

Ep 128 - Inside Influence: Live with Dr. Robert Cialdini

Robert Cialdini: [00:00:00] Yeah, I think it's the authority principle and the recognition that I should not be focusing on being in authority and the influence that has. I should be focusing exclusively on being an authority and the persuasive consequences of that. Being in authority is about power, but if you're demons- you've demonstrated that you're an authority, they want to follow your lead even if you're not there anymore to observe them.

MichaelAaron Flicker: That was Dr. Robert Cialdini, and after spending three episodes studying influence, Richard and I thought we had a pretty good understanding of his work. But this conversation really helped us appreciate that some of his most interesting ideas aren't the ones we've already covered in the last episodes.

It's hearing the way Dr. Cialdini has continued [00:01:00] to evolve his thinking over time, and that has a big impact on both marketers and business leaders alike. Today's conversation covered many of the back and forth Richard and I were talking about, but it also brought new ideas that we hadn't even thought to ask.

Dr. Cialdini is the author of Influence, one of the most important texts on persuasion and behavioral science available today. And with all that said, we're very excited for you to hear our episode. Thanks for listening.

Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and practical marketing. Every week, we sit down and go deep behind the science that powers great marketing today. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And today, we're sitting with Dr. Robert Cialdini, author of Influence, widely regarded as [00:02:00] the most foundational book on persuasion.

Let's get into it. Dr. Cialdini, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands. We're thrilled to have you here.

Robert Ciadini: Thank you, MichaelAaron and Richard. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We've spent three episodes diving into your book, Influence, breaking down the principles, and Richard and I are excited to test our knowledge with you today- Excellent

challenge some of our thinking and you'll tell us how we're doing on this matter.

Robert Ciadini: All right. Fair enough.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And before we get into that, we have just a few fun rapid-fire questions. And let me get us kicked off here. What's one thing about your work in Influence that you think most people misunderstand?

Robert Ciadini: That I am stressing the ethics of the process, not just the effectiveness of it. And I think by doing so, I [00:03:00] increase the effectiveness of those people who follow the approach of being simultaneously effective and ethical.

Richard Shotton: Which of the principles do you find hardest to resist yourself?

Robert Ciadini: I don't try to resist them anymore-

Richard Shotton: Oh, yeah ...

Robert Ciadini: because I think they move me in the right direction unless they're being counterfeited. So what I resist is the counterfeit versions the deception. That's the thing that I try to to recognize, and I think of those it's liking, because liking is not something that's easily recognized cognitively.

Richard Shotton: Oh, and when you say counterfeit, would this be, say for example, social proof, this idea that if you appear like you're popular, you become more popular still? Exactly. If it's counterfeit social proof, is that someone-

Robert Ciadini: Yes ... [00:04:00]

Richard Shotton: making up essentially, inventing fictitious stories of popularity?

Robert Ciadini: They can exaggerate.

They can ignore- they can invent statistics. They can lie with statistics. They can leave out other evidence that is counter to what they are presenting, which still might be true, but it may not be representative. So take, for example, the research that shows that 97% of doctors support vaccines, but you just present the authorities who, who don't believe that, and don't present the representativeness of the case for authority.

I think that's an example of a counterfeiter.

Michael Aaron Flicker: Brilliant. What's one small change that can make a big difference specifically for how brands or companies [00:05:00] influence behavior?

Robert Ciadini: They need to be more human in the way they present their case. And recognize the experience- I would say empathy with their market.

Ben Franklin one of the Founding Fathers here in the US said, "Should you wish to persuade, speak not to logical argument, speak to self-interest."

Empathize with your audience. See what the things you can think through or research are their major challenges, their preferences, their proclivities, their patterns, the things that you can resonate with and provide information to satisfy their preferences and choices in their lives.

Richard Shotton: Is there any persuasion [00:06:00] technique where you've changed your mind over time? Is there something that you've got a very different opinion on from when you started out?

Robert Ciadini: Yeah. I think it's the authority principle and the recognition that I should not be focusing on being in authority and the influence that has.

I should be focusing exclusively on being an authority and the persuasive consequences of that. Being in authority is about power. It really-- I shouldn't be talking about it as a persuasive approach. That's hierarchical authority that you can get, yes, through coercion or in or penalties, sanctions, and so people don't like that.

They really don't. But if you're demonstrating that you're [00:07:00] an authority, they want to follow your lead, even if you're not there

anymore to observe them, because it's your idea, not you as a, a- as an enforcer of that idea that's making the difference.

Richard Shotton: That's a nice distinction.

So that when you're in authority and enforcing something, it might work whilst you're there and present and can fulfill all these nasty sanctions. But is your argument that doesn't work once people have left then you're less likely to-

Robert Cialdini: Then reactance ca- can ex i- show itself essentially, that you resented, you resit- you resented that coercive push or pressure.

And so when that person is not there to observe any longer, that tendency can surface.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. It also strikes [00:08:00] me that becoming an authority is an achievable goal for all people that wanna be more persuasive. Being in authority that may, that that, that's more circumstantial than something that we can all work towards.

Robert Cialdini: And it allows you many more recipients to concentrate. Because you want to be persuasive with your superiors. You want to get them to a- agree to your budget. You wanna p- be persuasive with your peers. You want to get them online on the same page with a new initiative that you're proposing or something like that.

So it's n- you-- There are-- It's influence without authority. That's being an authority, not being in authority. Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So helpful to hear. So helpful to hear. So we have spent a number of episodes, Dr. Cialdini, going through the principles in detail, and [00:09:00] as Richard and I were getting ready for our conversation today, we were curious how did you finally arrive at these original six?

We're gonna talk about the seventh in a little bit, but what made these six stand out versus everything else you could have included? We're interested in the backstory that you have- Yeah ... to get to this.

Robert Cialdini: To get to that, I had to change my methodology. I moved out of my laboratory and became a participant observer.

That is, I infiltrated the training programs of as many influence professions as I could get access to. I would answer ads, and I would take the training in sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, recruiting, and to see what they were teaching their aspiring professionals to do to increase their profits, because they had [00:10:00] learned that these approaches worked.

So what was the thing that set them out apart? If I found evidence of them being recommended in each of those professional domains. There were only six that they all said worked. S- and then I, so it was a double b- step process. I then l- looked into the behavioral science research to see if they had been validated.

It wasn't just speculations or hunches or... No. These had been proven to be causal influences on increasing the likelihood of assent to a request or a proposal or a recommendation. And if I had those two together, then they made the-- that made the grade. [00:11:00] Those principles made the grade, and there were just six.

I was surprised. That was the biggest surprise I had, how small the footprint was. Only six. Yeah. At that point.

Richard Shotton: As a methodology, I love this idea of being a participant observer, and I wonder if there's a bigger application or a more broader application in both academia and in the professional world, because it's the overlap that's super interesting.

There's a danger that in the real world, people can adopt behaviors that aren't evidence-based, but I think there's a danger in the academic world that they can focus on maybe impractical solutions. That's right. And that- D- do you think this could be a broader technique for more people to use?

Robert Ciadini: I do. I do.

In fact, I'm very taken by the approach of certain executives CEOs and so on, who spend time in the roles of the people that they [00:12:00] supervise, so they recognize what might be conceivable but not practical. It's, it's-- You you can s- you can claim that this is a route to go, but you get into the situation, you see that's just not feasible to do it that way, right?

So you get that instruction from the side rather f- than from the top from above as to what's likely to be workable.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Dr. Cialdini, did I read that you did this type of field work, was it over three and a half years that you were on the ground? Am I right in that number?

Robert Cialdini: It was two and a half years.

Nearly three, but it was two and a half years of doing that. One full year I was on sabbatical, so I could do nothing but that. I could... I didn't have university responsibilities. I could do that. [00:13:00] And, but here's what I learned. In the first Five months, I knew the principles. I didn't-- They-- I knew the principles that were gonna work.

They were the ones that I could identify in every one of these professions. And I just had some interesting, I think, validation of... I had a-- I got a email from a university professor at St. Andrews University in Scot- Scotland. And he's a expert on ancient texts, right? And he's an expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls And he wrote to me and he said, "I found all seven principles being re-

recommended in the Dead Sea Scrolls." So these are the universal [00:14:00] principles, the features of the human condition that usually steer us correctly if they are inherently there in the situation, if there is true authority, if there's true scarcity, if there's true social proof. You want to follow those because they steer you most of the time in the right direction, and people have recognized that for a long time.

It would just took a while to put them all into one place my, my book Influence, which has been very good to me. I have to say, that book has been very good to me. I put one per chapter, and I have a colleague in Poland, a Professor Wilhemina Vosinska. She said, "Bob your book Influence is so famous in Poland, my students think you're dead."

MichaelAaron Flicker: What a compliment.

Robert Cialdini: But yeah, a- affirming at the same time.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I think so many [00:15:00] listeners are going to be so excited to hear the methodology that led to these, and of course, we're gonna go much deeper on, on some of the things that we've learned from all of this. What do you think was your approach when you were in those training situations, when you were on the ground, that allowed you to be open to hearing these principles come through?

O- obviously, there was lots of training, and there was lots of information- Yeah ... coming towards you. W- if those that are listening want to be open to perceiving the underlying currents of what are happening- Yeah ... they wanna learn in their roles w- what do you think was happening so that you were able to hear these things so clearly?

Robert Ciadini: Two things. One was I took scrupulous notes. I was recording everything. I had a, e- I even had a tape recorder. I was making sure I didn't miss anything. And then the big difference, I think, [00:16:00] was to focus away from tactics and onto concepts, to principles. Which were the principles, the categories of influence that could capture as much, as many of those tactics as possible?

And if you did that, then you reduce the number of things to have to know about from hundreds to six. That was the key. Go away from tactics to principles.

Richard Shotton: We've been discussing six so far, and in the original book from 1984, there were the six key principles. Then 40 years later, five million copies sold later, you do a revised version and you add a seventh principle in about unity.

Now, [00:17:00] when we were preparing the episode, we put a post out on LinkedIn and Twitter to ask people what questions they'd like us to ask you. And one of the most popular, one that came from Tom Elmer, was why add a seventh principle?

Robert Ciadini: It had to do with what I saw around me 30 years after the publication of Influence, and that was the power of we-ness, of oneness causing people to decide who to favor and who to follow, right?

And certainly once again, when you check it with the behavioral science literature there's identity theory there that makes this case that the reason we say yes to a request it is very often first deciding is that person one of us? Is that communic- is that communicator [00:18:00] of me, not just similar to me?

Is that person in the category that I share with a social or personal identity? And it-- And I was seeing it all around us, political identities, being willing to follow the lead of politicians or candidates who were of the same party. And there's this very dis- alarming evidence that if you see a politician who has committed a crime, you're less likely to report it if that person is of your party, right?

Then you can go to religious categories. We're fighting wars now between countries that have warring world- religious worldviews, right? You can go to nationality, right? [00:19:00] I'm an American, I'm a Brit I'm a, an Iranian. What... Those things dominate even to the point of locality. M-my colleague, Stephen Martin there in the UK did a study with the the tax bureau the tax office, His Majesty's Tax Office, and showed that he could significantly increase the likelihood that people would pay their taxes on time if he gave them a message that said, "The majority of UK residents do pay their taxes on time."

It went from 67% to 71. If he said, "The majority of people in your region," it goes up to 76. And if he says, "The majority of people in your community [00:20:00] who you identify with as a locale It goes up to 81%.

Richard Shotton: Which I think is absolutely fascinating because many people would say social proof, it's one of the most powerful biases you can use.

But in Steven's example, you get a four percentage point increase from the control by using basic social proof. And that's not to be sniffed at. Th- these were people who hadn't paid their tax previously very hard to change. But what's fascinating is from the social proof example to the more tailored by locale example, you're going up by another 10 percentage points.

So we're seeing a bigger change between social proof with- and tailoring than between the control and social proof. I think that's a fantastic demonstration of the power of it. And that

Robert Ciadini: is, I think, my view of one of the biggest mistakes that mar-brand marketers make. They don't segment their [00:21:00] market enough.

They use social proof with a blast, and they don't say-- And they don't segment to people of a particular age or a particular profession or a particular background. And if they raised that and said, "People in your situation, here's the social proof on them," makes a big difference, right? And when they do it, let's say by saying, "And people like you, in your situation, what we found is that we get, we have 100 five-star reviews from those people," that would be wonderful.

And here would be the one extra step. We have 100 five-star reviewers, not reviews. [00:22:00] Think of the difference. They're

MichaelAaron Flicker: people.

Robert Cialdini: There's pe- They're people like you. You imagine you envision check marks on a scale for reviews. You envision people who are on your side and who are recommending you.

100 of them

I w- so I have a small company called the Cialdini Institute, and what we're recommending is, look, what are the smallest changes you can make to y- your influence approach that will produce the biggest changes in your influence success? That would be one of them. The same thing with testif- testimonials.

I have these expert [00:23:00] testimonials. No, you have these expert testifiers to your merits. An entirely different image you've installed in the minds of the people. Small things like that. I-- we're spending a lot of time trying to think about the smallest things you can do to make a difference, right?

Change this word. So for example, when you're asking for your-- you're asking for people around you to share your idea, and let's say peers, your peers because if you could get everybody on the same page, then you would be emboldened to go forward with this idea, right? And you, a- and you love this idea, right?

So you would say, "Can you give me your opinion," right? "On this?" That's a [00:24:00] mistake. The research shows if you instead ask for their advice, you get significantly better and more frequent support because you've made them one of-- you've made them a partner. It's us, not you and me. When you ask for opinion, you get a critic Ask for advice, you get a partner.

And it's not just one study. There's multiple studies that show this.

Richard Shotton: C- could you share one of those studies? 'Cause I think that's, as you talk I think you had this phrase before, the small bigs. That's a phenomenal example of a tiny change in language that can have a big effect. So it'd be lovely to go into more detail.

Robert Cialdini: So it was this, one study was done for the business plan for a new restaurant. It was healthy Mexican food restaurant, all right? And [00:25:00] they provided the business plan, put it online to various evaluators, right? And half of them were asked for their opinion on the plan. Half were after, asked for their advice on this plan, and you got significantly more positive reviews when you asked for advice.

They were trying to be helpful, and this is the key. The the recommendations they made were rated by independent evaluators as significantly better recommendations.

Advice. So that's the kind of small/big that you can that we try to find. One word maybe changing the sequence of when you provide your message versus first versus later, that kind of thing. I'm a big one [00:26:00] for you know those testifiers that that you've been able to find, right?

They should go first on your website so that the aura of authority that they, being an authority, that they bring to your message is there at the first word.

Richard Shotton: Yeah and that's something I've taken from your book and your work and applied personally. That if I'm going to do a talk I feel uncomfortable, I'm British after all talking about achievements or reasons why I'm an authority.

But if I can get someone else to introduce me th- that, get a testifier in the flesh, then it's much, much more, more powerful. So that's certainly a little tweak I've made- A-

Robert Ciadini: and I bet- ... Based on your work ... that you take it even further, Richard, to someone who can introduce you who is an opinion [00:27:00] leader in that group.

Someone they n- they have credibility already toward, right? They see that person You don't have to establish your credibility. You get it by virtue of that person's credibility and that person's recommendation of you as a speaker

Richard Shotton: Yes.

Robert Ciadini: I think-- And there-- Here's an interesting study that I saw, or at least a [00:28:00] report. There are two forms of of marketing that have risen the most in the last decade, and one is influencer marketing. You wouldn't be surprised at that, right? And here's the other: handmade products. Why?

There's a person there in both cases. Technology is separating us every day in increasing ways. We work separate from others. We're in front of a screen. We we entertain ourselves by pressing a button and getting Netflix or Y-YouTube. We inform ourselves by going to Wikipedia or AI. We don't have human connection.[00:29:00]

If, as communicators, we can bring human connection back into our messages, even the ones that occur on technological dimensions, like saying re-reviewers instead of reviews. Like causing somebody to say, "Give me your advice and make you a partner with me." everything we can do... Here's... Yeah. Do you know that there was a study done of 6,700 online commercial sites, and they looked at the factors that in A/B tests most led to conversions.

And as you would expect, the principles of influence like authority and social proof and consistency and scarcity were there, but so was liking. How do you get liking on a website? [00:30:00] If you put a welcoming statement on the landing page of your site, you get significantly more conversions. There's warmth there.

There's a, there's approval there. There's human connection there. Yeah.

Michael Aaron Flicker: And something that you're highlighting in all of these points is it's our job as communicators to remind the recipient of the message that the human is central to the message. That the difference between reviewers and reviews- Yeah

is that it puts in the picture in my mind a person leaving- a review. Same thing in testimonials. So part of your insight is that by bringing the human front and center, we do a better job at building a connection, and therefore we're more effective.

Robert Ciadini: And people are increasingly thirsty for it.

Michael Aaron Flicker: Thank you.

Robert Ciadini: Yeah. That's why influencers [00:31:00] and handmade products have shown the biggest increase in the last decade

Do you know, I just saw an-an article la-last week. I'm like a shark in the water when it comes to behavioral science influence strategies and effects. I'm always looking at the journals and outlets of one sort or another. And there was a study of people who advertise Airbnb. M- "I have this rental that you can..."

And they have a pic- there's a picture

If the owner is smiling, gets significantly more conversions. That's what people are looking for.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

Robert Ciadini: They're looking for a human connection because it's being bleached out of us by technology. Now we're [00:32:00] not gonna, we're not gonna stand in the way of te- technology. That's s- standing in front of a bullet train, right?

But we can link humanness to our messaging, e- even in technology like a website, and get the consequences, the favorable consequences of those human connections.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It strikes me that over a longer arc of history, there's been other technologies that have separated people. I was reading a story of when radios were first introduced to cars.

Folks were- Oh ... terrified- Yeah ... that they could not drive and listen, or when the printing press started and oral storytelling could take more of a backseat. This, i- is this part of a longer narrative of how w- we [00:33:00] are c- we, technology is interrupting human connection and shows that it's not the first time this has happened?

Robert Ciadini: It's not the first time, and I would venture that the people who built warmth into their radio programming or their literature or their newscasts would, were the ones who were most popular.

Richard Shotton: Yeah.

Robert Ciadini: Because people n- that's who we are as a, a- as a species. We're an affiliative species. We need that. We want that.

Richard Shotton: I think sometimes marketers fall into the trap of thinking, "Oh, but I need to get across a message of quality or value for money or trustworthiness." And what they forget is that if you can come across as likable, because of the halo effects- Yep ... if you come across very strongly likable, all those other attributes will follow suit.

I- And w- we don't judge people on [00:34:00] independent metrics.

Robert Ciadini: I think that's a great insight. And another version of that is that w- because with technology, we are prioritizing efficiency over effectiveness. Build-- it may take a little longer to h- sign your emails or your to put a

signature and a photo at the-- beneath each of your emails at first, but every one of those is gonna make you more a person in the eyes of that individual, right?

That, that receives it. And they're looking for cues about that person, so that person should be smiling.

Michael Aaron Flicker: So we've gone deeply through this opportunity for communicators to find a way to be [00:35:00] likable, to make the human connection come to the front. If that's maybe the biggest area, I think you said, that marketers most underuse, would there be a second area you would guide marketers to say, "This is really important to not miss if you wanna be effective"?

Robert Ciadini: And it has to do with scarcity and the idea that people want more of those things they can have less of. So if you have something that's tr- that's unique and that differentiates yourself, y- you, from your competitors and so on, and I think b- marketers tend to use that. Except I've heard a lot of them say, " we're in such a competitive business.

I don't have anything, one thing that's unique that sets me apart." And here's the problem. You m- you might not have that, but I bet you have a suite of things [00:36:00] that together, in conjoint presence, your rivals don't have. Put that together and put that in your message. You can't get this, and this together, and I don't see that.

I don't see that in the marketing literature or presentation the combination of ingredients that's unique, that would be worth emphasizing

[00:37:00] No, that's exactly right. By the way there's good evidence that limited number is more effective than limited time, because when there's limited number, you have competitors who can take away that, that choice. If th- if they're, if they jump, it leaves you with nothing. So- limited number causes people to jump.

But you're right about limited information as well. People want what they what they haven't been exposed to and nobody else has. Exclusive information. So one thing I would say to m- to marketers is when you have something that [00:38:00] has new... I was just mentioning, I saw an article that came out last week.

Almost nobody else knows about it. People are gonna lean in to hear what I, what that has to say. When I talk about some of the research that we've done,

I'm a public speaker these days and I'm talking about a study that we've done that isn't published yet. I say to my audience, "And the results I'm about to show you are not even published yet."

Nobody else has this information." And I see the look and their posture. They lean in to the next piece of information because it's exclusive. Yeah.

Richard Shotton: So we've discussed underused biases, and we've talked [00:39:00] about likability and scarcity. Slightly different angle, are there any of the insights in the book that you think are misused by marketers?

Actively used in the wrong direction?

Robert Ciadini: Here's what I think is the... I'm not sure there's any one, but I would say any, all of them, and that is, and this is aided by AI, where you say, you ask them, "Okay. Help me forge a marketing plan for this particular industry or this particular customer or this thing - this email that I'm about to send out," what - whatever it is.

And you say, "So tell me, based on what you know about the influence process and all, everything that's been programmed into you, trained into you, what works?"

Here's what we should be asking. What [00:40:00] works of what I already have in this that's naturally a part of this situation?

Otherwise, you're just fooling people. If you have social proof, that's what you should be asking them to forge the best response to, or form of. If you have authority, that's what you should... You - I got an email from a woman who is running a big program, training program with within a company that reaches out to their client companies and trains their people in ways to be more persuasive.

And she wrote to me and said, "The-- We, we know about the principles. We train these principles, but they have the ones that are always most effective are the ones [00:41:00] that are already naturally there in the situation." And the marketer can simply raise to consciousness, and that registers with people.

"Oh, that is part of this situation." I don't have to construct it. I don't have to manufacture it. I just need to bring it to consciousness, which makes it ethical at the same time. You're pointing to something that's naturally there and simply making-- you're informing-- you're educating people into assent.

You're informing them into yes. And it wins the day over simply claiming scarcity or manufacturing scarcity that isn't a natural part of that situation and trying to leverage it. No, what-- if you really have something that's [00:42:00] unique in combination, that's the way to use scarcity. Yeah.

And then you win on both the ethical and effectiveness sides of the ledger. Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Shotton: I was gonna say, one of the areas that I sometimes see misused from your framework is social proof. So I think you've in, in the past called it the government's big mistake, and we certainly see sometimes governments emphasizing the popularity of the wrong thing.

So they might talk about loads of students get drunk or lots of- Yeah ... youths carry knives or lots of people steal bits of wood from a petrified national park in Arizona. And I think that is somewhere that I've certainly experienced a misuse amongst marketers, emphasizing the thing they want to stop- Right

not emphasizing it.

Robert Ciadini: So few people are taking advantage of our new model. It means most people don't want [00:43:00]

your new model. Yeah. It's the wrong thing to... We did a study where telling people that, There was th- we wanted them to conserve water in the home, right? And the evidence was that 30% of people are trying to conserve water in the home every day. All right? That message reduced ener- water conservation, right?

But here's the newest research on the s- social proof that allows you to escape that problem. If we said there's a trend, two years ago it was 15%, last year it was 20%, now it's 30%, we get the highest [00:44:00] conservation law because people project the trajectory of trends into the future, and that's what our mediational research found.

The reason they did it is that they expected it would be the norm, it would be the popular thing shortly, right? So it's still social proof, but it's future social proof that won the day.

Michael Aaron Flicker: It's interesting how that connects to a conversation we were having earlier about how they-- we look for the human in the other, and in

this instance, they're seeing, they're projecting future social proof even if it is not there yet.

They're injecting it themselves.

Robert Ciadini: I really like that. That's very perceptive because I think what is you see people going in that direction. You see your neighbors going in that direction with a trend like that. [00:45:00]

Michael Aaron Flicker: Our listeners love to find sources of inspiration and ideas from wide areas, and you've highlighted companies like Berkshire Hathaway.

What do they understand about influence that most organizations miss?

Robert Ciadini: They understand that if you're dealing with people who don't know you, have-- don't have a history with you, they're not familiar with you, but you'd like them to move toward you, sending them an, a message with all of your strengths, your best arguments up front, right away bang you hit them with the most logical, the wisest the easiest, the most efficient, what- whatever the arguments are, you fail to recognize that if they don't know you, there's a wall of [00:46:00] incredulity.

They're not willing to accept your best messages yet. And your best messages, when that's the only thing you send them, you're just like your rivals. You're just like everybody else. You have to bring down the wall of uncertainty where they can have trust in you. And here's what Warren Buffett does with every one of his letters to his sh- shareholders at the beginning of the year.

On the first page, he mentions something that went wrong He said, "We were wrong about this. We made a mistake. It won't happen again because we've put things in place that make sure... But but it won't ever happen again. We've made sure that's the case. We've put in policies and people to make sure of it."

And then he says, "However, let, [00:47:00] let-- Here's the things that went right." Now his strongest arguments are coming in straight. The wall is down. I've been getting his mes- his his letters, his stockholder letters for 25 years, and every time I say to myself, "Wow, this guy's being straight with us."

Richard Shotton: There, there's something I think very powerful in that.

The

Robert Ciadini: image of what he's saying- now about the strongest.

Richard Shotton: Yeah.

Robert Ciadini: Yeah.

Richard Shotton: Because what's the best way to prove your honesty? It's to admit a flaw or admit a mistake. That's a tangible proof point- Yes ... and then everything else becomes more-

Robert Ciadini: Not only are you competent in knowing the pros and the cons, you're trustworthy enough to talk about- Yeah

the cons as well as the pros.

Richard Shotton: Does this tactic, and we've previously referred to it as the stolen thunder tactic, does this tactic require a degree of status? So

a very [00:48:00] related or similar bias is the Pratfall Effect, this idea from Elliot Aronson, if you admit a flaw, you become more appealing. But for the Pratfall Effect he showed a bit of a nuance, which was if you had status and exhibited a flaw, you were much, much more appealing. If you didn't have status, in his case you made loads of mistakes in a quiz, and you spilled a cup of coffee down yourself, you became even less likable.

Robert Ciadini: Yep.

Richard Shotton: Is there something similar here? 'Cause Warren Buffett's got loads of status. He, he's- Yeah ... got this amazing reputation. Could someone with

Robert Ciadini: low status do that? I think that's right that you have to be careful that you're not seen as a bottom-feeder, you're not seen as a low-status communicator, that you have credentials, and you ha- your company has a history and so on.

Under those circumstances... And here's the s- the second part of it that I think has not been recognized, but y- you're absolutely right, [00:49:00] Richard, about that research. The title of that study is "To Err is Human," right? Here's what I would add. To admit it is humanizing. You become a person. You become someone they can recognize and trust But the key is always after you mention that, not the first thing you say.

You don't trash your s- com-- "Now let me tell you all the things that are wrong with me, my organization, my products and services." No. But fairly early, you mention a drawback that you can then eliminate or overpower with your strengths. But you always have to say but or however or nonetheless or at the same time, [00:50:00] so you move their attention away from the m- from the draw- drawback to the strengths.

I have a friend who's a psycholinguist, sh- studies the psychology of language, and she says, "Do you know what the word but signifies to the person who has just received it?" Ignore what I've just... Forget what I've just told you. Focus now on the next thing I'm about to say, and that's where the strengths belong.

Richard Shotton: A, a bit earlier you mentioned AI, and I think of all the questions we got, that was the biggest theme. Are you seeing any changes in the most effective persuasive tactics with the technological developments around AI?

Robert Ciadini: Yes. I think social proof is the one that's most available to those models to [00:51:00] find in their training on the internet, in, in the...

Yeah. And so they can bring it to consciousness in ways that we weren't really able to do before technology. We didn't have-- we could talk to our neighbors, but it wasn't Groups of people from all over the world who would be who, who could testify as to the the merits of a product, service, or idea.

And so AI has that now. They can get that and they can bring it in. Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: One of our listeners, Andy Kingston, asked what happens when people experience, he called it synthetic social proof. What he means by that is fake social proof that has been faked. It is made up. Does that change people's relationship to social proof if they [00:52:00] feel AI can just manufacture re- reviews, can manufacture pictures of people enjoying a product?

How does that change our relationship with social proof it- if it's being called into question?

Robert Ciadini: I'm very concerned about this because we, as-- So we don't know if there's true, if it's true, right? And so what we have to do is check online to see if there's any complaints about this if there's any evidence that these people are manufacturing it.

There are headlines about companies that, that ins- that sell a- and buy five-star reviews, or they order their, all their employees to write five-star reviews as if it... And [00:53:00] then when that comes, whenever I see somebody who is misusing the principles, it's not just social proof, but misinforming us about it, I get online and I penalize them.

We have to have a counter to those individuals who are using AI or whatever source to mislead us about the presence of these principles. Get online, complain about them, give them a one star, and give the reason, and say, "You should... This hey you, ABC company, fire the marketing agency that, that led you to do this, or res- rethink your marketing people who- sought to mislead us, right?

What do you think of your customers if you think that it's fine [00:54:00] to mislead them into change? Rethink this. Go back to what you really have. If you have something genuinely scarce, genuine-- what has genuine social proof or authority or whatever, use that, man. Get out of that that cheater's role.

I'm very militant about this. I'm online, I'm penalizing, I'm puncturing them whenever I see e-e-evidence of this. We need to counteract this, otherwise what can we believe anymore?

Michael Aaron Flicker: Richard and I have talked so often about it's an easy shorthand to say humans are cognitive misers. They-- if they could take a heuristic, if they could take a shortcut, they're apt to do it.

And when you don't have confidence in social proof, I wonder if it drives you to things like unity. " If I can't be sure of this, maybe I [00:55:00] just look at someone that's more that looks like me or that acts like me." it starts to tear at the balance of how these forces can play together.

Robert Ciadini: Yeah. Yeah I think that's a g- that's a good point. And I know that it it works on me, this unity thing. So I don't know how well you know the National Football League in the United States these professional football teams. And you always-- And I'm a fan. It turns out I grew up in the state of Wisconsin.

The Green Bay Packers are the fan. And I saw an article that listed the celebrities who were ardent fans of each of the football teams, each of the national football teams. And I learned that Justin Timberlake and Lil Wayne were big Green Bay Packer fans. And guys, I immediately felt [00:56:00] better of their music.

It's true. And here's the influence part. I wanted them to win-- I wanted them to be more successful. They w- they were of me.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

Robert Ciadini: They were one of us. I wanted them... There's this saying, "People don't sink the boats they're riding in." Makes sense. Your job as a communicator of the unity principle is to show people that you're in the same boat.

They're not gonna sink that boat. They're gonna want to advance it.

Richard Shotton: We began the conversation talking about how ethical uses of these biases are often the most effective. And there's something lovely about the unity principle because if people [00:57:00] grasp that and they believe that a powerful way to influence is to make whoever you're trying to persuade feel like you're one of us, I think what it leads to is a genuine listening, a genuine desire to discover facets of someone else's personality and then identify similarities.

And that I think makes the world a better place if you go out and try and find these honest areas of- Yeah ... Overlap. No, that's

Robert Ciadini: a really good, that's a really good point. Yeah.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. There's too much time spent talking about why we're different from each other. I think- this to me encourages to look for those overlaps.

Robert Ciadini: We're all in the human family after all, and we can see that connection and that unity if it, if we bring the features of that to the surface. Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And maybe the point that we're all driving at here is for commercial communicators, we [00:58:00] can do that and do well in our goals to sell. We can use these principles to bring people together and to drive good commercial outcomes.

And how good does that feel if you're in charge of a brand's budget or if you're in charge of a brand's creative to be able to do those things?

Robert Cialdini: And it seems to me you can do that by showing that you share an identity or by segmenting and saying- Thank you ... "These people share your identity, and they have been purchasing us.

They have been advocating us." Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I hate to start to bring us to a close, Dr. Cialdini. It's very hard to do that based on how engaging this conversation has been. Before we come to a close, one final question. If there was one thing you wish every marketer truly understood about your work on [00:59:00] influence, what would it be?

What would you wanna leave people with as we come to a close in today's episode?

Robert Cialdini: I think it would be the importance of the ethics of the process as enhancing the effectiveness of the process. That message if everybody understands- it-- Not just understood, but- But bought into that concept, the world would be a better place

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thank you for the lovely conversation today.

For folks that wanna learn more about your work, they can find "Influence" wherever books are sold. They can visit cialdini.com, and we were talking before we hit record today, there's an assessment you and your team have built. Yeah. Could you tell us a little bit about it? It may be an easy first place for people to get started.

Robert Cialdini: It's a [01:00:00] free questionnaire that you answer in terms of which kinds of influence you most prefer or are most likely to engage in, and then we bring that together and show you which are the approaches that you have the most proclivities toward, right? And which are somewhere where you're not using them, and you could increase your effectiveness by thinking about those as well that you're not using employing to the extent that is warranted by some situations.

Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: A great place to start.

Richard Shotton: The only thing I would do is double down on the books as well. You've got such a great portfolio of books. We've discussed "Influence" a

lot. There's "Small Big," there's "Yes," there's "Pre-Suasion," and I think all of those are linked by the fact that they are really rich in [01:01:00] data and evidence, but they're explained in such a easy-to-read, almost novelistic, simple way.

It's amazing. And then the final bit, they are so practical. Now, if people are listening to this and they've never read an academic book, this is completely different. I think anyone who's in the business or field of persuasion, you read any of Dr. Cialdini's books, and you will be a more effective communicator.

So yeah, just doubling down on how good those books are.

Robert Cialdini: Thank you for saying that. I'm grateful.

Richard Shotton: Gen- genuinely meant. Genuinely meant. Thank you.

MichaelAaron Flicker: For those listening at home, thank you for tuning in today. If you found today's conversation engaging, please share it, or, and follow, and comment on our pages.

It helps us reach more people just like you. And until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Dr. Cialdini, thank you for being with us today.

Robert Cialdini: So long [01:02:00] for now. I enjoyed it, I have to say.

Richard Shotton: Oh, it's brilliant.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thank you.

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