does the production line (making more things available) affect our sense of identity and individuality?

## Appeal to fear

In 1932, Adolf Hitler inspired his fellow countrymen with the words:

*The streets of our country are in turmoil. The universities are filling with students rebelling and rioting. Communists are seeking to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might, and the Republic is in danger. Yes-- danger from within and without. We need law and order! Without it our nation cannot survive.*

Sometimes the appeal to fear is based on legitimate concerns (smoking causes cancers, "unsafe sex" increases one's chance of getting AIDS, not wearing your seatbelt increases your chance of get hurt in an accident, or drinking while driving can increase the chance you will get in an accident). Sometimes the fear appeal is based on irrational fears such as those based on racial or ethnic prejudice in Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, the junta in Argentina, or Hussein's Iraq just to name a few.

### Contemporary examples:

- Corporations say that regulations will hurt the economy, lose jobs, etc.
- Regulating drug prices will hurt R&D.
- Enacting this law will restrict your rights.

Distinguishing the difference between the legitimate and illegitimate uses of the appeal to fear because:

- Fear redirects our thinking away from rational processes in assessing the claim and the evidence for the claim (which are rarely provided).
- Most of us don't realize when we are making decisions based on emotion, and not basing a decision on a rational process.
- Appealing to fear is powerful because it directs our thoughts away from careful considerations of the issue at hand and towards a plan of ridding ourselves of that fear, rather than assessing the evidence for or against the issue.

What are examples of both legitimate and illegitimate uses of the appeal of fear to motivate people?



## **What conditions does the appeal to fear work to motivate people?**

The fear appeal is most effective when

- (1) It scares the hell out of people
- (2) It offers a specific recommendation for overcoming the fear arousing threat.
- (3) The recommended action is perceived as effective for reducing the threat.
- (4) The recipient of the message believes that he or she can perform the recommended action.

Certain tetanus shot programs and anti-smoking campaigns that incorporate all four of these brought better results than programs that only used some of these. Certain threats such as campaigns to "just say no" to drugs or nuclear disarmament are not effective because the listener does not perceive that their behavior is effective or doable.

According to cognitive dissonance theory, what would happen to your attitudes if you didn't recognize the effects of these persuasion tactics on your behavior?