

# PSYCHOLOGY OF COMPLIANCE AND SALES TECHNIQUES

- KEVIN BREWER

Orsett Academic Monographs No.4

ISBN: 978-0-9540761-9-1

PUBLISHED BY

Orsett Psychological Services,  
PO Box 179,  
Grays,  
Essex  
RM16 3EW

PRINTED BY

Print-Trek,  
Upminster,  
Essex  
RM14 2AD

COPYRIGHT

Kevin Brewer 2002

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

All rights reserved. Apart from any use for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing of the publishers. In the case of reprographic reproduction only in accordance with the terms of the licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency in the UK, or in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the appropriate organization outside the UK.

# CONTENTS

	Page No.
INTRODUCTION	4
FACTORS AFFECTING COMPLIANCE	4
WHY DO PEOPLE COMPLY?	10
COMPLIANCE APPLIED TO SALES TECHNIQUE	10
FOOTNOTES	12
BIBLIOGRAPHY	12
Tables	
1 - Factors affecting compliance	4
2 - Results from Goldman (1986)	8
3 - Compliance-gaining strategies used in selling	11
Figures	
1 - That's-Not-All Technique	5
2 - Example of sign used by Freedman and Fraser (1966)	6
3 - Foot-in-the-Door Technique	6
4 - Door-in-the-Face Technique	7

## INTRODUCTION

Lippa (1994) defines compliance as "acceding to a request made by another person". This is the simplest form of social influence. It is the response to a request from another person. The requested person is not already doing that behaviour, nor would they necessarily want to do it.

Compliance can vary from an everyday request to get another person something through to advertising and sales techniques. Certainly with the latter, a lot of thought goes into how to request the person to buy a particular product. Face-to-face selling makes use of many of the factors affecting compliance.

Research has established that individuals often comply to everyday requests whether reasons are given or not for the request. Langer et al (1978) set up a series of requests to jump the queue to use a photocopier to make twenty copies. Compliance occurred on 1 in 4 occasions (with or without an explanation for why the person wanted to jump the queue). Interestingly, when the request was to jump the queue to make five copies, compliance was around 90%. There was no difference whether an explanation that made sense or not was given for jumping the queue.

Often giving in to social influence is painted as a negative thing or a sign of weakness, but it has everyday advantages for society. Flexibility to requests produces the give and take that allows society to function without conflicts. Imagine if nobody agreed to any requests.

## FACTORS AFFECTING COMPLIANCE

Whether an individual complies or not can be affected by different situational factors. Many of these factors are used as sales techniques, but they can be resisted. Table 1 lists the factors affecting compliance.

SELF ESTEEM  
TRANSGRESSION  
RECIPROCATATION  
FOOT-IN-THE DOOR TECHNIQUE  
DOOR-IN-THE FACE TECHNIQUE  
LOW-BALL TECHNIQUE  
POSITIVE MOODS  
INGRATIATION  
REACTANCE  
AUTHORITY  
CONSENSUS  
COMMITMENT

Table 1 - Factors affecting compliance.

## SELF ESTEEM

There is an inverse relationship between self-esteem and compliance. Apsler (1975) found that by lowering self-esteem, by getting people to say and do foolish things, resulted in a high level of compliance afterwards. This is probably as an attempt to recover loss of face.

## TRANSGRESSION

Wallace and Sadalla (1966) found that people caught in acts of wrong-doings complied more when asked, than those not caught.

## RECIPROCATION

There tends to be greater compliance from people who have been done a favour. For example, when driving, if you are let out by another driver, you are more likely to let someone else out. Certain groups make use of this tactic by giving a "free gift" before asking for a donation (eg: Society for Krishna Consciousness).

Applying this tactic to selling, it is called the "that's-not-all" technique (figure 1). The seller offers the product at a certain price. But before the buyer can agree or refuse, the price is lowered. Significantly more people take this product now than when the same price is offered straightaway. The buyer is reciprocating the apparent concession of the seller. This is used by many market traders who appear to keep reducing the prices as they talk to the buyers.

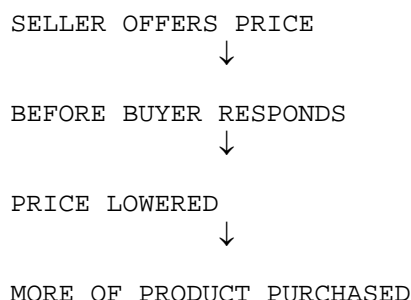


Figure 1 - "That's-Not-All Technique".

## FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR TECHNIQUE

A small request, that is accepted, followed by a large request can get greater compliance to the large request, than making the large request immediately

(figure 3).

Freedman and Fraser (1966) showed this technique at work in two experiments. The first experiment was set up in a small town in USA to see how many home-owners would display a large sign saying "Drive Carefully" in their gardens (figure 2). The control group were asked directly, and 17% agreed. There were two experimental groups in this field experiment. The first group was asked to display a small sign, then two weeks later asked to display the large sign. Of those who agreed to the small sign, 76% agreed to display the large sign. The second experimental group was asked to sign a petition about driving safely as the small request. Of those complying to this request, 50% complied to the large sign when asked later.



Figure 2 - Example of sign used by Freedman and Fraser (1966).

In Freedman and Fraser's second experiment, the large request was to get housewives to agree to five observers watch them use particular household products in their own homes for two hours. Around 50% of the women approached who agreed to the small request did comply to the large request. The small request was to fill out a detailed questionnaire about the household products.

Freedman and Fraser see the foot-in-the-door technique working because of the desire for consistency. Having complied with the small request, and attempting to be consistent with their self-image of being helpful, people feel compelled to go along with subsequent requests.

But this technique does not work if the first request appears too small or the second request too large.

SMALL REQUEST = AGREE



LARGE REQUEST = AGREE

Figure 3 - Foot-in-the-Door Technique.

## DOOR-IN-THE-FACE TECHNIQUE

This is the opposite to the foot-in-the-door technique. If a large request is refused, then a subsequent smaller request will be agreed (figure 4). But this only works if the same person makes both requests.

Cialdini et al (1975) asked college students to commit themselves to counsel a group of juvenile delinquents for two hours per week for two years. There was no agreement to this request. Then the students were asked to take the group of juvenile delinquents on a day trip to the zoo - 50% agreed. This compared to 17% in the control group, who were asked directly about the day trip.

The reason for the compliance here is once more impression management (1). People do not like to be thought of as inconsiderate and tend to agree to the second request to not appear too unhelpful.

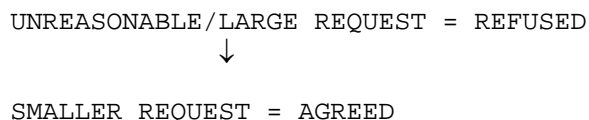


Figure 4 - Door-in-the-Face Technique.

## WHICH TECHNIQUE IS BETTER: FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR OR DOOR-IN-THE-FACE?

Cann et al (1975) compared the techniques of foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face for a request to distribute pamphlets, and found similar results between the two techniques. But the key was a delay between the requests or not.

Where there was no delay between the requests, approximately 80% agreed to help when the foot-in-the-door technique was used, and approximately 85% for the door-in-the-face technique. But where there was a delay between the requests, the figures for compliance were approximately 65% and 20% respectively. In other words, the foot-in-the-door technique is less affected by a delay between requests.

Goldman (1986) tested the two techniques with a more complex experiment. The target behaviour was a request to stuff 75 envelopes to help the Kansas City Zoo in a fund-raising campaign. The sample used were 380 participants phoned at random in the Kansas City area.

The easy request was to answer three questions; the moderate request was an extended phone interview; and the hard request was to be a phone interviewer of 150 people.

Table 2 shows the five different conditions of this field experiment, and the rates of compliance to the target behaviour.

A combination of both techniques proved most effective; ie: presenting two requests before the target request.

CONDITION	% COMPLIANCE	TECHNIQUE
Target behaviour only	22	control group
Moderate request only	/	control group
Easy then target	46	foot-in-the-door
Hard then target	42	door-in-the-face
Hard then moderate then target	57	combination

Table 2 - Results from Goldman (1986).

#### LOW-BALL TECHNIQUE

This technique makes use of a commitment to an initial request to increase subsequent compliance. For example, an individual agrees to buy a car with certain features. Later they are told that some of the features are not available, the individual still buys the car. In other words, people still comply after the commitment to comply, even when what they have complied to changes.

The low-ball technique works in selling because it creates the illusion of irreversibility about the original decision, and, in fact, less reputable sellers may emphasise this. There is also the anticipation of the reward by the purchaser, and they want to avoid disappointment. Or the purchaser may continue to believe that it is still a "good deal".

In an experiment with students, Cialdini et al (1978) asked them to take part in an experiment at 7am in the morning. Half of the students were told the time after agreeing to take part: 56% still agreed to comply (and 53% turned up). The other half of the students (control group) were told the time before agreeing. In this group, 31% agreed to take part (and 24% turned up).

Pallak et al (1980) made use of a real life situation for their experiment. The aim was to get Iowa residents to reduce their fuel consumption. They were told that those who did reduce consumption would have their names published in the local newspaper. This produced an overall reduction of 12%. The residents were then told that their names would not be in the newspaper. This produced a subsequent greater reduction in fuel



consumption. Cognitive dissonance (2) can be used to explain this behaviour.

#### POSITIVE MOODS

Making a request in a setting that creates a positive mood or the request from those we like are more likely to get compliance. The former is shown in advertising that attempts to make the viewer feel good. The latter is the technique used in "party selling": an individual invites their friends to their house to sell the items (rather than a stranger selling); eg: Tupperware, or Ann Summers.

#### INGRATIATION

Saying flattering things to the target before the request gets greater compliance.

#### REACTANCE

Get the target to comply by threatening their freedom of choice; eg: scarcity of the item. The sales techniques of "limited editions", "closing down sales", or "not many left" are examples of this factor.

#### AUTHORITY AND CONSENSUS

Following the lead of an expert, or that everybody else doing it. This latter factor is also linked to conformity to the majority. Thus the use of terms like "largest selling" or "fastest growing" by advertisers.

#### COMMITMENT

Cialdini (1993), who spent three years doing participant observations in the sales and advertising industries, talks of "foolish consistency". This is the tendency to avoid rethinking decisions once made (and thus commitment to past decisions). In other words, once individuals have complied, they continue to comply subsequently in the same situation, and do not assess each repeat situation as a new one.

Aronson et al (1999) prefer to call this "mindless conformity": "obeying internalised social norms without deliberating about one's actions" (p312).

Langer (1989) sent 40 secretaries at New York university a memo: "This paper is to be returned to Room

238 through inter-office mail" and left it unsigned. 90% of the secretaries returned the memo because their job involved following instructions without thinking. But when the same memo was signed: "Sincerely, John Lewis", which is unusual, only 60% of the secretaries returned the memo.

## WHY DO PEOPLE COMPLY?

The main reason that individuals comply, other than wanting to help the requester, is to maintain "face" (ie to give a good impression of themselves to the requester). It is this that is manipulated in selling. For example, the seller may suggest that not buying this product is a sign of being mean. Because most people are concerned about not appearing mean, they comply to the request. At one level, why does it matter if a complete stranger (the salesperson) thinks you are mean? What does it matter what they think of us?

The answer is that we are socialised into maintaining a good impression of ourselves. Known as impression management in social psychology. At another level, Western societies are based upon the idea of "good" and "bad" people, as much as the possessions we have. In other words, status in society comes from being seen in a positive light by others. There is the belief that "good people" succeed, and "bad people" don't. This is part of the "just world hypothesis" (3) (Lerner 1980).

## COMPLIANCE APPLIED TO SALES TECHNIQUES

Marwell and Schmitt (1967) list sixteen compliance-gaining strategies that can be used in selling (table 3)

STRATEGY	TECHNIQUE
1. Promise	compliance gains something desirable; eg: "you will be popular if you buy X"
2. Threat	compliance to avoid something undesirable; eg: "You will miss out if you don't buy X"
3. Positive expertise	expert tell you benefits of complying
4. Negative expertise	expert tell you disadvantages of not complying
5. Pre-giving	reward given before request; eg: Reader's Digest free entry to prize draw and details of book to buy (similar to reciprocation)
6. Aversive stimulation	continuous punishment only cease when comply; eg: dissatisfaction with life removed by purchasing X
7. Debt	indebted to requester; eg: companies sponsoring events or giving gifts to schools
8. Liking	compliments before request (similar to ingratiation)
9. Moral appeal	moral person would comply; eg: "caring person would give to this charity"
10. Positive self-feeling	compliance will make you feel better
11. Negative self-feeling	non-compliance will make you feel bad
12. Positive altercasting	person with "good qualities" would comply
13. Negative altercasting	only person with "bad qualities" would not comply
14. Altruism	compliance helps others
15. Positive esteem	people who you value will think highly of you if you comply
16. Negative esteem	people who you value will think bad of you if you don not comply

Table 3 - Compliance-gaining strategies used in selling.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Schlenker (1980) defines impression management as a "conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions".
2. Cognitive dissonance is an explanation put forward by Festinger (1957) to account for attitude changes. When two "cognitions" are inconsistent, the individual is motivated to resolve this.
3. The just world hypothesis is part of the process of making sense of events in the world that happen to others and to the self. It is a form of attributional bias. For Lerner and Miller (1978), "people have a need to believe that their environment is a just and orderly place where people usually get what they deserve".

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apsler, R (1975) Effects of embarrassment on behaviour towards others Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 32, 145-153
- Aronson, E; Wilson, T.D & Akert, R.M (1999) Social Psychology (3rd) New York: Longman
- Cann, A; Sherman, S & Elkes, R (1975) Effects of initial request size and timing of second request in compliance: foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 32, 774-782
- Cialdini, R.B (1993) Influence: Science and Practice (3rd ed) New York: Harper Collins
- Cialdini, R.B et al (1975) Reciprocal concessions procedure for inducing compliance: the door-in-the face technique Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 31, 206-215
- Cialdini, R.B et al (1978) Low-ball procedure for producing compliance: commitment then cost Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 36, 463-476
- Festinger, L (1957) A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance New York: Harper & Row
- Freedman, J.L & Fraser, S.C (1966) Compliance without pressure: the foot-in-the-door technique Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 4, 195-202
- Goldman, M (1986) Compliance employing a combined foot-in-the door and door-in-the face procedure Journal

of Social Psychology 126, 1, 111-116

Langer, E.J (1989) Minding matters: The consequences of mindlessness-mindfulness. In Berkowitz, L (ed) Advances in Experimental Social Psychology vol 22 San Diego, CA: Academic Press

Langer, E.J; Blank, A & Charnowitz, B (1978) The mindlessness of ostensibly thoughtful action Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 36, 635-642

Lerner, M.J (1980) The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion New York: Plenum Press

Lerner, M.J & Miller, D.J (1978) Just world hypothesis and the attribution process: looking back and looking ahead Psychological Bulletin 85, 1030-1051

Lippa, R.A (1994) Introduction to Social Psychology (2nd ed) Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole

Marwell, G & Schmitt, D.R (1967) Co-operation and interpersonal risk: cross-procedural generalisations Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 8, 594-599

Pallak, M.S; Cook, D & Sullivan, J (1980) Commitment and energy conservation. In Bickman, L (ed) Applied Social Psychology Annual vol 1 Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Schlenker, B (1980) Impression Management: The Self-Concept, Social Identity and Interpersonal Relations Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole

Wallace, J & Sadalla, E (1966) Behavioural consequences of transgressions: II. The effects of social recognition Journal of Experiment and Research in Personality 1, 187-194