

Persuading Others: The 6 Universal Principles of Influence

with Robert Cialdini, Author, *Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade*

In his bestselling book *Influence: The Science of Persuasion*, Robert Cialdini outlined 6 principles of influence — elements that, when present, make it much more likely that your audience will accept your message. These are: *reciprocity, liking, authority, social proof, scarcity, and commitment/consistency*. These same 6 elements can be used effectively in “pre-suading” yourself or your audience before launching a new project or pitch.

Reciprocity: We like to give back to those who have given to us.

Liking: We prefer to say yes to those we know, like, and share commonalities with.

Authority: We’re more open to ideas and recommendations that are supported by legitimate experts.

Social Proof: We will do what others around us are doing because it reduces uncertainty.

Scarcity: We are more likely to want a product that we perceive to be unavailable or available in limited quantity.

Commitment and Consistency: We are more likely to agree to something that is consistent with something we have already said or done publicly. Political campaigns are a great place to study these principles in action.

Reciprocity is the principle that people like to return favors. Politicians therefore always remind the electorate of the good they’ve done for them in the past. *Liking* is the principle that people respond best to people they already know and like. So politicians change their tone and message slightly from audience to audience, doing their best to sound like “one of us”, whoever *us* may be. *Authority* is the principle that people prefer to take the recommendations of experts. Politicians therefore associate their ideas with studies by top economists, business people, or scientists. *Social Proof* is the principle that we often follow the majority of our peers. Politicians cite the “millions of voters like you” who have already done something they’d like you to do, too, such as donating to the campaign. *Scarcity* is the principle that people especially value what’s scarce. Recently, politicians have been raffling off in-person meetings or one-on-one dinners while on the campaign trail to a lucky donor or two. Lastly, *commitment and consistency*: the principle that we don’t like to appear inconsistent or break implicit promises. So if you’ve ever voted for or supported the candidate’s party in the past, he/she will appeal to you on those grounds to do even better this time.

It takes a little practice, but you can find analogous specifics for whatever you might be selling to yourself or others, and you can use these 6 principles to significantly increase the likelihood of getting your message across.

Prepare

Before you watch the video

Think of a recent instance when somebody convinced you to do something you wouldn't normally have done. Which of the six principles of influence were part of their persuasive process?

Practice

After you watch the video

Consider an upcoming project or initiative for which you need buy-in from colleagues, leadership, or a public audience. Which of the 6 principles of influence are best suited to your pitch, and why?
