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INFLUENCE

The Psychology of Persuasion

ROBERT B. CIALDINI, PH.D.

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 HarperCollins e-books

This book is dedicated to Chris,
who glows in his father's eye

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INTRODUCTION

I can admit it freely now. All my life I've been a patsy. For as long as I can recall, I've been an easy mark for the pitches of peddlers, fund-raisers, and operators of one sort or another. True, only some of these people have had dishonorable motives. The others—representatives of certain charitable agencies, for instance—have had the best of intentions. No matter. With personally disquieting frequency, I have always found myself in possession of unwanted magazine subscriptions or tickets to the sanitation workers' ball. Probably this long-standing status as sucker accounts for my interest in the study of compliance: Just what are the factors that cause one person to say yes to another person? And which techniques most effectively use these factors to bring about such compliance? I wondered why it is that a request stated in a certain way will be rejected, while a request that asks for the same favor in a slightly different fashion will be successful.

So in my role as an experimental social psychologist, I began to do research into the psychology of compliance. At first the research

took the form of experiments performed, for the most part, in my laboratory and on college students. I wanted to find out which psychological principles influence the tendency to comply with a request. Right now, psychologists know quite a bit about these principles—what they are and how they work. I have characterized such principles as weapons of influence and will report on some of the most important in the upcoming chapters.

After a time, though, I began to realize that the experimental work, while necessary, wasn't enough. It didn't allow me to judge the importance of the principles in the world beyond the psychology building and the campus where I was examining them. It became clear that if I was to understand fully the psycholòˆgy of compliance, I would need to broaden my scope of investigation. I would need to look to the compliance professionals—the people who had been using the principles on me all my life. They know what works and what doesn't; the law of survival of the fittest assures it. Their business is to make us comply, and their livelihoods depend on it. Those who don't know how to get people to say yes soon fall away; those who do, stay and flourish.

Of course, the compliance professionals aren't the only ones who know about and use these principles to help them get their way. We all employ them and fall victim to them, to some degree, in our daily interactions with neighbors, friends, lovers, and offspring. But the compliance practitioners have much more than the vague and amateurish understanding of what works than the rest of us have. As I thought about it, I knew that they represented the richest vein of information about compliance available to me. For nearly three years, then, I combined my experimental studies with a decidedly more entertaining program of systematic immersion into the world of compliance professionals—sales operators, fund-raisers, recruiters, advertisers, and others.

The purpose was to observe, from the inside, the techniques and strategies most commonly and effectively used by a broad range of compliance practitioners. That program of observation sometimes took the form of interviews with the practitioners themselves and sometimes with the natural enemies (for example, police buncosquad officers, consumer agencies) of certain of the practitioners. At other times it involved an intensive examination of the written materials by which compliance techniques are passed down from one generation to another—sales manuals and the like.

Most frequently, though, it has taken the form of participant observation. Participant observation is a research approach in which the researcher becomes a spy of sorts. With disguised identity and intent, the investigator infiltrates the setting of interest and becomes a full-fledged

participant in the group to be studied. So when I wanted to learn about the compliance tactics of encyclopedia (or vacuum-cleaner, or portrait-photography, or dance-lesson) sales organizations, I would answer a newspaper ad for sales trainees and have them teach me their methods. Using similar but not identical approaches, I was able to penetrate advertising, public-relations, and fund-raising agencies to examine their techniques. Much of the evidence presented in this book, then, comes from my experience posing as a compliance professional, or aspiring professional, in a large variety of organizations dedicated to getting us to say yes.

One aspect of what I learned in this three-year period of participant observation was most instructive. Although there are thousands of different tactics that compliance practitioners employ to produce yes, the majority fall within six basic categories. Each of these categories is governed by a fundamental psychological principle that directs human behavior and, in so doing, gives the tactics their power. The book is organized around these six principles, one to a chapter. The principles—consistency, reciprocation, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity—are each discussed in terms of their function in the society and in terms of how their enormous force can be commissioned by a compliance professional who deftly incorporates them into requests for purchases, donations, concessions, votes, assent, etc. It is worthy of note that I have not included among the six principles the simple rule of material self-interest—that people want to get the most and pay the least for their choices. This omission does not stem from any perception on my part that the desire to maximize benefits and minimize costs is unimportant in driving our decisions. Nor does it come from any evidence I have that compliance professionals ignore the power of this rule. Quite the opposite: In my investigations, I frequently saw practitioners use (sometimes honestly, sometimes not) the compelling "I can give you a good deal" approach. I choose not to treat the material self-interest rule separately in this book because I see it as a motivational given, as a goes-without-saying factor that deserves acknowledgment but not extensive description.

Finally, each principle is examined as to its ability to produce a distinct kind of automatic, mindless compliance from people, that is, a willingness to say yes without thinking first. The evidence suggests that the ever-accelerating pace and informational crush of modern life will make this particular form of unthinking compliance more and more prevalent in the future. It will be increasingly important for the society, therefore, to understand the how and why of automatic influence.

It has been some time since the first edition of *Influence* was published.

In the interim, some things have happened that I feel deserve a place in this new edition. First, we now know more about the influence process than before. The study of persuasion, compliance, and change has advanced, and the pages that follow have been adapted to reflect that progress. In addition to an overall update of the material, I have included a new feature that was stimulated by the responses of prior readers.

That new feature highlights the experiences of individuals who have read *Influence*, recognized how one of the principles worked on (or for) them in a particular instance, and wrote to me describing the event. Their descriptions, which appear in the Reader's Reports at the end of each chapter, illustrate how easily and frequently we can fall victim to the pull of the influence process in our everyday lives.

I wish to thank the following individuals who—either directly or through their course instructors—contributed the Reader's Reports used in this edition: Pat Bobbs, Mark Hastings, James Michaels, Paul R. Nail, Alan J. Resnik, Daryl Retzlaff, Dan Swift, and Karla Vasks. In addition, I would like to invite new readers to submit similar reports for possible publication in a future edition. They may be sent to me at the Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-1104.

—ROBERT B. CIALDINI

Chapter 1

WEAPONS OF INFLUENCE

Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.
—ALBERT EINSTEIN

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 × ½," 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 "½" in her scrawled message as a "2," the entire allotment had sold out 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 the 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 in his description of an experiment involving a mother turkey and a stuffed polecat.[1] For a mother turkey, a polecat is a natural enemy whose approach is to be greeted with squawking, pecking, clawing rage. Indeed, the experimenters found that even a stuffed model of a polecat, when drawn by a string toward 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.

How ridiculous a female 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 own chicks just because it does not. She looks like an automaton 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 that compose 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 the situation calls for courtship, the courtship tape gets played; when the situation calls for mothering, the maternal-behavior tape gets

played. *Click* and the appropriate tape is activated; *whirr* and out rolls the standard sequence of behaviors.

The most interesting thing about all this is the way the tapes are activated. When a male animal acts to defend his territory, for instance, it is the intrusion of another male of the same species that cues the territorial-defense tape of rigid vigilance, threat, and, if need be, combat behaviors. But there is a quirk in the system. It is not the rival male as a whole that is the trigger; it is some specific feature of him, 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-redbreast feathers placed there. At the same time, it will virtually ignore a perfect stuffed replica of a male robin *without* red breast feathers; 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.[2]

Before we enjoy too smugly the ease with which lower animals can be tricked by trigger features into reacting in ways wholly inappropriate to the situation, we might realize two things. First, the automatic, fixed-action patterns of these animals work very well the great majority of the time. For example, because only healthy, normal 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 be used to dupe *us* into playing them at the wrong times.[3]

This parallel form of human automatic action is aptly demonstrated in an experiment by Harvard social psychologist Ellen Langer. 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. 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: Ninety-four 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." But 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 maternal turkeys—even when it emanated from a stuffed polecat—so, too, did the word "because" trigger an automatic compliance response from Langer's subjects, even when they were given no subsequent reason to comply. *Click, whirr!*[4]

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, what is astonishing is how often it does. 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." 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 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. *Click, whirr!*

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 good turquoise jewelry without much knowledge of

turquoise, they understandably relied on the old standby feature of cost to determine the jewelry's merits.

Although they probably did not realize it, by reacting solely to the price feature 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 of the things that indicate 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 "½" for a "2," they bet wrong. But 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 of human action, because in many cases it is the most efficient form of behaving, and in other cases it is simply necessary. You and I exist in an extraordinarily complicated stimulus 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 mindlessly 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. But we accept their imperfection, since there is really no other choice. Without them we would stand frozen—cataloging, appraising, and calibrating—as the time for action sped by and away. And from all indications, we will be relying on them 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.

The renowned British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead recognized this inescapable quality of modern life when he asserted that "civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them." Take, for example, the "advance" offered to civilization by the discount coupon, which allows consumers to assume that they will receive a reduced purchase price by presenting the coupon. The extent to which we have learned to operate mechanically on that assumption is illustrated in the experience of one automobile-tire company. Mailed-out coupons that—because of a printing error—offered no savings to recipients produced just as much customer response as did error-free coupons that offered substantial

savings. The obvious but instructive point here is that we expect discount coupons to do double duty. Not only do we expect them to save us money, we also expect them to save us the time and mental energy required to think about how to do it. In today's world, we need the first advantage to handle pocketbook strain; but we need the second advantage to handle something potentially more important—brain strain.

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, another glance at the work of the ethologists is in order. 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. There is a group of organisms, often termed mimics, that 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 mimic will then exploit this altogether inappropriate action for its 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. But through centuries of experience, the 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. Somehow, the *Photuris* female has cracked the *Photinus* courtship code. 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.

Insects seem to be the most severe exploiters of the automaticity of their prey; it is not uncommon to find their victims duped to death. But less uncompromising forms of exploitation occur as well. There is, for instance, a little fish, the saber-toothed blenny, that takes advantage of an unusual program of cooperation worked out by members of two other species of fish. The cooperating fish form a Mutt and Jeff team consisting of a large grouper fish on the one hand and a much smaller type of fish on the other. The smaller fish serves as a cleaner to the larger one, which allows the cleaner to approach it and even enter its mouth to pick off fungus and other parasites that have attached themselves to

the big fish's teeth or gills. It is a beautiful arrangement: The big grouper gets cleaned of harmful pests, and the cleaner fish gets an easy dinner. The larger fish normally devours any other small fish foolish enough to come close to it. But when the cleaner approaches, the big fish suddenly stops all movement and floats open-mouthed and nearly immobile in response to an undulating dance that the cleaner performs. This dance appears to be the trigger feature of the cleaner that activates the dramatic passivity of the big fish. It also provides the saber-toothed blenny with an angle—a chance to take advantage of the cleaning ritual of the cooperators. The blenny will approach the large predator, copying the undulations of the cleaner's dance and automatically producing the tranquil, unmoving posture of the big fish. Then, true to its name, it will quickly rip a mouthful from the larger fish's flesh and dart away before its startled victim can recover.[5]

There is a strong but sad parallel in the human jungle. We too have exploiters who mimic trigger features for our own brand of automatic responding. Unlike the mostly instinctive response sequences of nonhumans, 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 is a group of 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 they structure their requests, the way they arm themselves with one or another of the weapons of influence that exist within the social environment. To do this may take no more than one correctly chosen word that engages a strong psychological principle and sets an automatic behavior tape rolling within us. And trust the human exploiters to learn quickly exactly how to profit 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 mark the article "Reduced from _____" and sell it at its original price while still taking advantage of the "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 while he was growing up in the 1930s. Whenever the salesman, 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, as they talked, he would repeatedly request that the man speak more loudly to him. Once the customer had found a suit he liked and had 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."

There are several components shared by most of the weapons of automatic influence to be described in this book. We have already discussed two of them—the nearly mechanical process by which the power within these weapons can be activated, and the consequent exploitability of this power by anyone who knows how to trigger them. A third component involves the way that the weapons of automatic influence lend their force to those who use them. It's not that the weapons, like a set of heavy clubs, provide a conspicuous arsenal to be used by one person to bludgeon another into submission.

The process is much more sophisticated and subtle. With proper execution, the exploiters need hardly strain a muscle to get their way. All that is required is to trigger the great stores of influence that already exist in the situation and direct them toward the intended target. In this sense, the approach is not unlike that of the Japanese martial-art form called jujitsu. A woman employing jujitsu would utilize 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 exploiters can commission the power of these weapons for use against their targets while exerting little personal force. This last feature of the process allows the exploiters an enormous additional benefit—the ability to manipulate without the appearance of manipulation. Even the victims themselves tend to see their compliance as determined by the action of natural forces rather than by 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 trying 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 beautiful woman at a cocktail party and are then joined by an unattractive one, the second woman will strike us as less attractive than she actually is.

In fact, studies done on the contrast principle at Arizona State and Montana State universities suggest that we may be less satisfied with the physical attractiveness of our own lovers because of the way the popular media bombard us with examples of unrealistically attractive models. In one study college students rated a picture of an average-looking member of the opposite sex as less attractive if they had first looked through the ads in some popular magazines. In another study, male college-dormitory residents rated the photo of a potential blind date. Those who did so while watching an episode of the *Charlie's Angels* TV series viewed the blind date as a less attractive woman than those who rated her while watching a different show. Apparently it was the uncommon beauty of the *Angels* female stars that made the blind date seem less attractive.[6]

A nice demonstration of perceptual contrast is sometimes employed in psychophysics laboratories to introduce students to the principle firsthand. Each student takes a turn sitting in front of three pails of water—one cold, one at room temperature, and one hot. After placing one hand in the cold water and one in the hot water, the student is told to place both in the lukewarm 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. 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 very 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. A man might balk at the idea of spending $95 for a sweater, but if he has just bought a $495 suit, a $95 sweater does not seem excessive. 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. As sales motivation analysts Whitney, Hubin, and Murphy state, "The interesting thing is that even when a man enters a clothing store with the express purpose of purchasing a suit, he will almost always *pay more* for whatever accessories he buys if he buys them *after* the suit purchase than before."

It is much more profitable for salespeople to present the expensive item first, not only because to fail to do so will lose the influence of the contrast principle; to fail to do so will also cause the principle to work actively against them. Presenting an inexpensive product first and following it with an expensive one will cause the expensive item to seem even more costly as a result—hardly a desirable consequence for most sales organizations. 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. I came across a technique that engaged the contrast principle while I was investigating, undercover, the compliance tactics of real-estate companies. To "learn the ropes," I was accompanying a company realty 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 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 place he really wanted to sell them after they had seen the run-down 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 for a new car has been negotiated before suggesting one option after another that might be added. In the wake of a fifteen-thousand-dollar deal, the hundred or so dollars required for a nicety like an FM radio seems almost trivial in comparison. The same will be true of the added expense of accessories like tinted windows, dual side-view mirrors, whitewall tires, or special trim that the salesman might suggest in sequence. The trick is to bring up the extras independently of one another, so that each small price will seem petty when compared to the already-determined much larger one. As the veteran car buyer can attest, many a budget-sized final price figure has ballooned from the addition of all those seemingly little options. While the customer stands, signed contract in hand, wondering what happened and finding no one to blame but himself, the car dealer stands smiling the knowing smile of the jujitsu master.

READER'S REPORT

From the Parent of a College Coed

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 burntout dormitory, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It's really a basement room, but 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 got 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 pre-marital blood tests and I carelessly caught it from him.

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

Sharon may be failing chemistry, but she gets an "A" in psychology.

Chapter 2

RECIPROCATION

The Old Give and Take…and Take

Pay every debt, as if God wrote the bill.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

A FEW 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 the people who had never met nor heard of him. The great majority of those who returned a card never inquired into the identity of the unknown professor. They received his holiday greeting card, *click*, and, *whirr*, they automatically sent one in return. While small in scope, this study nicely shows the action of one of the most potent of the weapons of influence around us—the rule for reciprocation.[1] 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 term like "much obliged" has become a synonym for "thank you," not only in the English language but in others as well.

The impressive aspect of the rule for reciprocation and the sense of obligation that goes with it is its pervasiveness in human culture. It is so widespread that after intensive study, sociologists such as Alvin

Gouldner can report that there is no human society that does not subscribe to the rule.[2] And 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 for 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: "We are human because our ancestors learned to share their food and their skills in an honored network of obligation,"[3] he says. Cultural anthropologists Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox 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, the exchange of different services (making it possible for experts to develop), and the creation of a cluster of interdependencies that bind individuals together into highly efficient units.[4]

It is the future orientation inherent in a sense of obligation that is critical to its ability to produce social advances of the sort described by Tiger and Fox. A widely shared and strongly held feeling of future obligation made an enormous difference in human social evolution, because it meant that one person could give something (for example, food, energy, care) to another with confidence that it was not being lost. For the first time in evolutionary history, one individual could give away any of a variety of resources without actually giving them away. The result was the lowering of the natural inhibitions against transactions that must be *begun* by one person's providing personal resources to another. Sophisticated and coordinated systems of aid, gift giving, defense, and trade became possible, bringing immense benefit to the societies that possessed them. With such clearly adaptive consequences for the culture, it is not surprising that the rule for reciprocation is so deeply implanted in us by the process of socialization we all undergo.

I know of no better illustration of how reciprocal obligations can reach long and powerfully into the future than the perplexing story of five thousand dollars of relief aid that was sent in 1985 between Mexico and the impoverished people of Ethiopia. In 1985 Ethiopia could justly lay claim to the greatest suffering and privation in the world. Its economy was in ruin. Its food supply had been ravaged by years of drought and internal war. Its inhabitants were dying by the thousands from disease and starvation. Under these circumstances, I would not have been surprised to learn of a five-thousand-dollar relief donation from Mexico to that wrenchingly needy country. I remember my chin hitting my chest, though, when a brief newspaper item I was reading insisted that the aid had gone in the opposite direction. Native officials of the Ethiopian Red Cross had decided to send the money to help the victims of that year's earthquakes in Mexico City.

It is both a personal bane and a professional blessing that whenever I am confused by some aspect of human behavior, I feel driven to investigate further. In this instance, I was able to track down a fuller account of the story. Fortunately a journalist who had been as bewildered as I was by the Ethiopians' action had asked for an explanation. The answer he received offers eloquent validation of the reciprocity rule: Despite the enormous needs prevailing in Ethiopia, the money was being sent because Mexico had sent aid to Ethiopia in 1935, when it was invaded by Italy. So informed, I remained awed, but I was no longer puzzled. The need to reciprocate had transcended great cultural differences, long distances, acute famine, and immediate self-interest. Quite simply, a half century later, against all countervailing forces, obligation triumphed.

Make no mistake, human societies derive a truly significant competitive advantage from the reciprocity rule, and consequently they make sure their members are trained to comply with and believe in it. Each of us has been taught to live up to the rule, and each of us knows about the social sanctions and derision applied to anyone who violates it. The labels we assign to such a person are loaded with negativity—moocher, ingrate, welsher. Because there is general distaste for those who take and make no effort to give in return, we will often go to great lengths to avoid being considered one of their number. It is to those lengths that we will often be taken and, in the process, be "taken" by individuals who stand to gain from our indebtedness.

To understand how the rule for reciprocation can be exploited by one who recognizes it as the source of influence it certainly is, we might closely examine an experiment performed by Professor Dennis Regan of Cornell University.[5] A subject who participated in the study found himself rating, along with another subject, the quality of some paintings as part of an experiment on "art appreciation." The other rater—we can call him Joe—was only posing as a fellow subject and was actually Dr. Regan's assistant. For our purposes, the experiment took place under two different conditions. In some cases, Joe did a small, unsolicited favor for the true subject. During a short rest period, he left the room for a couple of minutes and returned with two bottles of Coca-Cola, one for the subject and one for himself, saying, "I asked him [the experimenter] if I could get myself a Coke, and he said it was okay, so I bought one for you, too." In other cases, Joe did not provide the subject with a favor; he simply returned from the two-minute break empty-handed. In all other respects, however, Joe behaved identically.

Later on, after the paintings had all been rated and the experimenter had momentarily left the room, Joe asked the subject to do *him* a favor. He indicated that he was selling raffle tickets for a new car and that if

he sold the most tickets, he would win a fifty-dollar prize. Joe's request was for the subject to buy some raffle tickets at twenty-five cents apiece: "Any would help, the more the better." The major finding of the study concerns the number of tickets subjects purchased from Joe under the two conditions. Without question, Joe was more successful in selling his raffle tickets to the subjects who had received his earlier favor. Apparently feeling that they owed him something, these subjects bought twice as many tickets as the subjects who had not been given the prior favor. Although the Regan study represents a fairly simple demonstration of the workings of the rule for reciprocation, it illustrates several important characteristics of the rule that, upon further consideration, help us to understand how it may be profitably used.

The Rule Is Overpowering

One of the reasons reciprocation can be used so effectively as a device for gaining another's compliance is its power. The rule possesses awesome strength, often producing a "yes" response to a request that, except for an existing feeling of indebtedness, would have surely been refused. Some evidence of how the rule's force can overpower the influence of other factors that normally determine whether a request will be complied with can be seen in a second result of the Regan study. Besides his interest in the impact of the reciprocity rule on compliance, Regan was also interested in how liking for a person affects the tendency to comply with that person's request. To measure how liking toward Joe affected the subjects' decisions to buy his raffle tickets, Regan had them fill out several rating scales indicating how much they liked Joe. He then compared their liking responses with the number of tickets they had purchased from Joe. There was a significant tendency for subjects to buy more raffle tickets from Joe the more they liked him. But this alone is hardly a startling finding. Most of us would have guessed that people are more willing to do a favor for someone they like.

The interesting thing about the Regan experiment, however, is that the relationship between liking and compliance was completely wiped out in the condition under which subjects had been given a Coke by Joe. For those who owed him a favor, it made no difference whether they liked him or not; they felt a sense of obligation to repay him, and they did. The subjects in that condition who indicated that they disliked Joe bought just as many of his tickets as did those who indicated that they liked him. The rule for reciprocity was so strong that it simply overwhelmed the influence of a factor—liking for the requester—that normally affects the decision to comply.

Think of the implications. People we might ordinarily dislike—unsa-

vory or unwelcome sales operators, disagreeable acquaintances, representatives of strange or unpopular organizations—can greatly increase the chance that we will do what they wish merely by providing us with a small favor prior to their requests. Let's take an example that by now many of us have encountered. The Hare Krishna Society is an Eastern religious sect with centuries-old roots traceable to the Indian city of Calcutta. But its spectacular modern-day story occurred in the 1970s, when it experienced a remarkable growth not only in followers but also in wealth and property. The economic growth was funded through a variety of activities, the principal and still most visible of which is the request for donations by Society members from passersby in public places. During the early history of the group in this country, the solicitation for contributions was attempted in a fashion memorable for anyone who saw it. Groups of Krishna devotees—often with shaved heads, and wearing ill-fitting robes, leg wrappings, beads, and bells—would canvass a city street, chanting and bobbing in unison while begging for funds.

Although highly effective as a technique for gaining attention, this form of fund-raising did not work especially well. The average American considered the Krishnas weird, to say the least, and was reluctant to provide money to support them. It quickly became clear to the Society that it had a considerable public-relations problem. The people being asked for contributions did not like the way the members looked, dressed, or acted. Had the Society been an ordinary commercial organization, the solution would have been simple—change the things the public does not like. But the Krishnas are a religious organization; and the way members look, dress, and act is partially tied to religious factors. Because, in any denomination, religious factors are typically resistant to change because of worldly considerations, the Krishna leadership was faced with a real dilemma. On the one hand were beliefs, modes of dress, and hairstyles that had religious significance. On the other hand, threatening the organization's financial welfare, were the less-than-positive feelings of the American public toward these things. What's a sect to do?

The Krishnas' resolution was brilliant. They switched to a fund-raising tactic that made it unnecessary for target persons to have positive feelings toward the fund-raisers. They began to employ a donation-request procedure that engaged the rule for reciprocation, which, as demonstrated by the Regan study, is strong enough to overcome the factor of dislike for the requester. The new strategy still involves the solicitation of contributions in public places with much pedestrian traffic (airports are a favorite), but now, before a donation is requested, the target person is given a "gift"—a book (usually the *Bhagavad Gita*), the *Back to Godhead*

magazine of the Society, or, in the most cost-effective version, a flower. The unsuspecting passerby who suddenly finds a flower pressed into his hands or pinned to his jacket is under no circumstances allowed to give it back, even if he asserts that he does not want it. "No, it is our gift to you," says the solicitor, refusing to accept it. Only after the Krishna member has thus brought the force of the reciprocation rule to bear on the situation is the target asked to provide a contribution to the Society. This benefactor-before-beggar strategy has been wildly successful for the Hare Krishna Society, producing large-scale economic gains and funding the ownership of temples, businesses, houses, and property in 321 centers in the United States and overseas.

As an aside, it is instructive that the reciprocation rule has begun to outlive its usefulness for the Krishnas, not because the rule itself is any less potent societally, but because we have found ways to prevent the Krishnas from using it on us. After once falling victim to their tactic, many travelers are now alert to the presence of robed Krishna Society solicitors in airports and train stations, adjusting their paths to avoid an encounter and preparing beforehand to ward off a solicitor's "gift." Although the Society has tried to counter this increased vigilance by instructing members to be dressed and groomed in modern styles to avoid immediate recognition when soliciting (some actually carry flight bags or suitcases), even disguise has not worked especially well for the Krishnas. Too many individuals now know better than to accept unrequested offerings in public places like airports. Furthermore, airport administrators have initiated a number of procedures designed to forewarn us of the Krishnas' true identity and intent. Thus, it is now common airport practice to restrict the Krishnas' soliciting activity to certain areas of the airport and to announce through signs and the public address system that the Krishnas are soliciting there. It is a testament to the societal value of reciprocation that we have chosen to fight the Krishnas mostly by seeking to avoid rather than to withstand the force of their gift giving. The reciprocity rule that empowers their tactic is too strong—and socially beneficial—for us to want to violate it.

Politics is another arena in which the power of the reciprocity rule shows itself. Reciprocation tactics appear at every level:

- At the top, elected officials engage in "logrolling" and the exchange of favors that makes politics the place of strange bedfellows, indeed. The out-of-character vote of one of our elected representatives on a bill or measure can often be understood as a favor returned to the bill's sponsor. Political analysts were amazed at Lyndon Johnson's ability to get so many of his programs through Congress during his early administration. Even members of congress who were thought

to be strongly opposed to the proposals were voting for them. Close examination by political scientists has found the cause to be not so much Johnson's political savvy as the large score of favors he had been able to provide to other legislators during his many years of power in the House and Senate. As President, he was able to produce a truly remarkable amount of legislation in a short time by calling in those favors. It is interesting that this same process may account for the problems Jimmy Carter had in getting his programs through Congress during his early administration, despite heavy Democratic majorities in both House and Senate. Carter came to the presidency from outside the Capitol Hill establishment. He campaigned on his outside-Washington identity, saying that he was indebted to no one there. Much of his legislative difficulty upon arriving may be traced to the fact that no one there was indebted to *him*.

- At another level, we can see the recognized strength of the reciprocity rule in the desire of corporations and individuals to provide judicial and legislative officials with gifts and favors, and in the series of legal restrictions against such gifts and favors. Even with legitimate political contributions, the stockpiling of obligations often underlies the stated purpose of supporting a favorite candidate. One look at the lists of companies and organizations that contribute to the campaigns of *both* major candidates in important elections gives evidence of such motives. A skeptic, requiring direct evidence of the quid pro quo expected by political contributors, might look to the remarkably bald-faced admission by Charles H. Keating, Jr., who was later convicted on multiple counts of fraud in this country's savings and loan disaster. Addressing the question of whether a connection existed between the $1.3 million he had contributed to the campaigns of five U.S. senators and their subsequent actions in his behalf against federal regulators, he asserted, "I want to say in the most forceful way I can: I certainly hope so."
- At the grass-roots level, local political organizations have learned that the principal way to keep their candidates in office is to make sure they provide a wide range of little favors to the voters. The "ward heelers" of many cities still operate effectively in this fashion. But ordinary citizens are not alone in trading political support for small personal favors. During the 1992 presidential primary campaign, actress Sally Kellerman was asked why she was lending her name and efforts to the candidacy of Democratic hopeful Jerry Brown. Her reply: "Twenty years ago, I asked ten friends to help me move. He was the only one who showed up."

Of course, the power of reciprocity can be found in the merchandising

field as well. Although the number of possible examples is large, let's examine a pair of familiar ones deriving from the "free sample." As a marketing technique, the free sample has a long and effective history. In most instances, a small amount of the relevant product is provided to potential customers for the stated purpose of allowing them to try it to see if they like it. And certainly this is a legitimate desire of the manufacturer—to expose the public to the qualities of the product. The beauty of the free sample, however, is that it is also a gift and, as such, can engage the reciprocity rule. In true jujitsu fashion, the promoter who gives free samples can release the natural indebting force inherent in a gift while innocently appearing to have only the intention to inform. A favorite place for free samples is the supermarket, where customers are frequently provided with small cubes of a certain variety of cheese or meat to try. Many people find it difficult to accept a sample from the always-smiling attendant, return only the toothpick, and walk away. Instead, they buy some of the product, even if they might not have liked it especially well. A highly effective variation on this marketing procedure is illustrated in the case, cited by Vance Packard in *The Hidden Persuaders*, of the Indiana supermarket operator who sold an astounding one thousand pounds of cheese in a few hours one day by putting out the cheese and inviting customers to cut off slivers for themselves as free samples.

A different version of the free-sample tactic is used by the Amway Corporation, a rapid-growth company that manufactures and distributes household and personal-care products in a vast national network of door-to-door neighborhood sales. The company, which has grown from a basement-run operation a few years ago to a one-and-a-half-billion-dollar-yearly-sales business, makes use of the free sample in a device called the BUG. The BUG consists of a collection of Amway products—bottles of furniture polish, detergent, or shampoo, spray containers of deodorizers, insect killers, or window cleaners—carried to the customer's home in a specially designed tray or just a polyethylene bag. The confidential Amway Career Manual then instructs the salesperson to leave the BUG with the customer "for 24, 48, or 72 hours, at no cost or obligation to her. Just tell her you would like her to try the products…. That's an offer no one can refuse." At the end of the trial period, the Amway representative returns and picks up orders for those of the products the customer wishes to purchase. Since few customers use up the entire contents of even one of the product containers in such a short time, the salesperson may then take the remaining product portions in the BUG to the next potential customer down the line or across the street and start the process again. Many Amway representatives have several BUGs circulating in their districts at one time.

Of course, by now you and I know that the customer who has accepted and used the BUG products has been trapped into facing the influence of the reciprocity rule. Many such customers yield to a sense of obligation to order those of the salesperson's products that they have tried and thereby partially consumed. And, of course, by now the Amway Corporation knows that to be the case. Even in a company with as excellent a growth record as Amway, the BUG device has created a big stir. Reports by state distributors to the parent company record a remarkable effect:

> Unbelievable! We've never seen such excitement. Product is moving at an unbelievable rate, and we've only just begun…. [Local] distributors took the BUGS, and we've had an unbelievable increase in sales [from Illinois distributor]. The most fantastic retail idea we've ever had!…On the average, customers purchased about half the total amount of the BUG when it is picked up…. In one word, tremendous! We've never seen a response within our entire organization like this [from Massachusetts distributor].

The Amway distributors appear to be bewildered—happily so, but nonetheless bewildered—by the startling power of the BUG. Of course, by now you and I should not be.

The reciprocity rule governs many situations of a purely interpersonal nature where neither money nor commercial exchange is at issue. Perhaps my favorite illustration of the enormous force available from the reciprocation weapon of influence comes from such a situation. The European scientist, Eibl-Eibesfeldt, provides the account of a German soldier during World War I whose job was to capture enemy soldiers for interrogation. Because of the nature of the trench warfare at that time, it was extremely difficult for armies to cross the no-man's-land between opposing front lines; but it was not so difficult for a single soldier to crawl across and slip into an enemy trench position. The armies of the Great War had experts who regularly did so to capture an enemy soldier, who would then be brought back for questioning. The German expert of our account had often successfully completed such missions in the past and was sent on another. Once again, he skillfully negotiated the area between fronts and surprised a lone enemy soldier in his trench. The unsuspecting soldier, who had been eating at the time, was easily disarmed. The frightened captive with only a piece of bread in his hand then performed what may have been the most important act of his life. He gave his enemy some of the bread. So affected was the German by this gift that he could not complete his mission. He turned from his benefactor and recrossed the no-man's-land empty-handed to face the wrath of his superiors.

An equally compelling point regarding the power of reciprocity comes from an account of a woman who saved her life not by *giving* a gift as did the captured soldier, but by *refusing* a gift and the powerful obligations that went with it. The woman, Diane Louie, was an inhabitant of Jonestown, Guyana, in November of 1978 when its leader, Jim Jones, called for the mass suicide of all residents, most of whom compliantly drank and died from a vat of poison-laced Kool-Aid. Diane Louie, however, rejected Jones's command and made her way out of Jonestown and into the jungle. She attributes her willingness to do so to her earlier refusal to accept special favors from him when she was in need. She turned down his offer of special food while she was ill because "I knew once he gave me those privileges, he'd have me. I didn't want to owe him nothin'."

The Rule Enforces Uninvited Debts

Earlier we suggested that the power of the reciprocity rule is such that by first doing us a favor, strange, disliked, or unwelcome others can enhance the chance that we will comply with one of their requests. However, there is another aspect of the rule, besides its power, that allows this phenomenon to occur. Another person can trigger a feeling of indebtedness by doing us an uninvited favor. Recall that the rule only states that we should provide to others the kind of actions they have provided us; it does not require us to have asked for what we have received in order to feel obligated to repay. For instance, the Disabled American Veterans organization reports that its simple mail appeal for donations produces a response rate of about 18 percent. But when the mailing also includes an unsolicited gift (gummed, individualized address labels), the success rate nearly doubles to 35 percent. This is not to say that we might not feel a stronger sense of obligation to return a favor we have requested, only that such a request is not necessary to produce our indebtedness.

If we reflect for a moment about the social purpose of the reciprocity rule, we can see why this should be so. The rule was established to promote the development of reciprocal relationships between individuals so that one person could *initiate* such a relationship without the fear of loss. If the rule is to serve that purpose, then, an uninvited first favor must have the ability to create an obligation. Recall, also, that reciprocal relationships confer an extraordinary advantage upon cultures that foster them and that, consequently, there will be strong pressures to ensure that the rule does serve its purpose. Little wonder, then, that the influential French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, in describing the social pressures surrounding the gift-giving process in human culture,

can state, "There is an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to repay."[6]

Although the obligation to repay constitutes the essence of the reciprocity rule, it is the obligation to receive that makes the rule so easy to exploit. The obligation to receive reduces our ability to choose whom we wish to be indebted to and puts that power in the hands of others. Let's reexamine a pair of earlier examples to get a sense of how the process works. First, let's return to the Regan study, where we find that the favor causing subjects to double the number of raffle tickets purchased from Joe was not one they had requested. Joe had voluntarily left the room and returned with one Coke for himself and one for the subject. There was not a single subject who refused the Coke. It is easy to see why it would have been awkward to turn down Joe's favor: Joe had already spent his money; a soft drink was an appropriate favor in the situation, especially since Joe had one himself; it would have been considered impolite to reject Joe's thoughtful action. Nevertheless, receipt of that Coke produced an indebtedness that manifested itself clearly when Joe announced his desire to sell some raffle tickets. Notice the important asymmetry here—all the genuinely free choices were Joe's. He chose the form of the initial favor, and he chose the form of the return favor. Of course, one could say that the subject had the choice of saying no to both of Joe's offers. But those would have been tough choices. To have said no at either point would have required the subject to go against the natural cultural forces favoring reciprocation arrangements that Jujitsu Joe had aligned himself with.

The extent to which even an unwanted favor, once received, can produce indebtedness is aptly illustrated in the soliciting technique of the Hare Krishna Society. During systematic observation of the airport soliciting strategy of the Krishnas, I have recorded a variety of responses from target persons. One of the most regular occurs as follows. An airport visitor—a businessman, let's say—is hurriedly walking along through a densely peopled area. The Krishna solicitor steps in front of him and hands him a flower. The man, reacting with surprise, takes it.[7] Almost immediately, he tries to give it back, saying that he does not want the flower. The Krishna member responds that it is a gift from the Krishna Society and that it is the man's to keep…however, a donation to further the Society's good works would be appreciated. Again the target protests, "I don't want this flower. Here, take it." And again the solicitor refuses, "It's our gift to you, sir." There is visible conflict on the businessman's face. Should he keep the flower and walk away without giving anything in return, or should he yield to the pressure of the deeply ingrained reciprocity rule and provide a contribution? By now, the conflict has spread from his face to his posture. He leans away

from his benefactor, seemingly about to break free, only to be drawn back again by the pull of the rule. Once more his body tilts away, but it's no use; he cannot disengage. With a nod of resignation, he fishes in his pocket and comes up with a dollar or two that is graciously accepted. Now he can walk away freely, and he does, "gift" in hand, until he encounters a waste container—where he throws the flower.

Purely by accident, I happened to witness a scene that demonstrates that the Krishnas know very well how frequently their gifts are unwanted by the people who receive them. While spending a day observing a soliciting Krishna group at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport a few years ago, I noticed that one of the group members would frequently leave the central area and return with more flowers to resupply her companions. As it happened, I had decided to take a break just as she was leaving on one of her supply missions. Having nowhere to go, I followed. Her journey turned out to be a garbage route. She went from trash can to trash can beyond the immediate area to retrieve all the flowers that had been discarded by Krishna targets. She then returned with the cache of recovered flowers (some that had been recycled who knows how many times) and distributed them to be profitably cycled through the reciprocation process once more. The thing that really impressed me about all this was that most of the discarded flowers had brought donations from the people who had cast them away. The nature of the reciprocity rule is such that a gift so unwanted that it was jettisoned at the first opportunity had nonetheless been effective and exploitable.

The ability of uninvited gifts to produce feelings of obligation is recognized by a variety of organizations besides the Krishnas. How many times have each of us received small gifts through the mail—personalized address labels, greeting cards, key rings—from charity agencies that ask for funds in an accompanying note? I have received five in just the past year, two from disabled veterans' groups and the others from missionary schools or hospitals. In each case, there was a common thread in the accompanying message. The goods that were enclosed were to be considered a gift from the organization; and any money I wished to send should not be regarded as payment but rather as a return offering. As the letter from one of the missionary programs stated, the packet of greeting cards I had been sent was not to be directly paid for, but was designed "to encourage your kindness." If we look past the obvious tax advantage, we can see a reason why it would be beneficial for the organization to have the cards viewed as a gift instead of merchandise: There is a strong cultural pressure to reciprocate a gift, even an unwanted one; but there is no such pressure to purchase an unwanted commercial product.

The Rule Can Trigger Unfair Exchanges

There is yet one other feature of the reciprocity rule that allows it to be exploited for profit. Paradoxically, the rule developed to promote equal exchanges between partners, yet it can be used to bring about decidedly unequal results. The rule demands that one sort of action be reciprocated with a similar sort of action. A favor is to be met with another favor; it is not to be met with neglect, and certainly not with attack. But within the similar-action boundaries, considerable flexibility is allowed. A small initial favor can produce a sense of obligation to agree to a substantially larger return favor. Since, as we have already seen, the rule allows one person to choose the nature of the indebting first favor *and* the nature of the debt-canceling return favor, we could easily be manipulated into an unfair exchange by those who might wish to exploit the rule.

Once again, we can turn to the Regan experiment for evidence. Remember in that study that Joe gave one group of subjects a bottle of Coca-Cola as an initiating gift and later asked all subjects to buy some of his raffle tickets at twenty-five cents apiece. What I have so far neglected to mention is that the study was done in the late 1960s, when the price of a Coke was a dime. The average subject who had been given a ten-cent drink bought two of Joe's raffle tickets, although some bought as many as seven. Even if we look just at the average subject, though, we can tell that Joe made quite a deal. A 500 percent return on investment is respectable indeed!

But in Joe's case, even a 500 percent return amounted to only fifty cents. Can the reciprocity rule produce meaningfully large differences in the sizes of the exchanged favors? Under the right circumstances, it certainly can. Take, for instance, the account of a student of mine concerning a day she remembers ruefully:

> About one year ago, I couldn't start my car. As I was sitting there, a guy in the parking lot came over and eventually jump-started the car. I said thanks, and he said you're welcome; as he was leaving, I said that if he ever needed a favor to stop by. About a month later, the guy knocked on my door and asked to borrow my car for two hours as his was in the shop. I felt somewhat obligated but uncertain, since the car was pretty new and he looked very young. Later, I found out that he was underage and had no insurance. Anyway, I lent him the car. He totaled it.

How could it happen that an intelligent young woman would agree to turn over her new car to a virtual stranger (and a youngster at that)

because he had done her a small favor a month earlier? Or, more generally, why should it be that small first favors often stimulate larger return favors? One important reason concerns the clearly unpleasant character of the feeling of indebtedness. Most of us find it highly disagreeable to be in a state of obligation. It weighs heavily on us and demands to be removed. It is not difficult to trace the source of this feeling. Because reciprocal arrangements are so vital in human social systems, we have been conditioned to be uncomfortable when beholden. If we were to ignore breezily the need to return another's initial favor, we would stop one reciprocal sequence dead and would make it less likely that our benefactor would do such favors in the future. Neither event is in the best interests of society. Consequently, we are trained from childhood to chafe, emotionally, under the saddle of obligation. For this reason alone, then, we may be willing to agree to perform a larger favor than we received, merely to relieve ourselves of the psychological burden of debt.

But there is another reason as well. A person who violates the reciprocity rule by accepting without attempting to return the good acts of others is actively disliked by the social group. The exception, of course, is when the person is prevented from repayment by reasons of circumstance or ability. For the most part, however, there is a genuine distaste for individuals who fail to conform to the dictates of the reciprocity rule.[8] Moocher and welsher are unsavory labels to be scrupulously shunned. So undesirable are they that we will sometimes agree to an unequal exchange in order to dodge them.

In combination, the reality of internal discomfort and the possibility of external shame can produce a heavy psychological cost. When seen in the light of this cost, it is not so puzzling that we will often give back more than we have received in the name of reciprocity. Neither is it so odd that, as was shown in an experiment conducted at the University of Pittsburgh, people will often avoid asking for a needed favor if they will not be in a position to repay it. The psychological cost may simply outweigh the material loss.

The risk of still other kinds of losses may also persuade people to decline certain gifts and benefits. Women frequently comment on the uncomfortable sense of obligation they can feel to return the favors of a man who has given them an expensive present or paid for a costly evening out. Even something as small as the price of a drink can produce a feeling of debt. A student in one of my classes expressed it quite plainly in a paper she wrote: "After learning the hard way, I no longer let a guy I meet in a club buy my drinks because I don't want either of us to feel that I am obligated sexually." Research suggests that there is a basis for her concern. If, instead of paying for them herself, a woman

allows a man to buy her drinks, she is immediately judged (by both men and women) as more sexually available to him.[9]

RECIPROCAL CONCESSIONS

There is a second way to employ the reciprocity rule to get someone to comply with a request. It is more subtle than the direct route of providing that person with a favor and then asking for one in return; yet in some ways it is more devastatingly effective than the straightforward approach. A personal experience I had a few years ago gave me firsthand evidence of just how well this compliance technique works.

I was walking down the street when I was approached by an eleven- or twelve-year-old boy. He introduced himself and said that he was selling tickets to the annual Boy Scouts circus to be held on the upcoming Saturday night. He asked if I wished to buy any at five dollars apiece. Since one of the last places I wanted to spend Saturday evening was with the Boy Scouts, I declined. "Well," he said, "if you don't want to buy any tickets, how about buying some of our big chocolate bars? They're only a dollar each." I bought a couple and, right away, realized that something noteworthy had happened. I knew that to be the case because: (a) I do not like chocolate bars; (b) I do like dollars; (c) I was standing there with two of his chocolate bars; and (d) he was walking away with two of my dollars.

To try to understand precisely what had happened, I went to my office and called a meeting of my research assistants. In discussing the situation, we began to see how the reciprocity rule was implicated in my compliance with the request to buy the candy bars. The general rule says that a person who acts in a certain way toward us is entitled to a similar return action. We have already seen that one consequence of the rule is an obligation to repay favors we have received. Another consequence of the rule, however, is an obligation to make a concession to someone who has made a concession to us. As my research group thought about it, we realized that was exactly the position the Boy Scout had put me in. His request that I purchase some one-dollar chocolate bars had been put in the form of a concession on his part; it was presented as a retreat from his request that I buy some five-dollar tickets. If I were to live up to the dictates of the reciprocation rule, there had to be a concession on my part. As we have seen, there was such a concession: I changed from noncompliant to compliant when he changed from a larger to a smaller request, even though I was not really interested in *either* of the things he offered.

It was a classic example of how a weapon of automatic influence can infuse a compliance request with its power. I had been moved to buy

something not because of any favorable feelings toward the item, but because the purchase request had been presented in a way that drew force from the reciprocity rule. It had not mattered that I do not like chocolate bars; the Boy Scout had made a concession to me, *click*, and, *whirr*, I responded with a concession of my own. Of course, the tendency to reciprocate a concession is not so strong that it will invariably work in all instances on all people; none of the weapons of influence considered in this book is *that* strong. However, in my exchange with the Boy Scout, the tendency had been sufficiently potent to leave me in mystified possession of a pair of unwanted and overpriced candy bars.

Why should I feel a strain to reciprocate a concession? The answer rests once again in the benefit of such a tendency to the society. It is in the interests of any human group to have its members working together toward the achievement of common goals. However, in many social interactions the participants begin with requirements and demands that are unacceptable to one another. Thus the society must arrange to have these initial, incompatible desires set aside for the sake of socially beneficial cooperation. This is accomplished through procedures that promote compromise. Mutual concession is one important such procedure.

The reciprocation rule brings about mutual concession in two ways. The first is obvious. It pressures the recipient of an already-made concession to respond in kind. The second, while not so obvious, is pivotally important. Just as in the case of favors, gifts, or aid, the obligation to reciprocate a concession encourages the creation of socially desirable arrangements by ensuring that anyone seeking to *start* such an arrangement will not be exploited. After all, if there were no social obligation to reciprocate a concession, who would want to make the first sacrifice? To do so would be to risk giving up something and getting nothing back. However, with the rule in effect, we can feel safe making the first sacrifice to our partner, who is obligated to offer a return sacrifice.

Because the rule for reciprocation governs the compromise process, it is possible to use an initial concession as part of a highly effective compliance technique. The technique is a simple one that we can call the rejection-then-retreat technique. Suppose you want me to agree to a certain request. One way to increase your chances would be first to make a larger request of me, one that I will most likely turn down. Then, after I have refused, you would make the smaller request that you were really interested in all along. Provided that you have structured your requests skillfully, I should view your second request as a concession to me and should feel inclined to respond with a concession of my own,

the only one I would have immediately open to me—compliance with your second request.

Was that how the Boy Scout got me to buy his candy bars? Was his retreat from the five-dollar request to the one-dollar request an artificial one that was intentionally designed to sell candy bars? As one who has still refused to discard even his first Scout merit badge, I genuinely hope not. But whether or not the large-request-then-smaller-request sequence was planned, its effect was the same, It worked. And because it works, the rejection-then-retreat technique can and will be used *purposely* by certain people to get their way. First let's examine how this tactic can be used as a reliable compliance device. Later we will see how it is already being used. Finally we can turn to a pair of little-known features of the technique that make it one of the most pervasively influential compliance tactics available.

Remember that after my encounter with the Boy Scout, I called my research assistants together to try to understand what had happened to me and, as it turned out, to eat the evidence. Actually, we did more than that. We designed an experiment to test the effectiveness of the procedure of moving to a desired request after a larger preliminary request had been refused. We had two primary purposes in conducting the experiment. First, we wanted to see whether this procedure worked on people besides myself. That is, it certainly seemed that the tactic had been effective when tried on me earlier in the day; but then, I have a history of falling for compliance tricks of all sorts. So the question remained, Does the rejection-then-retreat technique work on enough people to make it a useful procedure for gaining compliance? If so, it would definitely be something to be aware of in the future.

Our second reason for doing the study was to determine how powerful a compliance device the technique was. Could it bring about compliance with a genuinely sizable request? In other words, did the *smaller* request to which the requester retreated have to be a *small* request? If our thinking about what caused the technique to be effective was correct, the second request did not actually have to be small; it only had to be smaller than the initial one. It was our suspicion that the critical thing about a requester's retreat from a larger to a smaller favor was its appearance as a concession. So the second request could be an objectively large one—as long as it was smaller than the first request—and the technique would still work.

After a bit of thought, we decided to try the technique on a request that we felt few people would agree to perform. Posing as representatives of the "County Youth Counseling Program," we approached college students walking on campus and asked if they would be willing to chaperon a group of juvenile delinquents on a day trip to the zoo. The

idea of being responsible for a group of juvenile delinquents of unspecified age for hours in a public place without pay was hardly an inviting one for these students. As we expected, the great majority (83 percent) refused. Yet we obtained very different results from a similar sample of college students who were asked the very same question with one difference. Before we invited them to serve as unpaid chaperons on the zoo trip, we asked them for an even larger favor—to spend two hours per week as a counselor to a juvenile delinquent for a minimum of two years. It was only after they refused this extreme request, as all did, that we made the smaller, zoo-trip request. By presenting the zoo trip as a retreat from our initial request, our success rate increased dramatically. Three times as many of the students approached in this manner volunteered to serve as zoo chaperons.[10]

Be assured that any strategy able to triple the percentage of compliance with a substantial request (from 17 percent to 50 percent in our experiment) will be frequently employed in a variety of natural settings. Labor negotiators, for instance, often use the tactic of beginning with extreme demands that they do not actually expect to win but from which they can retreat in a series of seeming concessions designed to draw real concessions from the opposing side. It would appear, then, that the larger the initial request, the more effective the procedure, since there would be more room available for illusory concessions. This is true only up to a point, however. Research conducted at Bar-Ilan University in Israel on the rejection-then-retreat technique shows that if the first set of demands is so extreme as to be seen as unreasonable, the tactic backfires.[11] In such cases, the party who has made the extreme first request is not seen to be bargaining in good faith. Any subsequent retreat from that wholly unrealistic initial position is not viewed as a genuine concession and thus is not reciprocated. The truly gifted negotiator, then, is one whose initial position is exaggerated enough to allow for a series of reciprocal concessions that will yield a desirable final offer from the opponent, yet is not so outlandish as to be seen as illegitimate from the start.

It seems that certain of the most successful television producers, such as Grant Tinker and Gary Marshall, are masters of this art in their negotiations with network censors. In a candid interview with *TV Guide* writer Dick Russell, both admitted to "deliberately inserting lines into scripts that a censor's sure to ax" so that they could then retreat to the lines they really wanted included. Marshall appears especially active in this regard. Consider, for example, the following quotes from Russell's article:

> But Marshall…not only admits his tricks…he seems to revel in them. On one episode of his [then] top-rated *Laverne and Shirley* series, for example, he says, "We had a situation where Squiggy's in a rush to get out of his apartment and meet some girls upstairs. He says: 'Will you hurry up before I lose my lust?' But in the script we put something even stronger, knowing the censors would cut it. They did; so we asked innocently, well, how about 'lose my lust'? 'That's good,' they said. Sometimes you gotta go at 'em backward."
>
> On the *Happy Days* series, the biggest censorship fight was over the word "virgin." That time, says Marshall, "I knew we'd have trouble, so we put the word in seven times, hoping they'd cut six and keep one. It worked. We used the same pattern again with the word 'pregnant.'"[12]

I witnessed another form of the rejection-then-retreat technique in my investigations of door-to-door sales operations. These organizations used a less engineered, more opportunistic version of the tactic. Of course, the most important goal for a door-to-door salesperson is to make the sale. However, the training programs of each of the companies I investigated emphasized that a second important goal was to obtain from prospects the names of referrals—friends, relatives, or neighbors on whom we could call. For a variety of reasons we will discuss in Chapter 5, the percentage of successful door-to-door sales increases impressively when the sales operator is able to mention the name of a familiar person who "recommended" the sales visit.

Never as a sales trainee was I taught to get the sales pitch refused so that I could then retreat to a request for referrals. In several such programs, though, I was trained to take advantage of the opportunity to secure referrals offered by a customer's purchase refusal: "Well, if it is your feeling that a fine set of encyclopedias is not right for you at this time, perhaps you could help me by giving me the names of some others who might wish to take advantage of our company's great offer. What would be the names of some of these people you know?" Many individuals who would not otherwise subject their friends to a high-pressure sales presentation do agree to supply referrals when the request is presented as a concession from a purchase request they have just refused.

We have already discussed one reason for the success of the rejection-then-retreat technique—its incorporation of the reciprocity rule. This larger-then-smaller-request strategy is effective for a pair of other reasons as well. The first concerns the perceptual contrast principle we

encountered in Chapter 1. That principle accounted for, among other things, the tendency of a man to spend more money on a sweater following his purchase of a suit than before: After being exposed to the price of the large item, the price of the less expensive one *appears* smaller by comparison. In the same way, the larger-then-smaller-request procedure makes use of the contrast principle by making the smaller request look even smaller by comparison with the larger one. If I want you to lend me five dollars, I can make it seem like a smaller request by first asking you to lend me ten dollars. One of the beauties of this tactic is that by first requesting ten dollars and then retreating to five dollars, I will have simultaneously engaged the force of the reciprocity rule and the contrast principle. Not only will my five-dollar request be viewed as a concession to be reciprocated, it will also look to you like a smaller request than if I had just asked for it straightaway.

In combination, the influences of reciprocity and perceptual contrast can present a fearsomely powerful force. Embodied in the rejection-then-retreat sequence, their conjoined energies are capable of genuinely astonishing effects. It is my feeling that they provide the only really plausible explanation of one of the most baffling political actions of our time: the decision to break into the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee that led to the ruin of Richard Nixon's presidency. One of the participants in that decision, Jeb Stuart Magruder, upon first hearing that the Watergate burglars had been caught, responded with appropriate bewilderment, "How could we have been so stupid?" Indeed, how?

To understand how enormously ill conceived an idea it was for the Nixon administration to undertake the break-in, it is necessary to review a few facts:

- The idea was that of G. Gordon Liddy, who was in charge of intelligence-gathering operations for the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP). Liddy had gained a reputation among administration higher-ups as something of a flake, and there were questions about his stability and judgment.
- Liddy's proposal was extremely costly, requiring a budget of $250,000 in untraceable cash.
- In late March, when the proposal was approved in a meeting of the CRP director, John Mitchell, and his assistants Magruder and Frederick LaRue, the outlook for a Nixon victory in the November election could not have been brighter. Edmund Muskie, the only announced candidate the early polls had given a chance of unseating the President, had done poorly in the primaries. It looked very much as though

the most defeatable candidate, George McGovern, would win his party's nomination. A Republican victory seemed assured.
- The break-in plan itself was a highly risky operation requiring the participation and discretion of ten men.
- The Democratic National Committee and its chairman, Lawrence O'Brien, whose Watergate office was to be burglarized and bugged, had no information damaging enough to defeat the incumbent President. Nor were they likely to get any, unless the administration did something *very, very* foolish.

Despite the obvious counsel of the above reasons, the expensive, chancy, pointless, and potentially calamitous proposal of a man whose judgment was known to be questionable was approved. How could it be that intelligent men of the attainment of Mitchell and Magruder would do something so *very, very* foolish? Perhaps the answer lies in a little-discussed fact: The $250,000 plan they approved was not Liddy's first proposal. In fact, it represented a significant concession on his part from two earlier proposals, of immense proportions. The first of these plans, made two months earlier in a meeting with Mitchell, Magruder, and John Dean, described a $I million program that included (in addition to the bugging of the Watergate) a specially equipped communications "chase plane," break-ins, kidnapping and mugging squads, and a yacht featuring "high-class call girls" to blackmail Democratic politicians. A second Liddy plan, presented a week later to the same group of Mitchell, Magruder, and Dean, eliminated some of the program and reduced the cost to $500,000. It was only after these initial proposals had been rejected by Mitchell that Liddy submitted his "bare-bones" $250,000 plan, in this instance to Mitchell, Magruder, and Frederick LaRue. This time the plan, still stupid but less so than the previous ones, was approved.

Could it be that I, a longtime patsy, and John Mitchell, a hardened and canny politician, might both have been so easily maneuvered into bad deals by the same compliance tactic—I by a Boy Scout selling candy, and he by a man selling political disaster?

If we examine the testimony of Jeb Magruder, considered by most Watergate investigators to provide the most faithful account of the crucial meeting at which Liddy's plan was finally accepted, there are some instructive clues. First, Magruder reports that "no one was particularly overwhelmed with the project"; but "after starting at the grandiose sum of $1 million, we thought that probably $250,000 would be an acceptable figure…. We were reluctant to send him away with nothing." Mitchell, caught up in the "feeling that we should leave Liddy a little something…signed off on it in the sense of saying, 'Okay, let's give him a quarter of a million dollars and let's see what he can come up with.'"

In the context of Liddy's initial extreme requests, it seems that "a quarter of a million dollars" had come to be "a little something" to be left as a return concession. With the clarity afforded by hindsight, Magruder has recalled Liddy's approach in as succinct an illustration of the rejection-then-retreat technique as I have ever heard. "If he had come to us at the outset and said, 'I have a plan to burglarize and wiretap Larry O'Brien's office,' we might have rejected the idea out of hand. Instead he came to us with his elaborate call-girl/kidnapping/mugging/sabotage/wiretapping scheme…. He had asked for the whole loaf when he was quite content to settle for half or even a quarter."[13]

It is also instructive that, although he finally deferred to his boss's decision, only one member of the group, Frederick LaRue, expressed any direct opposition to the proposal. Saying with obvious common sense, "I don't think it's worth the risk," he must have wondered why his colleagues Mitchell and Magruder did not share his perspective. Of course, there could be many differences between LaRue and the other two men that may have accounted for their differing opinions regarding the advisability of Liddy's plan. But one stands out: Of the three, only LaRue had not been present at the prior two meetings, where Liddy had outlined his much more ambitious programs. Perhaps, then, only LaRue was able to see the third proposal for the clunker that it was and to react to it objectively, uninfluenced by the reciprocity and perceptual contrast forces acting upon the others.

A bit earlier we said that the rejection-then-retreat technique had, in addition to the reciprocity rule, a pair of other factors working in its favor. We have already discussed the first of those factors, the perceptual contrast principle. The additional advantage of the technique is not really a psychological principle, as in the case of the other two factors; it is more of a purely structural feature of the request sequence. Let's once again say that I wish to borrow five dollars from you. By beginning with a ten-dollar request, I really can't lose. If you agree to it, I will have gotten twice the amount from you I would have settled for. If, on the other hand, you turn down my initial request, I can retreat to the five-dollar favor that I desired from the outset and, through the action of the reciprocity and contrast principles, greatly enhance my likelihood of success. Either way, I benefit; it's a case of heads I win, tails you lose.

The clearest utilization of this aspect of the larger-then-smaller-request sequence occurs in the retail-store sales practice of "talking the top of the line." Here the prospect is invariably shown the deluxe model first. If the customer buys, there is frosting on the store's cake. However, if the customer declines, the salesperson effectively counteroffers with a

more reasonably priced model. Some proof of the effectiveness of this procedure comes from a report in *Sales Management* magazine, reprinted without comment in *Consumer Reports:*

> If you were a billiard-table dealer, which would you advertise—the $329 model or the $3,000 model? The chances are you would promote the low-priced item and hope to trade the customer up when he comes to buy. But G. Warren Kelley, new business promotion manager at Brunswick, says you could be wrong…. To prove his point, Kelley has actual sales figures from a representative store…. During the first week, customers…were shown the low end of the line…and then encouraged to consider more expensive models—the traditional trading-up approach…. The average table sale that week was $550…. However, during the second week, customers…were led instantly to a $3,000 table, regardless of what they wanted to see…and then allowed to shop the rest of the line, in declining order of price and quality. The result of selling down was an average sale of over $1,000.[14]

Given the remarkable effectiveness of the rejection-then-retreat technique, one might think that there could be a substantial disadvantage as well. The victims of the strategy might resent having been cornered into compliance. The resentment could show itself in a couple of ways. First, the victim might decide not to live up to the verbal agreement made with the requester. Second, the victim might come to distrust the manipulative requester, deciding never to deal with him again. If either or both of these events occurred with any frequency, a requester would want to give serious second thought to the use of the rejection-then-retreat procedure. Research indicates, however, that these victim reactions do not occur with increased frequency when the rejection-then-retreat technique is used. Somewhat astonishingly, it appears that they actually occur *less* frequently! Before trying to understand why this is the case, let's first look at the evidence.

A study published in Canada throws light on the question of whether a victim of the rejection-then-retreat tactic will follow through with the agreement to perform the requester's second favor. In addition to recording whether target persons said yes or no to the desired request (to work for two unpaid hours one day in a community mental-health agency), this experiment also recorded whether they showed up to perform their duties as promised. As usual, the procedure of starting with a larger request (to volunteer for two hours of work per week in the agency for at least two years) produced more verbal agreement to the smaller retreat request (76 percent) than did the procedure of asking for the smaller request alone (29 percent). The important result, though,

concerned the show-up rate *of those who volunteered;* and, again, the rejection-then-retreat procedure was the more effective one (85 percent vs. 50 percent).[15]

A different experiment examined whether the rejection-then-retreat sequence caused victims to feel so manipulated that they would refuse any further requests. In this study, the targets were college students who were each asked to give a pint of blood as part of the annual campus blood drive. One group of targets was first asked to give a pint of blood every six weeks for a minimum of three years. The other targets were asked only to give the single pint of blood. Those of both groups who agreed to give a pint of blood and who later appeared at the blood center were then asked if they would be willing to give their phone numbers so they could be called upon to donate again in the future. Nearly all the students who were about to give a pint of blood as a result of the rejection-then-retreat technique agreed to donate again later (84 percent), while less than half of the other students who appeared at the blood center did so (43 percent). Even for future favors, the rejection-then-retreat strategy proved superior.[16]

Strangely enough, then, it seems that the rejection-then-retreat tactic spurs people not only to agree to a desired request but actually to carry out the request and, finally, to volunteer to perform further requests. What could there be about the technique that makes people who have been duped into compliance so bewilderingly likely to continue to comply? For an answer, we might look at the requester's act of concession, which is the heart of the procedure. We have already seen that as long as it is not viewed to be a transparent trick, the concession will likely stimulate a return concession. But what we have not yet examined is a little-known pair of positive by-products of the act of concession: feelings of greater responsibility for, and satisfaction with, the arrangement. It is this set of sweet side effects that enables the technique to move its victims to fulfill their agreements and to engage in further such agreements.

The desirable side effects of making a concession during an interaction with another person are nicely shown in studies of the way people bargain with each other. One experiment, conducted by social psychologists at UCLA, offers an especially apt demonstration.[17] A subject in that study faced a "negotiation opponent" and was told to bargain with the opponent concerning how to divide between themselves a certain amount of money provided by the experimenters. The subject was also informed that if no mutual agreement could be reached after a certain period of bargaining, no one would get any money. Unknown to the subjects, the opponent was really an experimental assistant who had

been previously instructed to bargain with the subject in one of three ways. With some of the subjects, the opponent made an extreme first demand, assigning virtually all of the money to himself, and stubbornly persisted in that demand throughout the negotiations. With another group of subjects, the opponent began with a demand that was moderately favorable to himself; he, too, steadfastly refused to move from that position during the negotiations. With a third group, the opponent began with the extreme demand and then gradually retreated to the more moderate one during the course of the bargaining.

There were three important findings in this experiment that help us to understand why the rejection-then-retreat technique is so effective. First, compared to the two other approaches, the strategy of starting with an extreme demand and then retreating to the more moderate one produced the most money for the person using it. But this result is not very surprising in light of the previous evidence we have seen of the power of larger-then-smaller-request tactics to bring about profitable agreements. It is the two additional findings of the study that are more striking.

Responsibility. Those subjects facing the opponent who used the retreating strategy felt most responsible for the final deal. Much more than the subjects who faced a nonchanging negotiation opponent, these subjects reported that they had successfully influenced the opponent to take less money for himself. Of course, we know that they hadn't done any such thing. The experimenter had instructed their opponent to retreat gradually from his initial demand no matter what the subjects did. But it appeared to these subjects that they had made the opponent change, that they had *produced* his concessions. The result was that they felt more responsible for the final outcome of the negotiations. It does not require much of a leap from this finding to clarify the previous mystery of why the rejection-then-retreat technique causes its targets to live up to their agreements with such astounding frequency. The requester's concession within the technique not only causes targets to say yes more often, it also causes them to feel more responsible for having "dictated" the final agreement. Thus the uncanny ability of the rejection-then-retreat technique to make its targets meet their commitments becomes understandable: A person who feels responsible for the terms of a contract will be more likely to live up to that contract.

Satisfaction. Even though, on the average, they gave the most money to the opponent who used the concessions strategy, the subjects who were the targets of this strategy were the most satisfied with the final arrangement. It appears that an agreement that has been forged through the concessions of one's opponent is quite satisfying. With this in mind, we can begin to explain the second previously puzzling feature of the

rejection-then-retreat tactic—the ability to prompt its victims to agree to further requests. Since the tactic uses a concession to bring about compliance, the victim is likely to feel more satisfied with the arrangement as a result. And it stands to reason that people who are satisfied with a given arrangement are more likely to be willing to agree to further such arrangements.

HOW TO SAY NO

When up against a requester who employs the rule for reciprocation, you and I face a formidable foe. Whether by presenting us with an initial favor or initial concession, the requester will have enlisted a powerful ally in the campaign for our compliance. At first glance, our fortunes in such a situation would appear dismal. We could comply with the requester's wish and, in so doing, succumb to the reciprocity rule. Or, we could refuse to comply and thereby suffer the brunt of the rule's force upon our deeply conditioned feelings of fairness and obligation. Surrender or suffer heavy casualties. Cheerless prospects indeed.

Fortunately, these are not our only choices. With the proper understanding of the nature of our opponent, we can come away from the compliance battlefield unhurt and sometimes even better off than before. It is essential to recognize that the requester who invokes the reciprocation rule (or any other weapon of influence) to gain our compliance is not the real opponent. Such a requester has chosen to become a jujitsu warrior who aligns himself with the sweeping power of reciprocation and then merely releases that power by providing a first favor or concession. The real opponent is the rule. If we are not to be abused by it, we must take steps to defuse its energy.

But how does one go about neutralizing the effect of a social rule like that for reciprocation? It seems too widespread to escape and too strong to overpower once it is activated. Perhaps the answer, then, is to prevent its activation. Perhaps we can avoid a confrontation with the rule by refusing to allow the requester to commission its force against us in the first place. Perhaps by rejecting the requester's initial favor or concession to us, we can evade the problem. Perhaps; but then, perhaps not. Invariably declining the requester's initial offer of a favor or sacrifice works better in theory than in practice. The major problem is that when it is first presented, it is difficult to know whether such an offer is honest or whether it is the initial step in an exploitation attempt. If we always assume the worst, it would not be possible to receive the benefits of any legitimate favors or concessions offered by individuals who had no intention of exploiting the reciprocity rule.

I have a colleague who remembers with anger how his ten-year-old

daughter's feelings were terribly hurt by a man whose method of avoiding the jaws of the reciprocity rule was to refuse abruptly her kindness. The children of her class were hosting an open house at school for their grandparents, and her job was to give a flower to each visitor entering the school grounds. But the first man she approached with a flower growled at her, "Keep it." Not knowing what to do, she extended it toward him again only to have him demand to know what he had to give in return. When she replied weakly, "Nothing. It's a gift," he fixed her with a disbelieving glare, insisted that he recognized "her game," and brushed on past. The girl was so stung by the experience that she could not approach anyone else and had to be removed from her assignment—one she had anticipated fondly. It is hard to know whom to blame more here, the insensitive man or the exploiters who had abused his mechanical tendency to reciprocate a gift until his response had soured to a mechanical refusal. No matter whom you find more blameworthy, the lesson is clear. We will always encounter authentically generous individuals as well as many people who try to play fairly by the reciprocity rule rather than to exploit it. They will doubtless become insulted by someone who consistently rejects their efforts; social friction and isolation could well result. A policy of blanket rejection, then, seems ill advised.

Another solution holds more promise. It advises us to accept the desirable first offers of others but to accept those offers only for what they fundamentally are, not for what they are represented to be. If a person offers us a nice favor, let's say, we might well accept, recognizing that we have obligated ourselves to a return favor sometime in the future. To engage in this sort of arrangement with another is not to be exploited by that person through the rule for reciprocation. Quite the contrary; it is to participate fairly in the "honored network of obligation" that has served us so well, both individually and societally, from the dawn of humanity. However, if the initial favor turns out to be a device, a trick, an artifice designed specifically to stimulate our compliance with a larger return favor, that is a different story. Here our partner is not a benefactor but a profiteer. And it is here that we should respond to his action on precisely those terms. Once we have determined that his initial offer was not a favor but a compliance tactic, we need only react to it accordingly to be free of its influence. As long as we perceive and define his action as a compliance device instead of a favor, he no longer has the reciprocation rule as an ally: The rule says that favors are to be met with favors; it does not require that tricks be met with favors.

A practical example may make things more concrete. Let's suppose that a woman phoned one day and introduced herself as a member of

the Home Fire Safety Association in your town. Suppose she then asked if you would be interested in learning about home fire safety, having your house checked for fire hazards, and receiving a home fire extinguisher, all free of charge. Let's suppose further that you were interested in these things and made an evening appointment to have one of the Association's inspectors come over to provide them. When he arrived, he gave you a small hand extinguisher and began examining the possible fire hazards of your home. Afterward, he gave you some interesting, though frightening, information about general fire dangers, along with an assessment of your home's vulnerability. Finally, he suggested that you get a home fire-warning system and left.

Such a set of events is not implausible. Various cities and towns have nonprofit associations, usually made up of Fire Department personnel working on their own time, that provide free home fire-safety inspections of this sort. Were these events to occur, you would clearly have been done a favor by the inspector. In accordance with the reciprocation rule, you should stand more ready to provide a return favor if you were to see him in need of aid at some point in the future. An exchange of favors of this kind would be in the best tradition of the reciprocity rule.

A similar set of events with, however, a different ending would also be possible—in fact, more likely. Rather than leaving after recommending a fire-alarm system, the inspector would launch into a sales presentation intended to persuade you to buy an expensive, heat-triggered alarm system manufactured by the company he represented. Door-to-door home fire-alarm companies will frequently use this approach. Typically, their product, while effective enough, will be overpriced. Trusting that you will not be familiar with the retail costs of such a system and that, if you decide to buy one, you will feel obligated to the company that provided you with a free extinguisher and home inspection, these companies will pressure you for an immediate sale. Using this free-information-and-inspection gambit, fire-protection sales organizations have flourished around the country.[18]

If you were to find yourself in such a situation with the realization that the primary motive of the inspector's visit was to sell you a costly alarm system, your most effective next action would be a simple, private maneuver. It would involve the mental act of redefinition. Merely define whatever you have received from the inspector—extinguisher, safety information, hazard inspection—not as gifts, but as sales devices, and you will be free to decline (or accept) his purchase offer without even a tug from the reciprocity rule: A favor rightly follows a favor—not a piece of sales strategy. And if he subsequently responds to your refusal by proposing that you, at least, give him the names of some friends he might call on, use your mental maneuver on him again. Define his retreat