

Investor's Business Daily

Get A Grip On Influence

Whether you're the CEO, director or assistant, your success depends on an ability to influence others. There are tricks to getting others on your side. One is applying social science research to business, says psychologist Robert Cialdini.

"For example, the rule of reciprocity is a potent weapon," he told IBD. If you do someone a favor, he will feel indebted to you.

Cialdini, an Arizona State University professor who wrote "Influence: Science and Practice," lectures to groups such as IBM (NYSE:[IBM](#) - [News](#)), the Mayo Clinic and NATO. He and Jeff McAnarney, a vice president at VSR Financial Services, a Kansas City, Kan.-based broker-dealer for 275 representatives, share tips.

Use peer influence. Say you're in charge of implementing an initiative and you face resistance from a few old-timers who don't want change. Don't just repeat your message. This may have no effect.

Instead, ask employees who favor the changes and who've been with the company for decades to voice why they agree with management.

Cialdini suggests hosting a meeting and saying: "Some of you have expressed support for the message. Phil, you've been here for 20 years and seen a lot of change. Why do you like this initiative? Tell us."

By taking a public stand, Phil becomes more committed to it.

And Phil's message will sway other old-timers.

Do it first. Provide a solid deal to workers. They'll feel obliged to do the same. Give them early and accurate data they need for a project. Then ask, "Did that information help you?" They might say, "Thanks. I really appreciated it."

Respond by saying, "You're welcome. I know how much I appreciate it when you give me information a week before I need it."

Explain why. Suppose your hotel checkout time is noon, but you have nowhere to go until your 6 p.m. flight. Try saying, "I'd like to request an extended checkout of 3 p.m. because my flight doesn't leave for hours."

"You make it harder for people to turn you down," Cialdini said. "Requests with reasons are more powerful."

Hold off. Don't ask folks for their views at the start of a meeting.

If you want to change their convictions, make your arguments first and then ask for their positions.

Why? People want to appear consistent with the values, attitudes and behaviors they've already shared, and might stick to those initial views even if they like your points better.

Present the negatives. Research shows that potential loss is a stronger motivator than potential gain, McAnarney tells IBD.

Clarify what the company will lose if you don't take a certain opportunity. Explain to a worker that if he doesn't accomplish the task, he'll miss his chance for a promotion.

At many jobs, bosses often deliver compliments and then bad news. "But this has a negative impact," McAnarney said. "It has people waiting for the other shoe to drop."

On the job, McAnarney tries to criticize workers first and then compliment them.

"You discuss the problem and then help provide the solution," he said.