Much of your professional success depends on getting people to say “Yes.” Because the ability to influence is so important, scientists have researched what exactly makes someone influential.

Hearing “Yes” becomes much easier when you know how to ethically influence people. Let’s be clear – this isn’t a magic wand. You can’t guarantee that everyone will do what you want all the time. However, countless social psychologists and behavioral economists have pinpointed how you can move significantly more people to do what you want, if you apply the science on influence ethically and correctly.

This article is the first in a four part series where we’ll take a look at Robert Cialdini’s principles of influence. Specifically we’ll look at how salespeople can employ the principles to ensure better odds of success. This initial article lays the groundwork for the next three where we’ll dive into each of the principles of influence in detail.
People

I believe influence is all about PEOPLE because successful influence is all about Powerful Everyday Opportunities to Persuade that are Lasting and Ethical. Let's take a look at each of these components of successful influence.

**Powerful**

Did you know there's a vast body of research into the science of influence and human decision-making? For more than 60 years social psychologists and behavioral economists have applied rigorous scientific study into the psychology of persuasion – what causes one person to say, “Yes” to another.

What you'll learn during this series isn't someone's good advice because all too often that advice may not work for you. What you'll learn will be based on empirical study; scientifically proven ways to get to “Yes” more often.

**Everyday**

Have you ever thought about how much time you spend persuading others at work? If you're like one of the 7,000 people Daniel Pink surveyed for his book *To Sell is Human*, then about 40% of your day is spent in “non-sales selling.” I know most of you reading this are significantly higher than that because you're in sales, so to say you spend at least half of your day persuading others would be conservative.

Influence is truly a skill that comes in handy on a daily basis. Whether you're at work, home or anywhere else you interact with people, understanding how others think and behave and adjusting your communication accordingly is an incredibly powerful skill to possess.
Opportunities
Consider the following question I often ask audiences – Last time you bought a new car, did you notice your new car on the road more in the days immediately after your purchase?

The answer is always “Yes” which is followed up with this question – Were there really more of your new car on the road in the days after you bought it?

People chuckle because they know everyone else didn't run out and all of a sudden buy the same car they did. With that acknowledgement I ask – Then what changed?

Usually someone says, “My perspective,” or “My focus.” That's right, their focus changed and they started to notice something that had been there all along. And so it is with persuasion.

In future posts when I describe the principles of influence you might think to yourself, “I know that.” The reason you'll intuitively know the principles is because they simply describe human behavior...and you're a human who behaves. Undoubtedly you'll recall times where you responded to certain principles or instances where you saw others’ response to them.

Although you know them intuitively, the difference will be, as you learn about them in more detail your eyes will be open to new ways to ethically and correctly use them. Your eyes will be open to opportunities that have literally been there all along.

Persuade
So what exactly is persuasion? There are lots of definitions floating around but the one I like best comes from a pretty smart guy – the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Thousands of years ago Aristotle defined persuasion as “the art of getting someone to do something they wouldn't ordinarily do if you didn't ask.” I like his definition because it's simple and direct.

If someone is already doing what you want there’s no need to ask him or her to do anything differently. Life is good and you can focus your attention elsewhere. Unfortunately, all too often people aren't doing what you need them to do.
With that background you can see my friend was a pretty good persuader. Once I start- ed running I fell in love with it and an in- teresting thing happened; my self-identity changed. I began to see myself as a runner and my friend never had to persuade me to enter a race again because my new self-iden- tity took over. Seeing myself as a runner I naturally did the things runners do. 

and that's when you have to communicate in such a way that they'll receive the message and change their behavior appropriately.

As much as I like Aristotle's definition I think there is a slightly better one – Persuasion is the science of getting someone to do something they wouldn't ordinarily do if you didn't ask.

Did you catch the difference? I replaced “art” with “science” because as I noted earlier, there's more than six decades of rigorous scientific research into this field of study. You and I can learn what decades of research has to tell us then make conscious choices to apply what we learn in our everyday situations to become more effective persuaders.

**Lasting**

Sometimes when persuasion is done right the change can be lasting which means no more persuasion attempts are needed. When you obtain a new client don't you hope they remain a client for a long time? Of course! Life will be much easier if you don't have to persuade them year after year to remain with you. This frees you up to look for new clients.

Sometimes your attempts to persuade change how people view themselves and it takes on a life of its own. Here's a personal example. A friend who is a fitness trainer persuaded a number of friends to run the Columbus Marathon many years ago including my wife and me.

When I was younger I was consumed with weightlifting. I went from a skinny 155 lbs. to nearly 240 lbs. as I competed in powerlifting and bodybuilding contests. In my mind running needlessly burned precious calories that could be used in the gym.

With that background you can see my friend was a pretty good persuader. Once I started running I fell in love with it and an interesting thing happened; my self-identity changed. I began to see myself as a runner and my friend never had to persuade me to enter a race again because my new self-identity took over. Seeing myself as a runner I naturally did the things runners do.

Not every persuasion attempt has such a lasting impact but often times they do when someone’s self-identity changes and that's a beautiful thing because it frees you up for other things that compete for your time and attention.
Ethical
What's the difference between ethical persuasion and manipulation? Manipulators tend to lookout only for themselves, unconcerned about the impact on others. It doesn't matter to them if they have to stretch the truth – or lie outright – to get what they want. They don't care if they disingenuously use their knowledge of human behavior to twist your arm because they only care about how the results work out for them.

When it comes to ethics I like the following quote from *The Art of Woo* by G. Richards Shell and Mario Moussa, “An earnest and sincere lover buys flowers and candy for the object of his affections. So does the cad who seeks to take advantage of another’s heart. But when the cad succeeds we don’t blame the flowers and candy. We rightly question his character.”

Are flowers good or bad? Actually they're neither. We ascribe personal meaning to them. The same is true of the principles of influence. They're neither good nor bad; they simply describe how people respond when you interact with them. As the quote shows us; how you use the principles will revealsomething about your character. Will you be the kind of person who uses your knowledge in a way that's mutually beneficial? Will you be truthful in your communication? We'd all to well to remember another quote from our friend Aristotle, “Character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion.”

Conclusion
PEOPLE has laid the groundwork for the next three articles. Next month I'll share scientifically proven ways to build relationships with your prospects and clients using the principles of influence. After that we'll look at prove techniques for helping customers and potential customers overcome uncertainty during the sales process. We'll conclude the series with strategies to motivate clients and prospects to “Yes” behaviors.

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If you've been in sales for any length of time, you know relationships are extremely important. While the strongest relationships cannot overcome a poor product, you can't deny that a strong relationship is better than a weak or non-existent one. It can be the difference maker in tight situations.

Most of us can tell when someone “likes” us; however, very few of us really know how to build a relationship quickly. The good news is that we have at our
disposal scientifically proven ways to build and strengthen relationships with clients.

In my “Principles of Persuasion” workshop, I teach participants two principles of influence for building relationships with current and prospective clients: the principle of reciprocity and the principle of liking.

The Principle of Reciprocity

Have you ever invited someone to a social gathering—perhaps a wedding, graduation or Christmas party—because that person invited you to a similar event in the past? If so, the principle of reciprocity was at work in that situation.

The psychological principle alerts us to the reality that people generally feel obligated to give to those who’ve first given to them. Social psychologists believe every human society raises its people in the ways of reciprocity.

If you think back to your childhood, or if you’ve raised children, you probably recall one of the earliest lessons kids learn is to thank someone who has done something for them. As we get older our responses become more sophisticated. Someone’s kind deed may be met with a thank-you card, short note or gift. We learn that when someone does something for us we should “return the favor,” so to speak.

Why does reciprocity help build relationships? Think about how you feel toward people when they do something that benefits you—something that you truly appreciate. If you’re like most people, you feel good about those people and it’s easier for you to like them.

Now reverse the situation: You’ve done something for someone, so the person appreciates your actions—and you. That person will be much more likely to say “Yes” to you in the future.

Let’s talk specifically about sales now. Here’s a situation many of you can probably relate to: You’re trying to win a new account. You learn everything you can about the prospect, including what he or she is currently paying. You make your presentation
leveraging every tool available to you. You beat last year's price by a good bit and feel very confident the sale is yours.

Unfortunately the prospect's current provider swoops in, hears about your offer and asks the client for one more day to match or beat it. The prospect gives the current provider the opportunity because of their established relationship. Low and behold, the current provider comes back, beats your price and retains the account.

That situation happened to an insurance agent who recently attended my workshop. The prospective insured paid $25,000 for her insurance the prior year, and the agent trying to win the account came in at $17,000. When the current agent got wind of this he asked for more time, scrambled and magically reduced the price to $15,000.

One of the values of relationships is that you are often given the last look—and the opportunity to counter the offer. So what should the agent do next time the account comes up for renewal? Here's what I advised.

Agent: “I thought we'd get your business last year. We had all the right coverages and beat the renewal price by $8,000. In the end you saved $10,000, so I can't blame you for staying with your current agent. But I'd like to ask you a question. Do you think your current agent would have come in $10,000 lower if I'd not been quoting your business?”

Prospective Customer: “No, they probably would not have come back lower and especially not that low.”

In all likelihood, recognizing how the bidding process helped reduce costs, the prospective customer will agree because reciprocity dictates that she help the agent who was so close to winning her business last year. After all, the agent's work saved her a bundle of money. Not only did she feel good about the savings but also she felt good about the agent. That's one simple way of using the principle of reciprocity to make sales easier.

**The Principle of Liking**

Imagine for a moment that a complete stranger approaches you and asks “Can I have $5?” What do you do? Most people would not just give money to someone they don't know. But what if the person had been a friend? Odds are you'd willingly give the money, and perhaps more, to someone you know and like.
The principle of liking explains why we willingly say “Yes” to some and not others. The principle of influence alerts us to the reality that it’s easy to say “Yes” to those we know and like. The key is to understand how to get people to like us.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to like people with whom we have things in common? What we have in common can range from sports teams we root for, the school we went to, our hometown, mutual friends and so on. If you want people to like you, discover what you have in common and mention those commonalities during your initial conversations. Then let nature take its course.

Another simple way to connect is to offer up genuine compliments. It feels good to receive compliments, and we begin to associate those good feelings with the people who offer them. After all, it’s much more pleasant to be around people who look for the best in us and let us know it. Be that person who looks for the best in others and acknowledges it.

The interesting thing about principle of liking is that it works just as much on us as it does on other people. When we discover in other people that we have things in common and when we find things we can truly compliment, we naturally come to like those people. When they get the sense that we like them, they become very open to whatever we might ask of them. That’s true because generally friends want the best for their friends.

**Conclusion**

Both principles of influence can help you build and strengthen relationships with current clients and prospective customers. I strongly encourage you to seek out ways to give to others because it’s the best way to live life. Not only does it feel good to give but also it pays dividends.

Zig Ziglar said “You can get everything you want in life if you’ll just help enough other people get what they want.” Become a giver, enjoy how that feels and trust that good things will happen.

When it comes to liking, don’t just connect with people to accomplish things; do it because it makes your day and the other person’s day better in the process. The more friends you have, the more you can accomplish. More important: The more friends you have, the more you’ll enjoy life.

“**All things being equal, people want to do business with their friends. All things being not quite so equal, people still want to do business with their friends.”**

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Here are two things you need to understand about most prospects. First, all people have reasons for doing what they do. They may not be your reasons and they may not appear to be good reasons. Still, people have personal reasons for making particular decisions or acting in a specific manner. You can bet if they don’t have any reasons top of mind they will come up with a few of them when asked about why they did something.

Second is that most people fear change. You may be familiar with the saying, “The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t.” While change can be good, all too often people can only think about what they might lose if the change ultimately turns out to be negative. Naturally, that puts doubt in people’s minds and causes them to hesitate.
The uncertainty associated with potential change forces your prospects to keep doing what they’ve always done. As a sales professional, potential clients’ desire to stick with the familiar can be tough for you to overcome—unless you know which principles of influence to employ.

The Principle of Authority

The principle of authority tells us that it’s easier for people to say “Yes” to those with superior wisdom or knowledge. That is why we pay people like doctors, lawyers and other professionals for advice. Their expertise gives us confidence that the proposed course of action is the right one.

One study using brain imaging with two dozen college students at Emory University observed when an authority figure—a professor at Emory who was also an advisor to the Fed—was introduced to the class and began to give financial advice. The student’s critical thinking stopped, and they passively took his advice. They knew his credentials so they willingly accepted what he had to say without questioning his words or ideas.

You can use your authority—both from within and from outside sources—to eliminate customers’ doubt. Authority from within means highlighting your expertise. That is critical because customers are not only buying your product but also they’re buying you. Customers want to know that the person they’re dealing with knows what he or she is talking about. That gives customers confidence to overcome their uncertainty. Many things convey authority, including:

- Your title
- Degrees and designations you’ve earned
- Awards you’ve won
- Years you’ve been in business

The more customers are aware of those aspects of your professional life, the more they come to see you as successful. In many people’s minds, if you are successful, you also have expertise. Convey your expertise with:

- Business cards containing your credentials
- A good autosignature on emails
- A letter of introduction
- Reference publications you’ve been mentioned in or written for
- Client testimonials

A bit of advice: The next time you want a letter of introduction from a current client to a prospect, write the letter yourself. That ensures that your most important credentials are highlighted, and it will save your client time. Here is an example:

“ Alice, thanks for agreeing to introduce me to Bill. I know you’re very busy and the last thing you want to do is spend 30 minutes thinking about what to write about me. I have an idea that will save you time and ensure that Bill knows about my credentials. How about I give you a rough draft of the letter and you can tweak it so it contains your language?”

Who would refuse that request? It saves Alice time, ensures that you control the message and guarantees that the prospect will know exactly what they need to know about you. Everybody wins.
What if you don’t have the years in business, the credentials or awards to boast about? That is where outside authority comes into play. You can reference various statistics and cite authoritative sources to ensure that your prospect feels more confident about you and your suggested course of action. Added benefit: You build your authority in the process because you’re viewed as well-read and someone who does research for clients. Here’s one such example:

“Susan, Louis Pasteur once said, ‘Chance favors only the prepared mind.’ In preparation for our meeting I did a little research on your question from the other day. I found out some things from the Bureau of Labor I think you’ll find very interesting.”

Something as simple as what I’ve just outlined will impress the prospect and build the client’s anticipation about what the research will reveal.

Whether your authority is based on your credentials or substantiated from outside sources, it will encourage your prospective customers to begin to overcome any uncertainty they may have about switching to your product or service.

### The Principle of Consensus

Consensus is the principle of persuasion that highlights the fact that we’re often influenced by the crowd. When we see many people—people just like us—doing something, we assume it’s probably the right thing for us to do. As the old saying goes, “Everyone can’t be wrong.” That’s not always true, but most of the time we’re better going with the flow than against it.

When it comes to helping a prospect overcome uncertainty, the principle is powerful because we typically feel better doing something our peers are doing.

Share with prospects other customers’ feedback and experiences. For example, if you know the majority of your customers love the upgrades they choose, weave that into your sales presentation. Example:

“Tom, you seem a bit hesitant about whether you want to go with the deluxe package. I understand your hesitation because the base model is a good bit of money to begin with. However, what I can tell you from years of experience is that customers who go with the deluxe model love it. In fact, I’ve never had one come back and say they regretted their decision. However, I can tell you that I have worked with customers who went with the base model come back and say they wish they’d have gone with the upgrade.”

You’ve just given prospect Tom some powerful information to consider. If everyone who went with the deluxe version loves it and customers who went with the base version don’t, the prospect has some thinking to do. Presenting the information that way might just be the difference between selling the deluxe over the base version. And, if Tom is like other customers who love the deluxe, he’s more likely to be a repeat customer and tell others about you and the product.

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**Conclusion**

Both of these principles of influence can help you overcome uncertainty in the minds of prospective customers and current clients, which should make getting the sale much easier. So remember these two things:

Look for ways to highlight your expertise or bring expertise into your sales presentation. That will give your prospect confidence that what you’re proposing is the right solution.

Share what other customers are doing, or more specifically customers who are just like your prospect. That will provide prospects with a sense of comfort and safety that your proposal has worked for others and will work for them.

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How to Motivate Customers to Take Action
This is the fourth and final installment in the series on how to ethically influence people to a “Yes” decision. The first article introduced readers to the concept of PEOPLE – Powerful Everyday Opportunities to Persuade that are Lasting and Ethical. The second article gave readers a few simple ideas on relationship building. Last month was all about helping prospects overcome uncertainty and this month we’ll look at some psychological triggers that can help motivate behavior.

So you’ve met with prospective clients and successfully established a relationship with them. It’s clear they like you so they’ve given you a shot at their business. Of course, liking you and trusting you enough to actually give you their business are two different things. But you’ve done a good job overcoming some of their uncertainty by establishing your credibility and showing how many customers just like them have made the switch.

They’re comfortable with you and trust you. However, when you hit the home stretch, you sense their hesitancy to pull the trigger and make the switch. They’re afraid your product or service might not be all it’s cracked to be, and you sense they’re thinking it might just be easier to stay where they are. What’s a salesperson to do?

The Principle of Consistency

The principle of consistency describes the human tendency we all have to be consistent in what we say and what we do. It’s a strong drive because we feel pressure internally (we want to feel good about ourselves) and externally (we want to look good in the eyes of others). If you understand that principle and can ethically show prospects how the decision you’re asking them to make aligns with what they’ve said or done in the past—their beliefs, values and so on—it will be easier for them to make the switch.

The principle of consistency is the reason a sales technique known as “the up front close” can be so effective. If you can establish prospects’ criteria for moving their business up front, it becomes very natural for them to make the switch when you show them you’ve done everything they’ve asked. Here’s how it might play out sometime early in the sales process:

**Salesperson:** “Jane, you seem like a very busy person.”

**Jane:** “You don’t know the half of it!”

**Salesperson:** “If I can show you a way to possibly save time during the quoting process, would you be willing to hear me out?”

The principle of consistency describes the human tendency we all have to be consistent in what we say and what we do. It’s a strong drive because we feel pressure internally (we want to feel good about ourselves) and externally (we want to look good in the eyes of others).
Jane: “Absolutely. I don’t like putting our business out to bid because it’s time consuming but I also need to know we’re getting a good deal.”

Salesperson: “I’d like to know exactly what it will take for me to win your business. If I know I cannot meet one of your requirements, I’ll let you know and remove myself from the process and save us both time. Does that sound fair?”

Most prospects will agree to that because they don’t want to deal with any more salespeople than is necessary. Now the salesperson needs to ask the right questions to find out what it will take to turn the prospect into a customer. Not only does that help the salesperson get ready to present, it will provide the necessary information to tap into consistency and make it easier to close the sale.

Salesperson: “Jane, when we met last time you indicated I’d need to do X, Y and Z to earn your business. I have great news. You’ll see by the end of the presentation we did X, Y, Z and then some.”

At the end of the presentation it becomes very natural to ask for the sale and psychologically easier for the prospect to say, “Yes.” After all, they told you what you needed to do and you did it.

Salesperson: “Jane, I think you can see we went beyond X, Y and Z. I know you’re busy so I’d like to just ask, could we get started on the paperwork today to consummate the deal?”

The success of this approach is contingent on asking good questions and uncovering every reason behind prospects’ decision making. Done right you should naturally close more deals without making them feel pressured.

The Principle of Scarcity

It’s a sure bet that humans hate living with regret. Looking back and wondering, “What if ...” is a nagging feeling we try to avoid at all costs. That is where the final principle of influence comes in. The principle of scarcity describes the phenomenon that we want things more when we believe they’re rare or going away. If you’re a parent, you’ve seen this with your children and it’s not something they need to be taught. Give them 10 toys and tell them there’s only one they are not allowed to play with, and you can bet your bottom dollar that’s the only one they’ll be drawn to.
As adults, we see that play out daily with sales. I’m sure you can think of a time you got off the couch and went to the store because you knew the big sale was ending Sunday. You may not have needed anything, but you wanted to look around just in case. I’m sure on many of those trips you’ve come home with purchases you never would have made if you hadn’t known about the end of the sale. If the sale happened to be “While Supplies Last” you probably went to the store even sooner because you wouldn’t want to get there Sunday afternoon only to learn they’re all sold out.

Your business may not host sales events, but that doesn’t mean you can’t tap into that powerful principle. Presenting yourself, your company or your product in a compelling way is another way of utilizing scarcity.

There may be products, services and characteristics of your company or some combination of those that cannot be gotten elsewhere. Being able to talk about those things in a way that makes the customer realize they cannot get exactly what you’re offering anywhere else will give them pause to consider your offer even more.

Salesperson: “Bill, there are a lot of fine agencies here in town with good people. I’ve been in the business long enough that I know many of them quite well. You might be quite happy going with a few of them, but in the long run I think you’d be missing out because no other agency in town does quite what we do for customers like you. Here’s how we’re different …”

Now it’s incumbent upon the salesperson to state exactly what makes his or her firm, products and services unique among the competition. You want prospects to get the sense that, should they go elsewhere, they’ll lose out on something.

**Conclusion**

Consistency and scarcity can help you motivate action with your prospective customers and current clients so closing the sale becomes easier and more natural. Here are a couple of things remember:

1. Ask good questions to find out what it will take to win the business. During your sales presentation make sure you bring those things up as a reminder.

2. People hate to lose great opportunities so make sure you talk about your offering in a way that makes the prospect realize they can’t get all that you bring to the table from any other firm.

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