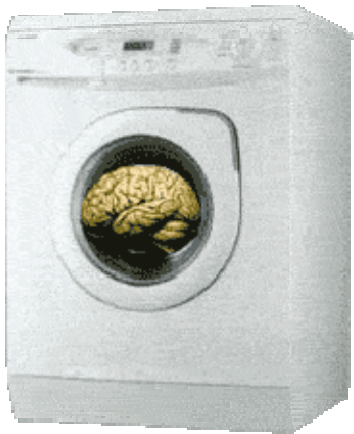


# SPOOKY ACTION

IT'S A PRODUCTIVE IRREVERENCE VS. BEST REST PRACTICES SMACKDOWN!

5/01/2007

## Commitment and Consistency



I know how to brainwash you. So does Charlie Munger, vice-chairman of Berkshire Hathaway. We both learned the secret from Prof. Robert Cialdini, who learned it from the Chinese. Would you like to know how it's done? I can teach you in about two minutes.

Have you read Prof. Cialdini's *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*? If you have, then you know what I'm talking about. If not, you've missed out on one of the most important lessons you'll ever learn. Don't believe me? Would Mr. Munger's strong recommendation be better? How about George Soros or Peter Lynch? They all

recommend the book. In fact, Mr. Munger gave a copy to *every single attendee* at a speech at Harvard, along with this admonition:

"And if you have half as much sense as I think you do, you will immediately order copies for all of your children and several of your friends. **You will never make a better investment.**"

At least click on the link above and check it out. I'll resume the post when you come back.

Cialdini outlines 6 tools of influence, which he formulated over a three year period by "infiltrating" influence peddling organizations such as used car dealerships and the Hare Krishnas, and by studying others, such as the brainwashing experts. During the Korean War the Chinese demonstrated that you didn't need special drugs to brainwash

American prisoners of war. Or special forms of torture. The only things they needed were patience and creativity.

And an understanding of the principle of Commitment and Consistency.

It turns out that your brain, consciously and subconsciously, works **VERY** hard to be consistent. How hard is very hard? One of Cialdini's experiments

### ABOUT ME



MIKE  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA,  
UNITED STATES

That's me and my wife  
at the bottom right of  
the photo; good thing  
my kids got their looks from my  
amazingly beautiful bride of 29  
years!

to test this principle consisted of having a student go to an affluent neighborhood and ask residents to display a 3" x 3" sign saying "Be a safe driver", which the majority of residents agreed to do. Three weeks later, he sent out another student to ask the residents with the small signs to display a larger sign:

"To get an idea of just how the sign would look, they were shown a photograph depicting an attractive house, the view of which was almost completely obscured by a very large, poorly lettered sign reading DRIVE CAREFULLY."

**76% of those affluent residents agreed to do it!** Because making the tiny commitment to campaigning for public safety with the smaller sign made their brains want to act in a consistent manner when asked to make a larger, ridiculous, but **consistent** commitment.

How you use this principle is up to you, but it can be used for good. Here is a handy example. Over at [Successful Blog](#), Liz Strauss asked an interesting [question](#):

*"A friend of yours, Larry, is larger than life. He seems to know everyone in the country and most of the folks online. He's rich and highly connected, especially in home and garden television. Once when you were in New York, he invited you to an event at the Waldorf where the entire industry seemed to be in attendance.*

*Larry is so busy in his world, that he doesn't seem to notice that you have attained some status. Your blog has gotten press, and you've become known as an expert. In fact, you're a celebrity and highly popular with the gardening set. You've written three books of your own and been interviewed by People, House and Garden, and Architectural Digest — not too shabby for a blogger. These days it's not unusual to get a short bit on the Today Show when they need an expert.*

*After many months, you finally can announce that you have a daily spot on a national home and garden television show. While you're reading the press release and formal announcement, Larry calls to congratulate you. Then he says how glad he is that he was able to help you land that job.*

*You're stunned. Larry didn't help. He's never met any of the people involved. You did it on your own.*

How do you respond?

The comments in Liz's post are fascinating, and got me asking myself "What would Cialdini do in that situation?" I thought about the 6 tools, and this is how I would respond (if I had an hour to craft my answer).

"Larry, it is an honor to have a luminary figure in our industry like you recognize the value of my work and act to advance it. Thank you."

Then I'd sit and wait for Larry's brain to process the fact that he'd made such a commitment, setting up a future opportunity for me to call on Larry to act in a consistent manner. And I'd wait for him to act in a consistent manner right now by telling me why he did it (his brain is feverishly if subconsciously crafting a reason for this in the silence), which only further strengthens the commitment!

That's why car sales people try to get you to make tiny commitments to making a car buying decision before they make the big ask, e.g.: "If you *were* to buy a car like this, would you prefer the cloth or leather seating?" And that's why the Chinese didn't start by asking P.O.W.s to renounce the United States, but rather by asking if they thought it was *possible* that the U.S. Government had ever made a mistake. Once they'd gotten a tiny seed of doubt to take root, they knew that with careful nurturing, they could turn even the strongest captive to their purpose.

My response to Larry uses another of the 6 tools, too. Did you catch it? It turns out that using 2 or more tools together geometrically multiplies their effectiveness! And people are using these tools on you every day. So if you haven't read the book, now would be a good time to [click on the link](#) and buy a copy.

If you *have* read the book, answer this question: which of the **other** five tools might Larry have been trying to use on me?

If you know, tell me in a comment. Not sure? Better [click on the link](#) and get a little refresher. ;-)