

Or you could say:

“In 2009, 79.4 percent of US adults 18 or over did *not* smoke cigarettes.”

The latter statement would be more influential in getting people to stop smoking or not start, because it implies that most people don't smoke.

Takeaways

- * People are very influenced by others' opinions and behaviors, especially when they are uncertain. Let your audience know what others are doing or deciding if you want them to decide to take the same action.
- * The wording you use in your presentation is important. “70% of people don't litter” is not the same as saying “30% of people litter.” Whatever you tell them that most other people are doing is what will stick and influence.

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PEOPLE THINK OTHERS ARE MORE EASILY INFLUENCED THAN THEY THEMSELVES ARE

When I discuss the research on social validation (see #93) everyone in the room nods and talks about how this is true, that other people are very influenced by what others are doing, but most people I speak to think that they themselves are not very affected. I talk about how much we are affected by pictures, images, and words, and that we don't realize we're being influenced. And the reaction is always similar: “Yes, other people are affected by these things, but I am not.”

THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT

In fact, this belief that “others are affected but not me” is so common that there is research on it, and it has its own name: the *third-person effect*. The research shows that most people think others are influenced by persuasive messages but that they themselves are not. The research also shows that this perception is false. The third-person effect seems to be especially true if you think you aren't interested in the topic. For example, if you are not currently in the market to buy a new TV, then you will tend to think that advertising about new TVs won't affect you, but the research says that it will.

WHY DO PEOPLE DECEIVE THEMSELVES THIS WAY?

Why the self-deception? It's partly because all this influence is happening unconsciously. People are literally unaware that they're being influenced. And it's also partly because people don't like to think of themselves as easily swayed or as gullible. To be gullible is to not be in control, and the old brain—the part that is concerned with survival—always wants to be in control.

DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR PLAN TO PERSUADE

Have you ever had people come up to you before you start a presentation and say, “There might be people here who aren't familiar with your topic, but I think many people are like me—we're already familiar with the material” or “We've already made up our minds.” Of course it's possible that these statements are true, but it is also likely that the individual, and the group, is not as knowledgeable or as resistant to influence as they say they are. If you've “done your homework” about your audience, don't abandon your

plan or your presentation if someone says that they are not easily influenced. They may be more influenced than they think.

Takeaways

- * Everyone is affected by unconscious processes.
- * Even if your audience says that they are not influenced by unconscious factors—that they are making their decision based on logic and analysis only—don't believe them.
- * Plan your presentation to make an appeal to the unconscious factors that will affect people in this group.
- * Take what people say regarding how much you can influence them with a grain of salt.

95

PEOPLE VALUE A PRODUCT MORE HIGHLY WHEN IT'S PHYSICALLY IN FRONT OF THEM

An author gives a presentation on the topic of his book. It's well received and people are interested in buying his book. Will people be more likely to buy it if he has it there with him? Is it enough for him to have a picture of the book? Does it matter if he's selling a book versus some other product? Does the way the item is displayed affect the dollar value that people put on it? Ben Bushong (2010) and a team of researchers decided to test this out.

In the first set of experiments the researchers used snack food (potato chips, candy bars, and so on). Participants were given money to spend. There were lots of choices, and the participants could pick what they wanted to buy. (They screened out people on a diet and people with eating disorders.) Participants "bid" on the products so the researchers could find out what the participants were willing to pay for each product.

Some participants only read the name and a brief description of the item—for example, "Lay's Potato Chips in a 1.5 oz bag." Some saw a picture of the item. And some had the real item right in front of them. **Figure 95.1** shows the results.

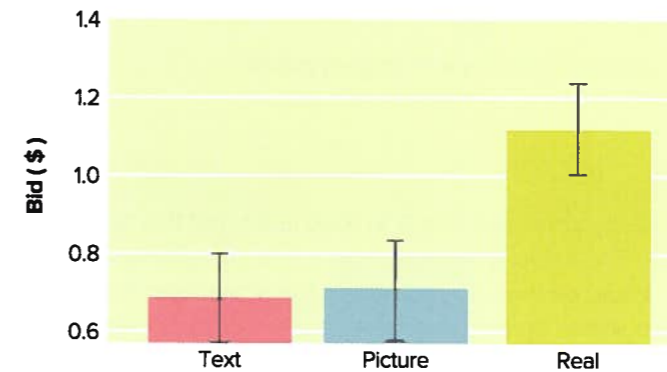


FIGURE 95.1 People valued the food more when it was in front of them.

THE REAL DEAL COUNTS

Having a picture didn't increase the amount of money people were willing to bid for the product, but having the product right in front of them definitely did, by up to 60 percent. Interestingly, the form of presentation didn't change how much people said they *liked* the item, just the dollar value they were willing to bid. In fact, for some items that they had said before the experiment they didn't like, they still valued those more highly if they were in front of them.

TOYS, TRINKETS, AND PLEXIGLAS

Next the researchers tried the experiment with toys and trinkets instead of food. **Figure 95.2** shows the results with toys and trinkets. The chart looks the same as with the snack foods.

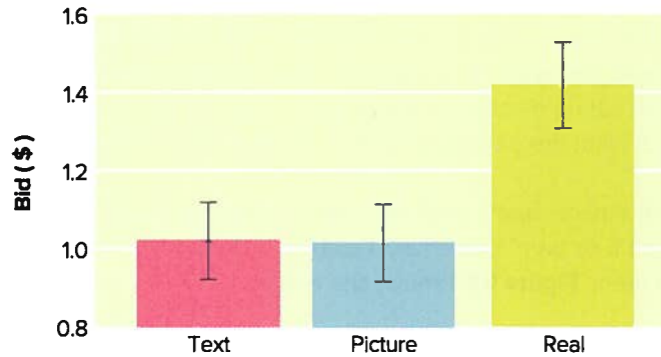


FIGURE 95.2 People valued the toys and trinkets more when they were physically present.

WHAT ABOUT SAMPLES?

Deciding to try another tack, the researchers went back to food items, but this time they let people see and taste a sample. The actual item wasn't there, but the sample was. Surely, they thought, the sample would be the same as having the actual item in front of them. Wrong again! **Figure 95.3** shows that the samples were still not as powerful as having the full product available.

The researchers note that in this taste condition the participants didn't even look at the samples in the paper cup, since they knew they were the same as the food in the package.

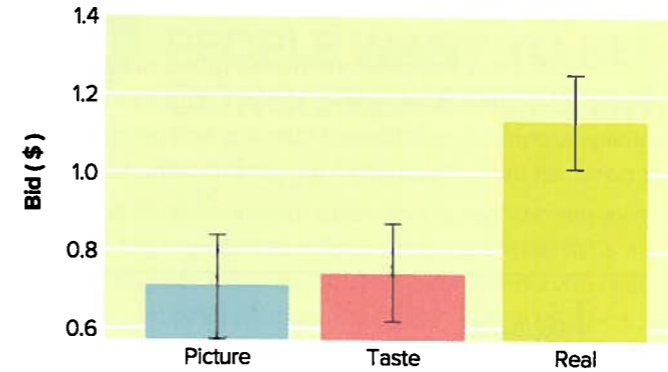


FIGURE 95.3 Samples were less effective than the actual product.

IS IT OLAFACTORY?

The researchers wondered if the food produced some unconscious olfactory (smell) cues that triggered the brain, so they did another experiment, putting the food in view but behind Plexiglas. If the food was in view but behind Plexiglas, it was deemed to be worth a little more money, but not the same as if it were within reach. "Ah!" the researchers thought, "There are olfactory cues!" but then they found the same result with the nonfood items, so smell is not the trigger. **Figure 95.4** shows the results for the Plexiglas trials.

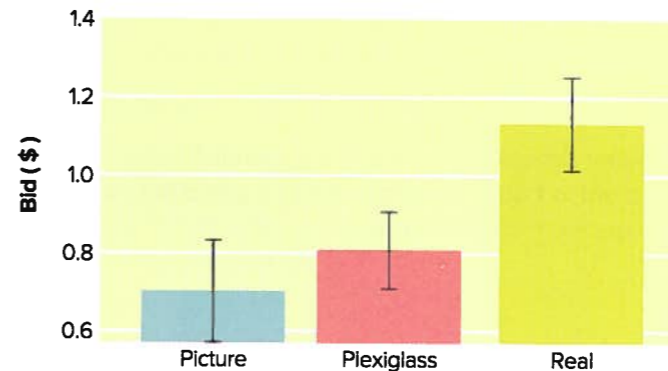


FIGURE 95.4 Plexiglas improved the value, but still not as much as having the product in close physical proximity.

A PAVLOVIAN RESPONSE?

Bushong and his team hypothesize that there is a Pavlovian response going on: when the product is actually available, it acts as a conditioned stimulus and elicits a response. Images and even text could potentially become a conditioned stimulus and produce the same response, but they have not been set up in the brain to trigger the same response as the actual item.

Takeaways

- * If your presentation has to do with a product, have the product physically with you and show it during your presentation.
- * If possible and appropriate, let people touch the product.

96

PEOPLE WANT TO KEEP A CONSISTENT PERSONA

Someone knocks on your door. You recognize him as a kid from your neighborhood. He is selling popcorn as a fund-raiser for a club he is a member of at school. The club is trying to go to the state convention. How do you react? It depends on the story, or persona, you have of yourself when it comes to topics such as school, fund-raising, and your relationship to your neighborhood. Here's one story you might relate to:

"I'm a very busy person. When I'm at home I want to relax, not get bombarded with people at the door selling things. I don't like it when people bother me at home with these fund-raising schemes. The schools should pay for these trips and not make us buy this overpriced popcorn. This poor kid isn't to blame, but I'm not going to buy the popcorn because it just perpetuates this behavior. Someone has got to act right on this. I'm the kind of person who does what is right on principle. I'm going to say no nicely but firmly."

Or maybe you can relate to this story:

"Oh, isn't that great that the kids are going to the state convention. I remember when I went on a similar trip when I was in high school. It was really fun. Maybe not all that educational, but definitely fun! I'm the kind of person who encourages students to have lots of experiences outside of our own neighborhood. I am the kind of person who supports the school. I'll buy some popcorn and help this kid out."

Or maybe you can relate to this story:

"It kind of annoys me that there are always these kids selling things. But this is part of being a good neighbor. I'm part of the community. I am a good citizen of our neighborhood. I'll buy the popcorn because that's what a good community member would do."

PEOPLE HAVE PERSONAS

People have an idea of who they are and what's important to them. Essentially they have a "story" operating about themselves at all times. These self-stories, or personas, are powerful influencers on decisions and actions.

People actually have more than one persona. There are different personas for different aspects of life in relation to others. For example, there is a persona you might have as a husband or wife, another persona as a parent, another persona at work, and yet another persona that defines your relationship with the neighborhood you live in. People make

decisions based on staying true to their personas. Most of this decision-making based on personas happens unconsciously. Some aspects of personas are conscious or might even be pulled into consciousness, but most of the time the personas are under the surface.

PEOPLE WANT PERSONAS TO STAY CONSISTENT

These personas are important in decision-making because people strive to be consistent in their decision-making. There is a drive to make the personas “stick.” People will make decisions in order to have their personas stay consistent. This means that there is a higher likelihood that someone will take a particular action if a persona is “activated.”

Once we make one decision consistent with one of the personas, we will try to stay consistent with that persona. We will be more likely to make a decision or take an action if it is consistent with that story or persona.

TELL PERSONA STORIES

You can activate a persona and connect the persona to a specific action. This will be influential in getting people to take action. For example, if you are giving a presentation about the charity you run, and the call to action in the presentation is to have people donate, don't just ask people to donate money to your charity. Tell a story about a person and show how that person's values convinced him or her to donate.

BE SPECIFIC

If you want to activate personas, you need to be specific. Don't hint at what someone should do, but instead tell them exactly what that type of person would do. For example, at the end of your presentation, when you are stating the call to action, instead of saying “I hope you will consider donating to our charity,” you could say, “Someone like Bill [the person you just told a story about] would show that they are a caring person by donating \$50 to the XYZ charity.”

Takeaways

- * People have personas, and they want their actions to be consistent with these personas.
- * If you want people to make a decision to act, first activate a persona.
- * Using stories during your presentation activates personas and will show people how a persona would act. This encourages them to take the same action.
- * Make references to a particular type of persona and then specifically state the action that persona would take.

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SMALL STEPS CAN CHANGE PERSONAS

Do people ever make a decision or take an action that isn't totally consistent with an existing persona or story they have about themselves? If the action is small (just a little different from the existing persona), it is possible for people to take an action that is inconsistent with a strong existing persona. Once they take *that* action, they actually will adjust their persona a little to fit the new action. That means the next thing they are asked to do along those same lines will fit the new persona, and it will be easier for them to continue to take action consistent with this new, revised persona.

SMALL COMMITMENTS LEAD TO MORE ACTION

If you want someone to take action, you need to first get a commitment to something small that will activate a persona, and then you need to ask for a commitment to something larger later. The more public you can get that commitment, the stronger the persona change will be. Making a commitment silently to yourself is not as strong as saying the commitment aloud to someone else. Taking an action, even if small, results in changes to a persona, which will lead to larger actions later on.

GET A COMMITMENT BEFORE THE OFFICIAL CALL TO ACTION

If one of your goals in your presentation is to get people to take action, build in an earlier step, before the official call to action, to get a small commitment and a small persona change. Then, later, when you ask for the real call to action, you are more likely to see people take action.

For example, I often give presentations about how to improve the usability of software or Web sites. The official call to action might be for someone to read a book or attend a class for more in-depth learning. But often there are people in the session who aren't totally convinced that improving usability is all that important. So early on in the presentation—sometimes at the very beginning—I have participants do a short exercise in small groups. I have them think about a Web site, software, mobile app, and so on that they used in the last 12 months that was hard to learn and hard to use. I ask them to list what it was about the product that made it hard to use or learn, and what the consequences are of not fixing the problem.

One of the things I am trying to accomplish with the exercise is to get people to personalize the topic. Instead of “I guess it's important for someone to think about whether products are easy to use,” the internal story becomes “I struggle when things are not

easy to use. I wish this product were easy to use. If the product were easier to use I wouldn't have gotten so frustrated. The people who designed this product should have been paying more attention." Now the participants in my presentation have changed their personas a little bit. They have, essentially, said to themselves and to others in their group, "I am a person who thinks that paying attention to how usable a product is is a worthwhile and important thing to do." They will now listen to the rest of my presentation in a different way, and, at the end, when I get to the official call for action, it is much more likely that they will take action.

Takeaways

- * If you want people to take an action that is not exactly consistent with their persona, ask them for something small first.
- * Build into your presentation opportunities for people to realize that the topic at hand is important to them. Talk in personal and concrete terms. Instead of "Why is software hard to use?" ask them, "What software have you recently used that was hard to use and what made it hard to use?" Being specific requires them to commit to the idea that the topic is relevant to them.
- * After they have taken a small action that is a step toward a revised or new persona, then ask them later for a larger commitment—for example, in your call to action at the end of the presentation.

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WRITING BY HAND CAN INCREASE COMMITMENT

When people write something down, it increases their commitment to action.

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) looked at the effect that others might have on decision-making. They asked people to estimate the length of some lines, and they had other people who were part of the experiment estimate the length of the line incorrectly. Would the subjects go along with the incorrect estimates they were hearing from others, or would they stick (commit) to the answer they felt was correct? If you read #93, about social validation, you won't be surprised to discover that estimates were influenced by the lengths people heard from others.

But Deutsch and Gerard also looked at whether there were situations in which *commitment* to a decision would be stronger.

- ★ Before hearing what others had to say on the length of the line, Group 1 wrote their estimates on paper. They were told *not* to sign the paper and that they would not be turning in the sheets of paper.
- ★ Group 2 wrote their estimates on a "magic pad"; they then lifted a sheet and the estimate was erased without anyone seeing it.
- ★ Group 3 was told to write their estimates on paper and to sign their papers, and they were told that their papers would be collected at the end of the experiment.

Would the groups vary in terms of how strongly they stuck to their commitment of the length of the line?

Group 2 was most likely to change their decisions and to give incorrect estimates. Groups 1 and 3 reacted the same way. They were five times less likely to change their answers. They were more committed to their original estimates, regardless of what they heard others say.

Signing their names or being told they were going to hand in their estimates did not seem to make a difference. Just the act of writing it on something relatively permanent was enough to make them commit.

WRITING CHANGES BRAIN PROCESSING

Research by Shadmehr and Holcomb (1997) looked at brain activity when people wrote something down longhand (for example, with a pen or pencil) instead of typing on a keyboard. Writing involves different muscles than typing, and Shadmehr and Holcomb found that there was more memory consolidation when people were writing in longhand.

Takeaways

- * If you want people to become and stay committed, have them write down the commitment on a piece of paper.
- * For maximum memory and commitment, have people write things out longhand, not type on a keyboard.

99

PEOPLE WILL ACT IN ORDER TO RELIEVE A SENSE OF OBLIGATION

If I give you a gift or do you a favor, you will feel indebted to me. You will want to give me a gift or do me a favor in return; possibly to be nice, but mainly to get rid of the feeling of indebtedness. This is a largely unconscious feeling, and it is quite strong. This is called *reciprocity*.

The theory is that this gift-giving and favor-swapping developed in human societies because it is useful in the survival of the species. If one person gives someone something (food, shelter, money, a gift, or a favor), that person will trigger the indebtedness. If the person who did the gifting finds him or herself in need of something in the future, he can “call in” the favor. These “deals” or arrangements encouraged cooperation between individuals in a group, and that cooperation allowed the group to grow and support each other.



How to double donations

Cialdini (2006) reports that a mailing that solicited donations for a veterans group generated an average response rate of 18 percent. But when the mailing campaign included personalized address labels—whereby the recipient perhaps feels somewhat obligated to “return the favor”—the donations almost doubled to 35 percent.



Reciprocity is universal

According to Heinrich (2001), the principle of reciprocity occurs across all cultures.

THE SIZES OF THE GIFTS DON'T HAVE TO MATCH

The relief of indebtedness does not require an equal size to the giving. For example, if I buy you a nice dinner, then you will feel indebted to me. But you don't have to return the favor with a nice dinner. You can buy me coffee next time or run an errand for me, and then you will consider the debt repaid.

INVOKING RECIPROCITY IN YOUR PRESENTATION

At the end of your presentation, you will have a call to action and you will be asking people to do something. If you can incur a debt before that, then they will be more likely to say yes to your call to action.

Since the size of the indebtedness doesn't matter, you can give something small. You can offer to communicate by email with anyone who has more questions (a gift of your time). If this is a sales presentation, you can offer a free trial of your product. If your presentation is useful, informative, or entertaining, then you have just given them a gift of your time, expertise, and knowledge. That will also be enough to incur indebtedness.

Takeaways

- * If you give something to someone, they will feel indebted to you and will look for an opportunity to give back to you in order to relieve the debt.
- * Figure out something small you can give during your presentation—for example, a small gift, a pen or highlight marker, a small toy, food, candy, or a free book.
- * If your presentation is extremely useful, informative, or entertaining, that can act as a gift that incurs debt.

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WHEN PEOPLE SAY NO THE FIRST TIME, THEY OFTEN SAY YES THE NEXT TIME

Imagine that you are giving a presentation to your local school board. You are part of a group of parents who would like to get new playground equipment. The parent group has selected you to approach the school board and ask for \$2000 for the playground equipment project.

At the meeting where you are making the presentation and request, you shock the rest of the parent group by asking for \$5000, not \$2000. The members of the school board say, "No, no, we can't possibly spend that much money for playground equipment." You look disappointed and then say, "Oh, well, we do have a reduced plan for \$2000." They ask to see the reduced plan, and you walk out of the meeting with the \$2000 project approved.

What just happened is called *concession*. When the school board said no, and you accepted that no, the no acted as a gift to the school board. As a result, they had incurred a debt to you. When you offered the reduced plan for \$2000, they could relieve the indebtedness by saying yes to the reduced amount.

This tactic is sometimes called *rejection then retreat*. The initiator asks a favor that is well above what most people would agree to. After the refusal, the initiator then asks for another favor that is more reasonable and receives exactly what he or she wanted in the first place.



Concession builds commitment too

Cialdini (1975) stopped people on the street and asked them to chaperone a group of troubled youth on a one-day trip to the zoo. Only 17 percent of people said yes.

Some of the time, he first asked people to spend two hours a week as a counselor for the youth for a minimum of two years (a larger request). In that case everyone said no. But if he then asked them to chaperone a group of troubled youth on a one-day trip to the zoo, 50 percent agreed. That is nearly three times the 17 percent who agreed when they were only asked to chaperone. That's concession working.

But Cialdini found an interesting side effect. Eighty-five percent of the people in the concession group actually showed up, compared with only 50 percent of the group that did not go through the concession process. Concession increases commitment to the action.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE REQUEST SIZES MATTERS

For concession to have an effect, the first offer has to be beyond what people will normally agree to, but it still has to be considered reasonable. If the first offer is totally outlandish, the retreat (second) request won't work. In addition, the retreat offer has to be seen as fair.

BUILD CONCESSION INTO YOUR TALK

Since you are going to build a call to action into the end of your talk, find a way during the talk to ask for something larger. Then at the end of the talk you can make the smaller request.

Takeaways

- * If you ask for something and the person says no, they have incurred a debt, so that if you next ask for something smaller, they will feel that they have to say yes.
- * When people initially say no and then agree to something smaller, it increases their commitment.
- * Build in a way to ask for something large during your presentation so that you can come back with a smaller request in your call to action.

“It takes one hour of preparation for each minute of presentation time.”

—Wayne Burgraff

HOW TO CRAFT YOUR PRESENTATION

I have good news and bad news. The good news is that you can craft a powerful presentation that hits the mark with your audience. The bad news is that it takes significant time and energy and homework.

You can read all the “things” in this book, and just reading them would probably help you improve a little bit. But if you really want to give presentations that are interesting and exciting and persuasive, if you really want to be a better presenter, then you have to spend time to craft your presentations in a way that automatically takes these “things” into account.

In this chapter you'll learn my five-step process to crafting and structuring your presentation for maximum impact, including the “magic formula” to make sure your presentation speaks right to your particular audience.