



PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Influence
Science and Practice
Robert B. Cialdini
Fifth Edition

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PEARSON

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Weapons of Influence

Civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them.

—Alfred North Whitehead



From Chapter 1 of *Influence, Science and Practice*, Fifth Edition. Robert B. Cialdini. Copyright © 2009 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

WEAPONS OF INFLUENCE

I GOT A PHONE CALL ONE DAY FROM A FRIEND WHO HAD recently opened an Indian jewelry store in Arizona. She was giddy with a curious piece of news. Something fascinating had just happened, and she thought that, as a psychologist, I might be able to explain it to her. The story involved a certain allotment of turquoise jewelry she had been having trouble selling. It was the peak of the tourist season, the store was unusually full of customers, the turquoise pieces were of good quality for the prices she was asking; yet they had not sold. My friend had attempted a couple of standard sales tricks to get them moving. She tried calling attention to them by shifting their location to a more central display area; no luck. She even told her sales staff to “push” the items hard—again without success.

Finally, the night before leaving on an out-of-town buying trip, she scribbled an exasperated note to her head saleswoman, “Everything in this display case, price $\times \frac{1}{2}$,” hoping just to be rid of the offending pieces, even if at a loss. When she returned a few days later, she was not surprised to find that every article had been sold. She was shocked, though, to discover that, because the employee had read the “ $\frac{1}{2}$ ” in her scrawled message as a “2,” the entire allotment had sold at twice the original price!

That’s when she called me. I thought I knew what had happened but told her that, if I were to explain things properly, she would have to listen to a story of mine. Actually, it isn’t my story; it’s about mother turkeys, and it belongs to the relatively new science of ethology—the study of animals in their natural settings. Turkey mothers are good mothers—loving, watchful, and protective. They spend much of their time tending, warming, cleaning, and huddling their young beneath them; but there is something odd about their method. Virtually all of this mothering is triggered by one thing: the “cheep-cheep” sound of young turkey chicks. Other identifying features of the chicks, such as their smell, touch, or appearance, seem to play minor roles in the mothering process. If a chick makes the cheep-cheep noise, its mother will care for it; if not, the mother will ignore or sometimes kill it.

The extreme reliance of maternal turkeys upon this one sound was dramatically illustrated by animal behaviorist M. W. Fox (1974) in his description of an experiment involving a mother turkey and a stuffed polecat. For a mother turkey, a polecat is a natural enemy whose approach is to be greeted with squawking, pecking, clawing rage. Indeed, the experiments found that even a stuffed model of a polecat, when drawn by a string to a mother turkey, received an immediate and furious attack. When, however, the same stuffed replica carried inside it a small recorder that played the cheep-cheep sound of baby turkeys, the mother not only accepted the oncoming polecat but gathered it underneath her. When the machine was turned off, the polecat model again drew a vicious attack.

Click, Whirr

How ridiculous a mother turkey seems under these circumstances: She will embrace a natural enemy just because it goes cheep-cheep and she will mistreat or murder one of her chicks just because it does not. She acts like an automaton

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whose maternal instincts are under the automatic control of that single sound. The ethologists tell us that this sort of thing is far from unique to the turkey. They have begun to identify regular, blindly mechanical patterns of action in a wide variety of species.

Called *fixed-action patterns*, they can involve intricate sequences of behavior, such as entire courtship or mating rituals. A fundamental characteristic of these patterns is that the behaviors comprising them occur in virtually the same fashion and in the same order every time. It is almost as if the patterns were recorded on tapes within the animals. When a situation calls for courtship, a courtship tape gets played; when a situation calls for mothering, a maternal behavior tape gets played. *Click* and the appropriate tape is activated; *whirr* and out rolls the standard sequence of behaviors.

The most interesting aspect of all this is the way the tapes are activated. When an animal acts to defend its territory for instance, it is the intrusion of another animal of the same species that cues the territorial-defense tape of rigid vigilance, threat, and, if need be, combat behaviors; however, there is a quirk in the system. It is not the rival as a whole that is the trigger; it is, rather, some specific feature, the *trigger feature*. Often the trigger feature will be just one tiny aspect of the totality that is the approaching intruder. Sometimes a shade of color is the trigger feature. The experiments of ethologists have shown, for instance, that a male robin, acting as if a rival robin had entered its territory, will vigorously attack nothing more than a clump of robin red breast feathers placed there. At the same time, it will virtually ignore a perfect stuffed replica of a male robin *without* red breast feathers (Lack, 1943). Similar results have been found in another species of bird, the bluethroat, where it appears that the trigger for territorial defense is a specific shade of blue breast feathers (Peiponen, 1960).

Before we enjoy too smugly the ease with which trigger features can trick lower animals into reacting in ways wholly inappropriate to the situation, we should realize two things. First, the automatic, fixed-action patterns of these animals work very well most of the time. For example, because only normal, healthy turkey chicks make the peculiar sound of baby turkeys, it makes sense for mother turkeys to respond maternally to that single cheep-cheep noise. By reacting to just that one stimulus, the average mother turkey will nearly always behave correctly. It takes a trickster like a scientist to make her tapelike response seem silly. The second important thing to understand is that we, too, have our preprogrammed tapes; and, although they usually work to our advantage, the trigger features that activate them can dupe us into playing the tapes at the wrong times.¹

This parallel form of human automaticity is aptly demonstrated in an experiment by social psychologist Ellen Langer and her co-workers (Langer, Blank, &

¹Although several important similarities exist between this kind of automaticity in humans and lower animals, there are some important differences as well. The automatic behavior patterns of humans tend to be learned rather than inborn, more flexible than the lock-step patterns of the lower animals, and responsive to a larger number of triggers.

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Chanowitz, 1978). A well-known principle of human behavior says that when we ask someone to do us a favor we will be more successful if we provide a reason. People simply like to have reasons for what they do (Bastardi & Shafir, 2000). Langer demonstrated this unsurprising fact by asking a small favor of people waiting in line to use a library copying machine: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I’m in a rush?” The effectiveness of this request plus-reason was nearly total: 94 percent of those asked let her skip ahead of them in line. Compare this success rate to the results when she made the request only: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?” Under those circumstances only 60 percent of those asked complied. At first glance, it appears that the crucial difference between the two requests was the additional information provided by the words *because I’m in a rush*. However, a third type of request tried by Langer showed that this was not the case. It seems that it was not the whole series of words, but the first one, *because*, that made the difference. Instead of including a real reason for compliance, Langer’s third type of request used the word *because* and then, adding nothing new, merely restated the obvious: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make some copies?” The result was that once again nearly all (93 percent) agreed, even though no real reason, no new information was added to justify their compliance. Just as the cheep-cheep sound of turkey chicks triggered an automatic mothering response from mother turkeys, even when it emanated from a stuffed polecat, so the word *because* triggered an automatic compliance response from Langer’s subjects, even when they were given no subsequent reason to comply. *Click, whirr.*²

Although some of Langer’s additional findings show that there are many situations in which human behavior does not work in a mechanical, tape-activated way, she and many other researchers are convinced that most of the time it does (Bargh & Williams, 2006; Langer, 1989). For instance, consider the strange behavior of those jewelry store customers who swooped down on an allotment of turquoise pieces only after the items had been mistakenly offered at double their original price. I can make no sense of their behavior unless it is viewed in *click, whirr* terms.

The customers, mostly well-to-do vacationers with little knowledge of turquoise, were using a standard principle—a stereotype—to guide their buying: expensive = good. Much research shows that people who are unsure of an item’s quality often use this stereotype (Cronley et al., 2005). Thus the vacationers, who wanted “good” jewelry, saw the turquoise pieces as decidedly more valuable and desirable when nothing about them was enhanced but the price. Price alone had

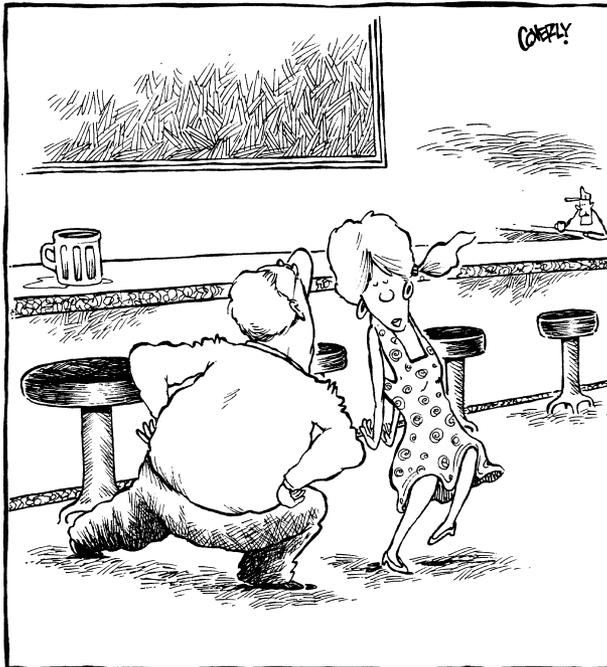
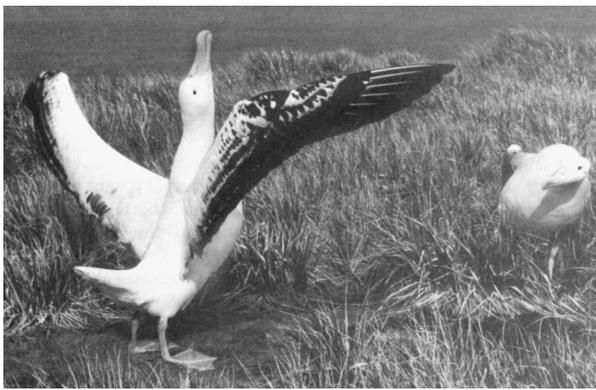
²Perhaps the common “because . . . just because” response of children asked to explain their behavior can be traced to their shrewd recognition of the unusual amount of power adults appear to assign to the word *because*.

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Cluck-Whirr

Human mating rituals aren't actually as rigid as animals'. Still, researchers have uncovered impressive regularities in courtship patterns across many human cultures (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). For instance, in personals ads around the world, women describe their physical attractiveness while men trumpet their material wealth (Buss & Kenrick, 1998).

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DOUG DISCOVERS THAT ELLEN, TOO, IS AN ORNITHOLOGIST, AND THE MATING RITUAL BEGINS...

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READER'S REPORT 1

From a Management Doctoral Student

A man who owns an antique jewelry store in my town tells a story of how he learned the expensive = good lesson of social influence. A friend of his wanted a special birthday present for his fiancée. So, the jeweler picked out a necklace that would have sold in his store for \$500 but that he was willing to let his friend have for \$250. As soon as he saw it, the friend was enthusiastic about the piece. But when the jeweler quoted the \$250 price, the man's face fell, and he began backing away from the deal because he wanted something "really nice" for his intended bride.

When a day later it dawned on the jeweler what had happened, he called his friend and asked him to come back to the store because he had another necklace to show him. This time, he introduced the new piece at its regular \$500 price. His friend liked it enough to buy it on the spot. But before any money was exchanged, the jeweler told him that, as a wedding gift, he would drop the price to \$250. The man was thrilled. Now, rather than finding the \$250 sales price offensive, he was overjoyed—and grateful—to have it.

Author's note: Notice that, as in the case of the turquoise jewelry buyers, it was someone who wanted to be assured of good merchandise who disdained the low-priced item. I'm confident that besides the "expensive = good" rule, there's a flip side, "inexpensive = bad" rule that applies to our thinking as well. After all, in English, the word cheap doesn't just mean inexpensive; it has come to mean inferior, too. A Japanese proverb makes this point eloquently: "There's nothing more expensive than that which comes for free."

become a trigger feature for quality, and a dramatic increase in price alone had led to a dramatic increase in sales among the quality-hungry buyers.³

Betting the Shortcut Odds

It is easy to fault the tourists for their foolish purchase decisions, but a close look offers a kinder view. These were people who had been brought up on the rule, "You get what you pay for" and who had seen that rule borne out over and over in their lives. Before long, they had translated the rule to mean expensive = good. The expensive = good stereotype had worked quite well for them in the past, since normally the price of an item increases along with its worth; a higher price typically reflects higher quality. So when they found themselves in the position of wanting

³In marketing lore, the classic case of this phenomenon is that of Chivas Regal Scotch Whiskey, which had been a struggling brand until its managers decided to raise its price to a level far above its competitors. Sales skyrocketed, even though nothing was changed in the product itself (Aaker, 1991). A recent brain-scan study helps explain why. When tasting the same wine, participants not only rated themselves as experiencing more pleasure if they thought it cost \$45 versus \$5, their brain centers associated with pleasure became more activated by the experience as well (Plassmann et al., 2008).

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good turquoise jewelry but not having much knowledge of turquoise, they understandably relied on the old standby feature of cost to determine the jewelry's merits (Rao & Monroe, 1989).

Although they probably did not realize it, by reacting solely to the price of the turquoise, they were playing a shortcut version of betting the odds. Instead of stacking all the odds in their favor by trying painstakingly to master each feature that indicates the worth of turquoise jewelry, they were counting on just one—the one they knew to be usually associated with the quality of any item. They were betting that price alone would tell them all they needed to know. This time, because someone mistook a “ $\frac{1}{2}$ ” for a “2,” they bet wrong. In the long run, over all the past and future situations of their lives, betting those shortcut odds may represent the most rational approach possible.

In fact, automatic, stereotyped behavior is prevalent in much human action, because in many cases, it is the most efficient form of behaving (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996), and in other cases it is simply necessary (Bodenhausen, Macrae, & Sherman, 1999; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). You and I exist in an extraordinarily complicated environment, easily the most rapidly moving and complex that has ever existed on this planet. To deal with it, we *need* shortcuts. We can't be expected to recognize and analyze all the aspects in each person, event, and situation we encounter in even one day. We haven't the time, energy, or capacity for it. Instead, we must very often use our stereotypes, our rules of thumb, to classify things according to a few key features and then to respond without thinking when one or another of these trigger features is present.

Sometimes the behavior that unrolls will not be appropriate for the situation, because not even the best stereotypes and trigger features work every time. We will accept their imperfections since there is really no other choice. Without these features we would stand frozen—cataloging, appraising, and calibrating—as the time for action sped by and away. From all indications, we will be relying on these stereotypes to an even greater extent in the future. As the stimuli saturating our lives continue to grow more intricate and variable, we will have to depend increasingly on our shortcuts to handle them all.⁴

Psychologists have recently uncovered a number of mental shortcuts that we employ in making our everyday judgments (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Todd & Gigerenzer, 2007). Termed *judgmental heuristics*, these shortcuts operate in much the same fashion as the expensive = good rule, allowing for simplified thinking that works well most of the time but leaves us open to occasional, costly mistakes. Especially relevant to this book are those heuristics that tell us when to believe or do what we are told. Consider, for example, the shortcut rule that goes, “If an expert said so, it must be true.” There is an unsettling tendency in our society to accept unthinkingly the statements and

⁴Take, by way of illustration, the case (Zimatore, 1983) of the automatic, mindless consumer response to a standard trigger for buying in our society—the discount coupon. A tire company found that mailed-out coupons which, because of a printing error, offered no savings to recipients produced just as much customer response as did the error-free coupons that offered substantial savings.

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directions of individuals who appear to be authorities on the topic. That is, rather than thinking about an expert's arguments and being convinced (or not), we frequently ignore the arguments and allow ourselves to be convinced just by the expert's status as "expert." This tendency to respond mechanically to one piece of information in a situation is what we have been calling automatic or *click, whirr* responding; the tendency to react on the basis of a thorough analysis of all of the information can be referred to as *controlled responding* (Chaiken & Trope, 1999).

Quite a lot of laboratory research has shown that people are more likely to deal with information in a controlled fashion when they have both the desire and the ability to analyze it carefully; otherwise, they are likely to use the easier *click, whirr* approach (Epley & Gilovich, 2006; Petty & Wegener, 1999). For instance, in one study (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981), students at the University of Missouri listened to a recorded speech that supported the idea of requiring all seniors to pass comprehensive examinations before they would be allowed to graduate. The issue affected some of them personally, because they were told that the exams could go into effect in the next year—before they had the chance to graduate. Of course, this news made them want to analyze the arguments carefully. However, for other subjects in the study, the issue had little personal importance—because they were told



"Perhaps Monsieur would care for something more expensive?"

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that the exams would not begin until long after they had graduated; consequently, they had no strong need to carefully consider the argument's validity. The study's results were quite straightforward: Those subjects with no personal stake in the topic were primarily persuaded by the speaker's expertise in the field of education; they used the "If an expert said so, it must be true" rule, paying little attention to the strength of the speaker's arguments. Those subjects for whom the issue mattered personally, on the other hand, ignored the speaker's expertise and were persuaded primarily by the quality of the speaker's arguments.

So, it appears that when it comes to the dangerous business of *click, whirr* responding, we give ourselves a safety net: We resist the seductive luxury of registering and reacting to just a single (trigger) feature of the available information when an issue is important to us. No doubt this is often the case (Leippe & Elkin, 1987). Yet, I am not fully comforted. Recall that earlier we learned that people are likely to respond in a controlled, thoughtful fashion only when they have both the desire *and* the ability to do so. I have recently become impressed by evidence suggesting that the form and pace of modern life is not allowing us to make fully thoughtful decisions, even on many personally relevant topics (Cohen, 1978; Milgram, 1970). That is, sometimes the issues may be so complicated, the time so tight, the distractions so intrusive, the emotional arousal so strong, or the mental fatigue so deep that we are in no cognitive condition to operate mindfully. Important topic or not, we have to take the shortcut.⁵

Perhaps nowhere is this last point driven home more dramatically than in the life-and-death consequences of a phenomenon that airline industry officials have labeled *Captainitis* (Foushee, 1984). Accident investigators from the Federal Aviation Administration have noted that, frequently, an obvious error made by a flight captain was not corrected by the other crew members and resulted in a crash. It seems that, despite the clear and strong personal importance of the issues, the crew members were using the shortcut "If an expert says so, it must be true" rule in failing to attend or respond to the captain's disastrous mistake (Harper, Kidera, & Cullen, 1971).

An account by Thomas Watson, Jr., the former chairman of IBM, offers graphic evidence of the phenomenon. During World War II, he was assigned to investigate plane crashes in which high-ranking officers were killed or injured. One case involved a famous air force general named Uzal Ent whose copilot got sick before a flight. Ent was assigned a replacement who felt honored to be flying alongside the legendary general. During takeoff, Ent began singing to himself, nodding in time to a song in his head. The new copilot interpreted the gesture as a signal to him to

⁵It's instructive that even though we often don't take a complex approach to personally important topics, we wish our advisors—our physicians, accountants, lawyers, and brokers—to do precisely that for us (Kahn & Baron, 1995). When feeling overwhelmed by a complicated and consequential choice, we still want a fully considered, point-by-point analysis of it—an analysis we may not be able to achieve except, ironically enough, through a shortcut: reliance on an expert.

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lift the wheels. Even though they were going much too slowly to fly, he raised the landing gear, causing the plane to drop immediately onto its belly. In the wreck, a propeller blade sliced into Ent's back, severing his spine and rendering him a paraplegic. Watson (1990) described the copilot's explanation for his action:

When I took the copilot's testimony, I asked him, "If you knew the plane wasn't going to fly, why did you put the gear up?"

He said, "I thought the general wanted me to." He was stupid. (p. 117)

Stupid? In that singular set of circumstances, yes. Understandable? In the shortcut-demanding maze of modern life, also yes.

The Profiteers

It is odd that despite their current widespread use and looming future importance, most of us know very little about our automatic behavior patterns. Perhaps that is so precisely because of the mechanistic, unthinking manner in which they occur. Whatever the reason, it is vital that we clearly recognize one of their properties. They make us terribly vulnerable to anyone who *does* know how they work.

To understand fully the nature of our vulnerability, let us take another glance at the work of the ethologists. It turns out that these animal behaviorists with their recorded cheep-cheeps and their clumps of colored breast feathers are not the only ones who have discovered how to activate the behavior tapes of various species. One group of organisms, often termed *mimics*, copy the trigger features of other animals in an attempt to trick these animals into mistakenly playing the right behavior tapes at the wrong times. The mimics then exploit this altogether inappropriate action for their own benefit.

Take, for example, the deadly trick played by the killer females of one genus of firefly (*Photuris*) on the males of another firefly genus (*Photinus*). Understandably, the *Photinus* males scrupulously avoid contact with the bloodthirsty *Photuris* females. However, through centuries of natural selection, the *Photuris* female hunters have located a weakness in their prey—a special blinking courtship code by which members of the victims' species tell one another they are ready to mate. By mimicking the flashing mating signals of her prey, the murderess is able to feast on the bodies of males whose triggered courtship tapes cause them to fly mechanically into death's, not love's, embrace (Lloyd, 1965).⁶

In the struggle for survival, nearly every form of life has its mimics—right down to some of the most primitive pathogens. By adopting certain critical features of useful hormones or nutrients, these clever bacteria and viruses can gain

⁶Apparently, the tendency of males to be bamboozled by powerful mating signals extends to humans. Two University of Vienna biologists, Astrid Juetter and Karl Grammer secretly exposed young men to airborne chemicals (called copulins) that mimic human vaginal scents. The men then rated the attractiveness of women's faces. Exposure to the copulins increased the judged attractiveness of all the women and masked the genuine physical attractiveness differences among them ("For Women," 1999).

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entry into a healthy host cell. The result is that the healthy cell eagerly and naively sweeps into itself the causes of such diseases as rabies, mononucleosis, and the common cold (Goodenough, 1991).⁷ It should come as no surprise, then, that there is a strong but sad parallel in the human jungle. We too have profiteers who mimic trigger features for our own brand of automatic responding. Unlike the mostly instinctive response sequences of nonhumans, however, our automatic tapes usually develop from psychological principles or stereotypes we have learned to accept. Although they vary in their force, some of these principles possess a tremendous ability to direct human action. We have been subjected to them from such an early point in our lives, and they have moved us about so pervasively since then, that you and I rarely perceive their power. In the eyes of others, though, each such principle is a detectable and ready weapon, a weapon of automatic influence.

There are some people who know very well where the weapons of automatic influence lie and who employ them regularly and expertly to get what they want. They go from social encounter to social encounter, requesting others to comply with their wishes; their frequency of success is dazzling. The secret of their effectiveness lies in the way that they structure their requests, the way that they arm themselves with one or another of the weapons of influence that exist in the social environment. To do this may take no more than one correctly chosen word that engages a strong psychological principle and sets rolling one of our automatic behavior tapes. Trust the human profiteers to learn quickly exactly how to benefit from our tendency to respond mechanically according to these principles.

Remember my friend the jewelry store owner? Although she benefited by accident the first time, it did not take her long to begin exploiting the expensive = good stereotype regularly and intentionally. Now during the tourist season, she first tries to speed the sale of an item that has been difficult to move by increasing its price substantially. She claims that this is marvelously cost-effective. When it works on the unsuspecting vacationers—as it frequently does—it results in an enormous profit margin.

And even when it is not initially successful, she can then mark the article “Reduced” and sell it to bargain-hunters at its original price while still taking advantage of their expensive = good reaction to the inflated figure.

By no means is my friend original in this last use of the expensive = good rule to snare those seeking a bargain. Culturist and author Leo Rosten gives the example of the Drubeck brothers, Sid and Harry, who owned a men’s tailor shop in Rosten’s neighborhood in the 1930s. Whenever Sid had a new customer trying on suits in front of the shop’s three-sided mirror, he would admit to a hearing problem and

⁷As exploitative as these creatures seem, they are topped in this respect by an insect known as the rove beetle. By using a variety of triggers involving smell and touch, the rove beetles get two species of ants to protect, groom, and feed them as larvae and to harbor them for the winter as adults. Responding mechanically to the beetles’ trick trigger features, the ants treat the beetles as though they were fellow ants. Inside the ant nests, the beetles respond to their hosts’ hospitality by eating ant eggs and young; yet they are never harmed (Holldobler, 1971).

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repeatedly request that the man speak more loudly to him. Once the customer had found a suit he liked and asked for the price, Sid would call to his brother, the head tailor, at the back of the room, “Harry, how much for this suit?” Looking up from his work—and greatly exaggerating the suit’s true price—Harry would call back, “For that beautiful, all wool suit, forty-two dollars.” Pretending not to have heard and cupping his hand to his ear, Sid would ask again. Once more Harry would reply, “Forty-two dollars.” At this point, Sid would turn to the customer and report, “He says twenty-two dollars.” Many a man would hurry to buy the suit and scramble out of the shop with his expensive = good bargain before poor Sid discovered the “mistake.”

Jujitsu

A woman employing the Japanese martial art form called jujitsu would use her own strength only minimally against an opponent. Instead, she would exploit the power inherent in such naturally present principles as gravity, leverage, momentum, and inertia. If she knows how and where to engage the action of these principles she can easily defeat a physically stronger rival. And so it is for the exploiters of the weapons of automatic influence that exist naturally around us. The profiteers can commission the power of these weapons for use against their targets while exerting little personal force. This last feature of the process gives the profiteers an enormous additional benefit—the ability to manipulate without the appearance of manipulation. Even the victims themselves tend to see their compliance as a result of the action of natural forces rather than the designs of the person who profits from that compliance.

An example is in order. There is a principle in human perception, the contrast principle, that affects the way we see the difference between two things that are presented one after another. Simply put, if the second item is fairly different from the first, we will tend to see it as *more* different than it actually is. So if we lift a light object first and then lift a heavy object, we will estimate the second object to be heavier than if we had lifted it without first lifting the light one. The contrast principle is well established in the field of psychophysics and applies to all sorts of perceptions besides weight. If we are talking to a very attractive individual at a party and are then joined by an unattractive individual, the second will strike us as less attractive than he or she actually is.⁸

Another demonstration of perceptual contrast is sometimes employed in psychophysics laboratories to introduce students to the principle. Each student takes a turn sitting in front of three pails of water—one cold, one at room temperature,

⁸Some researchers warn that the unrealistically attractive people portrayed in the popular media (actors, actresses, models) may cause us to be less satisfied with the looks of the genuinely available romantic possibilities around us. For instance, one study demonstrated that exposure to the exaggerated sexual attractiveness of nude pinup bodies (in such magazines as *Playboy* and *Playgirl*) causes people to become less pleased with the sexual desirability of their current spouse or live-in mate (Kenrick, Gutierrez, & Goldberg, 1989).

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and one hot. After placing one hand in the cold water and one in the hot water, the student is told to place both hands in the room-temperature water simultaneously. The look of amused bewilderment that immediately registers tells the story: Even though both hands are in the same bucket, the hand that has been in the cold water feels as if it is now in hot water, while the one that was in the hot water feels as if it is now in cold water. The point is that the same thing—in this instance, room-temperature water—can be made to seem very different depending on the nature of the event that precedes it.

Be assured that the nice little weapon of influence provided by the contrast principle does not go unexploited. The great advantage of this principle is not only that it works but also that it is virtually undetectable (Tormala & Petty, 2007). Those who employ it can cash in on its influence without any appearance of having structured the situation in their favor. Retail clothiers are a good example. Suppose a man enters a fashionable men's store and says that he wants to buy a three-piece suit and a sweater. If you were the salesperson, which would you show him first to make him likely to spend the most money? Clothing stores instruct their sales personnel to sell the costly item first. Common sense might suggest the reverse: If a man has just spent a lot of money to purchase a suit, he may be reluctant to spend much more on the purchase of a sweater; but the clothiers know better. They behave in accordance with what the contrast principle would suggest: Sell the suit first, because when it comes time to look at sweaters, even expensive ones, their prices will not *seem* as high in comparison. The same principle applies to a man who wishes to buy the accessories (shirt, shoes, belt) to go along with his new suit. Contrary to the commonsense view, the evidence supports the contrast principle prediction.

It is much more profitable for salespeople to present the expensive item first; to fail to do so will lose the influence of the contrast principle and will also cause the principle to work actively against them. Presenting an inexpensive product first and following it with an expensive one will make the expensive item seem even more costly as a result—hardly a desirable consequence for most sales organiza-



Perceptual Contrast

A one-percent solution.

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tions. So, just as it is possible to make the same bucket of water appear to be hotter or colder depending on the temperature of previously presented water, it is possible to make the price of the same item seem higher or lower depending on the price of a previously presented item.

Clever use of perceptual contrast is by no means confined to clothiers. (See Figure 1.) I came across a technique that engaged the contrast principle while I

Dear Mother and Dad,

Since I left for college I have been remiss in writing and I am sorry for my thoughtlessness in not having written before. I will bring you up to date now, but before you read on, please sit down. You are not to read any further unless you are sitting down, okay?

Well, then, I am getting along pretty well now. The skull fracture and the concussion I got when I jumped out the window of my dormitory when it caught on fire shortly after my arrival here is pretty well healed now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital and now I can see almost normally and only get those sick headaches once a day. Fortunately, the fire in the dormitory, and my jump, was witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm, and he was the one who called the Fire Department and the ambulance. He also visited me in the hospital and since I had nowhere to live because of the burnt-out dormitory, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It's really a basement room, but it it's kind of cute. He is a very fine boy, and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We haven't set the exact date yet, but it will be before my pregnancy begins to show.

Yes, Mother and Dad, I am pregnant. I know how much you are looking forward to being grandparents and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion and tender care you gave me when I was a child. The reason for the delay in our marriage is that my boyfriend has a minor infection which prevents us from passing our premarital blood tests and I carelessly caught it from him. I know that you will welcome him into our family with open arms. He is kind and, although not well educated, he is ambitious.

Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you that there was no dormitory fire, I did not have a concussion or skull fracture, I was not in the hospital, I am not pregnant, I am not engaged, I am not infected, and there is no boyfriend. However, I am getting a "D" in American History and an "F" in Chemistry, and I want you to see those marks in their proper perspective.

Your loving daughter,

Sharon

Figure 1 *Perceptual Contrast and the College Coed*

Sharon may be failing chemistry, but she'd get an "A" in psychology.

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was investigating, undercover, the compliance tactics of real estate companies. To “learn the ropes,” I accompanied a salesman on a weekend of showing houses to prospective home buyers. The salesman—we can call him Phil—was to give me tips to help me through my break-in period. One thing I quickly noticed was that whenever Phil began showing a new set of customers potential buys, he would start with a couple of undesirable houses. I asked him about it, and he laughed. They were what he called “setup” properties. The company maintained a run-down house or two on its lists at inflated prices. These houses were not intended to be sold to customers but only to be shown to them, so that the genuine properties in the company’s inventory would benefit from the comparison. Not all the sales staff made use of the setup houses, but Phil did. He said he liked to watch his prospects’ “eyes light up” when he showed the places he really wanted to sell them after they had seen the rundown houses. “The house I got them spotted for looks really great after they’ve first looked at a couple of dumps.”

Automobile dealers use the contrast principle by waiting until the price of a car has been negotiated before suggesting one option after another. In the wake of a many-thousand-dollar deal, the hundred or so dollars extra for a nicety like an upgraded CD player seems almost trivial in comparison. The same will be true of the added expense of accessories like tinted windows, better tires, or special trim that the dealer might suggest in sequence. The trick is to bring up the options independently of one another so that each small price will seem petty when compared

READER’S REPORT 2

From a University of Chicago Business School Student

While waiting to board a flight at O’Hare, I heard a desk agent announce that the flight was overbooked and that, if passengers were willing to take a later plane, they would be compensated with a voucher worth \$10,000! Of course, this exaggerated amount was a joke. It was supposed to make people laugh. It did. But I noticed that when he then revealed the *actual* offer (a \$200 voucher), there were no takers. In fact, he had to raise the offer twice, to \$300 and then \$500, before he got any volunteers.

I was reading your book at the time, and I realized that, although he got his laugh, according to the contrast principle, he screwed up. He’d arranged things so that compared to \$10,000, a couple hundred bucks seemed like a pittance. That was an expensive laugh. It cost his airline an extra \$300 per volunteer.

Author’s note: Any ideas on how the desk agent could have used the contrast principle to his advantage rather than his detriment? Perhaps he could have started with a \$5 joke offer and then revealed the true (and now much more attractive-sounding) \$200 amount. Under those circumstances, I’m pretty sure he would have secured his laugh and his volunteers.

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to the already determined much larger price. As veteran car buyers can attest, many a budget-sized final price figure has ballooned out of proportion from the addition of all those seemingly little options. While the customers stand, signed contract in hand, wondering what happened and finding no one to blame but themselves, the car dealer stands smiling the knowing smile of the jujitsu master.

Summary

- Ethologists, researchers who study animal behavior in the natural environment, have noticed that among many animal species behavior often occurs in rigid and mechanical patterns. Called fixed-action patterns, these mechanical behavior sequences are noteworthy in their similarity to certain automatic (*click, whirr*) responding by humans. For both humans and subhumans, the automatic behavior patterns tend to be triggered by a single feature of the relevant information in the situation. This single feature, or trigger feature, can often prove very valuable by allowing an individual to decide on a correct course of action without having to analyze carefully and completely each of the other pieces of information in the situation.
- The advantage of such shortcut responding lies in its efficiency and economy; by reacting automatically to a usually informative trigger feature, an individual preserves crucial time, energy, and mental capacity. The disadvantage of such responding lies in its vulnerability to silly and costly mistakes; by reacting to only a piece of the available information (even a normally predictive piece), an individual increases the chances of error, especially when responding in an automatic, mindless fashion. The chances of error increase even further when other individuals seek to profit by arranging (through manipulation of trigger features) to stimulate a desired behavior at inappropriate times.
- Much of the compliance process (wherein one person is spurred to comply with another person's request) can be understood in terms of a human tendency for automatic, shortcut responding. Most individuals in our culture have developed a set of trigger features for compliance, that is, a set of specific pieces of information that normally tell us when compliance with a request is likely to be correct and beneficial. Each of these trigger features for compliance can be used like a weapon (of influence) to stimulate people to agree to requests.

Study Questions

Content Mastery

1. What are fixed-action patterns among animals? How are they similar to some types of human functioning? How are they different?
2. What makes automatic responding in humans so attractive? So dangerous?

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Critical Thinking

1. Suppose you were an attorney representing a woman who broke her leg in a department store and was suing the store for \$100,000 in damages. Knowing only what you do about perceptual contrast, what could you do during the trial to make the jury see \$100,000 as a reasonable, even small, award?
2. The charity request card in Figure 2 seems rather ordinary except for the odd sequencing of the donation request amounts. Explain why, according to the contrast principle, placing the smallest donation figure between two larger figures is an effective tactic to prompt more and larger donations.
3. What points do the following quotes make about the dangers of *click-whirr* responding?
“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.” Albert Einstein
“The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are sometimes right.” Winston Churchill
4. How does the photograph that opens this chapter reflect the topic of the chapter?



Society for the Prevention of CRABGRASS

Unightly crabgrass can be conquered—but only with the help of concerned citizens like you. Your generous contribution makes research possible to reach our goal of a crabgrass-free world. Please join us and make your donation payable to the Society for the Prevention of Crabgrass. A return envelope has been provided for your convenience!

Yes, I want to further the Society's efforts for a crabgrass-free world.
Enclosed is my contribution in the amount of:

\$25 \$10 \$5 \$15 \$_____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Society for the Prevention of Crabgrass
P.O. Box 5-CG
Lawn City, USA 12345



Figure 2 *Charity Request Appeal*

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Reciprocation

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Reciprocation

The Old Give and Take . . .and Take

Pay every debt, as if God wrote the bill.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson



RECIPROCATION

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR TRIED A LITTLE experiment. He sent Christmas cards to a sample of perfect strangers. Although he expected some reaction, the response he received was amazing—holiday cards addressed to him came pouring back from people who had never met nor heard of him. The great majority of those who returned cards never inquired into the identity of the unknown professor. They received his holiday greeting card, *click*, and *whirr*, they automatically sent cards in return (Kunz & Woolcott, 1976).

While small in scope, this study shows the action of one of the most potent of the weapons of influence around us—the rule of reciprocation. The rule says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us. If a woman does us a favor, we should do her one in return; if a man sends us a birthday present, we should remember his birthday with a gift of our own; if a couple invites us to a party, we should be sure to invite them to one of ours. By virtue of the reciprocity rule, then, we are *obligated* to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like. So typical is it for indebtedness to accompany the receipt of such things that a phrase like “much obliged” has become a synonym for “thank you,” not only in the English language but in others as well (such as with the Portuguese term “obrigado”). The future reach of the obligation is nicely connoted in a Japanese word for thank you, “sumimasen,” which means “this will not end” in its literal form.

The impressive aspect of reciprocation with its accompanying sense of obligation is its pervasiveness in human culture. It is so widespread that, after intensive study, Alvin Gouldner (1960), along with other sociologists, report that all human societies subscribe to the rule.¹ Within each society it seems pervasive also; it permeates exchanges of every kind. Indeed, it may well be that a developed system of indebtedness flowing from the rule of reciprocation is a unique property of human culture. The noted archaeologist Richard Leakey ascribes the essence of what makes us human to the reciprocity system. He claims that we are human because our ancestors learned to share food and skills “in an honored network of obligation” (Leakey & Lewin, 1978). Cultural anthropologists view this “web of indebtedness” as a unique adaptive mechanism of human beings, allowing for the division of labor, the exchange of diverse forms of goods and different services, and

¹Certain societies have formalized the rule into ritual. Consider for example the Vartan Bhanji, an institutionalized custom of gift exchange common to parts of Pakistan and India. In commenting upon the Vartan Bhanji, Gouldner (1960) remarks:

It is . . . notable that the system painstakingly prevents the total elimination of outstanding obligations. Thus, on the occasion of a marriage, departing guests are given gifts of sweets. In weighing them out, the hostess may say, “These five are yours,” meaning “These are a repayment for what you formerly gave me,” and then she adds an extra measure, saying, “These are mine.” On the next occasion, she will receive these back along with an additional measure which she later returns, and so on.
(p. 175)