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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

to this smaller request as what (it is hoped after reading this chapter) you recognize it to be—a compliance tactic. Once done, there would be no pressure to offer the names as a return concession, since his reduced request would not be viewed as a real concession. At this point, unhampered by an inappropriately triggered sense of obligation, you may once again be as compliant or noncompliant as you wish.

Provided you are so inclined, you might even turn his own weapon of influence against him. Recall that the rule for reciprocation entitles a person who has acted in a certain way to a dose of the same thing. If you have determined that the "fire inspector's" gifts were used, not as genuine gifts, but to make a profit from you, then you might want to use them to make a profit of your own. Simply take whatever the inspector is willing to provide—safety information, home extinguisher—thank him politely, and show him out the door. After all, the reciprocity rule asserts that if justice is to be done, exploitation attempts should be exploited.

READER'S REPORT
From a Former TV and Stereo Salesperson

"For quite a while, I worked for a major retailer in their Television and Stereo Department. Salespeople in this department are paid on a commission basis; however, continued employment was, and still is, based on the ability to sell service contracts rather than merchandise. Company policy was that, for every ten sales you made, you had to sell at least four service contracts. Failure to bring your service-contract sales up to expected levels for two consecutive months resulted in threats, relocation, or termination.

"Once I recognized the importance of meeting my sales-contract quota, I devised a plan that used the rejection-then-retreat technique, although I didn't know its name at the time: A customer had the opportunity to buy from one to three years' worth of service-contract coverage at the time of the sale. Most of the sales staff attempted just to sell a single-year policy. That was my intention as well, since a one-year contract counted just as much toward my quota as a three-year contract did. Initially, however, when making my sales pitch, I would advocate the longest and most expensive plan, realizing that most people would not be willing to spend that much (about $140). But this gave me an excellent opportunity later, after being rejected in my sincere attempt to sell the three-year plan, to retreat to the one-year extension and its relatively small $34.95 price, which I was thrilled to get. This proved highly effective, as I sold sales contracts to an average of seventy percent of my customers, who seemed very satisfied with the purchase while

others in my department clustered around forty percent. I never told anyone how I did it until now."

Notice how, as is usually the case, use of the rejection-then-retreat tactic engages the action of the contrast principle as well. Not only did the $140 initial request make the $34.95 request seem like a retreat, it made that second request seem smaller too.

Chapter 3

COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY

Hobgoblins of the Mind

It is easier to resist at the beginning than at the end.
—LEONARDO DA VINCI

A STUDY DONE BY A PAIR OF CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGISTS UNCOVERED something fascinating about people at the racetrack: Just after placing a bet, they are much more confident of their horse's chances of winning than they are immediately before laying down that bet.[1] Of course, nothing about the horse's chances actually shifts; it's the same horse, on the same track, in the same field; but in the minds of those bettors, its prospects improve significantly once that ticket is purchased. Although a bit puzzling at first glance, the reason for the dramatic change has to do with a common weapon of social influence. Like the other weapons of influence, this one lies deep within us, directing our actions with quiet power. It is, quite simply, our nearly obsessive desire to be (and to appear) consistent with what we have already done. Once we have made a choice or taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Those pressures will cause us to respond in ways that justify our earlier decision.

Take the bettors in the racetrack experiment. Thirty seconds before putting down their money, they had been tentative and uncertain; thirty seconds after the deed, they were significantly more optimistic and self-assured. The act of making a final decision—in this case, of buying a

ticket—had been the critical factor. Once a stand had been taken, the need for consistency pressured these people to bring what they felt and believed into line with what they had already done. They simply convinced themselves that they had made the right choice and, no doubt, felt better about it all.

Before we see such self-delusion as unique to racetrack habitués, we should examine the story of my neighbor Sara and her live-in boyfriend, Tim. They met at a hospital where he worked as an X-ray technician and she as a nutritionist. They dated for a while, even after Tim lost his job, and eventually they moved in together. Things were never perfect for Sara: She wanted Tim to marry her and to stop his heavy drinking; Tim resisted both ideas. After an especially difficult period of conflict, Sara broke off the relationship, and Tim moved out. At the same time, an old boyfriend of Sara's returned to town after years away and called her. They started seeing each other socially and quickly became serious enough to plan a wedding. They had gone so far as to set a date and issue invitations when Tim called. He had repented and wanted to move back in. When Sara told him her marriage plans, he begged her to change her mind; he wanted to be together with her as before. But Sara refused, saying she didn't want to live like that again. Tim even offered to marry her, but she still said she preferred the other boyfriend. Finally, Tim volunteered to quit drinking if she would only relent. Feeling that under those conditions Tim had the edge, Sara decided to break her engagement, cancel the wedding, retract the invitations, and let Tim move back in with her.

Within a month, Tim informed Sara that he didn't think he needed to stop his drinking after all; a month later, he had decided that they should "wait and see" before getting married. Two years have since passed; Tim and Sara continue to live together exactly as before. He still drinks, there are still no marriage plans, yet Sara is more devoted to Tim than she ever was. She says that being forced to choose taught her that Tim really is number one in her heart. So, after choosing Tim over her other boyfriend, Sara became happier with him, even though the conditions under which she had made her choice have never been fulfilled. Obviously, horse-race bettors are not alone in their willingness to believe in the correctness of a difficult choice, once made. Indeed, we all fool ourselves from time to time in order to keep our thoughts and beliefs consistent with what we have already done or decided.

Psychologists have long understood the power of the consistency principle to direct human action. Prominent theorists such as Leon Festinger, Fritz Hieder, and Theodore Newcomb have viewed the desire for consistency as a central motivator of our behavior. But is this tend-

ency to be consistent really strong enough to compel us to do what we ordinarily would not want to do? There is no question about it. The drive to be (and look) consistent constitutes a highly potent weapon of social influence, often causing us to act in ways that are clearly contrary to our own best interests.

Take, as proof, what happened when psychologist Thomas Moriarty staged thefts on a New York City beach to see if onlookers would risk personal harm to halt the crime. In the study, a research accomplice would put a beach blanket down five feet from the blanket of a randomly chosen individual—the experimental subject. After a couple of minutes on the blanket spent relaxing and listening to music from a portable radio, the accomplice would stand up and leave the blanket to stroll down the beach. A few minutes later, a second researcher, pretending to be a thief, would approach, grab the radio, and try to hurry away with it. As you might guess, under normal conditions, subjects were very reluctant to put themselves in harm's way by challenging the thief—only four people did so in the twenty times, that the theft was staged. But when the same procedure was tried another twenty times, with a slight twist, the results were drastically different. In these incidents, before taking his stroll, the accomplice would simply ask the subject to please "watch my things," which each of them agreed to do. Now, propelled by the rule for consistency, nineteen of the twenty subjects became virtual vigilantes, running after and stopping the thief, demanding an explanation, and often restraining the thief physically or snatching the radio away.

To understand why consistency is so powerful a motive, it is important to recognize that in most circumstances consistency is valued and adaptive. Inconsistency is commonly thought to be an undesirable personality trait. The person whose beliefs, words, and deeds don't match may be seen as indecisive, confused, two-faced, or even mentally ill. On the other side, a high degree of consistency is normally associated with personal and intellectual strength. It is at the heart of logic, rationality, stability, and honesty. A quote attributed to the great British chemist Michael Faraday suggests the extent to which being consistent is approved—sometimes more than being right. When asked after a lecture if he meant to imply that a hated academic rival was always wrong, Faraday glowered at the questioner and replied, "He's not that consistent."

Certainly, then, good personal consistency is highly valued in our culture. And well it should be. It provides us with a reasonable and gainful orientation to the world. Most of the time we will be better off if our approach to things is well laced with consistency. Without it our lives would be difficult, erratic, and disjointed.

But because it is so typically in our best interests to be consistent, we easily fall into the habit of being automatically so, even in situations where it is not the sensible way to be. When it occurs unthinkingly, consistency can be disastrous. Nonetheless, even blind consistency has its attractions.

First, like most other forms of automatic responding, it offers a shortcut through the density of modern life. Once we have made up our minds about an issue, stubborn consistency allows us a very appealing luxury: We really don't have to think hard about the issue anymore. We don't have to sift through the blizzard of information we encounter every day to identify relevant facts; we don't have to expend the mental energy to weigh the pros and cons; we don't have to make any further tough decisions. Instead, all we have to do when confronted with the issue is to turn on our consistency tape, *whirr*, and we know just what to believe, say, or do. We need only believe, say, or do whatever is consistent with our earlier decision.

The allure of such a luxury is not to be minimized. It allows us a convenient, relatively effortless, and efficient method for dealing with complex daily environments that make severe demands on our mental energies and capacities. It is not hard to understand, then, why automatic consistency is a difficult reaction to curb. It offers us a way to evade the rigors of continuing thought. And as Sir Joshua Reynolds noted, "There is no expedient to which a man will not resort to avoid the real labor of thinking." With our consistency tapes operating, then, we can go about our business happily excused from the toil of having to think too much.

There is a second, more perverse attraction of mechanical consistency as well. Sometimes it is not the effort of hard, cognitive work that makes us shirk thoughtful activity, but the harsh consequences of that activity. Sometimes it is the cursedly clear and unwelcome set of answers provided by straight thinking that makes us mental slackers. There are certain disturbing things we simply would rather not realize. Because it is a preprogrammed and mindless method of responding, automatic consistency can supply a safe hiding place from those troubling realizations. Sealed within the fortress walls of rigid consistency, we can be impervious to the sieges of reason.

One night at an introductory lecture given by the transcendental meditation (TM) program, I witnessed a nice illustration of how people will hide inside the walls of consistency to protect themselves from the troublesome consequences of thought. The lecture itself was presided over by two earnest young men and was designed to recruit new

members into the program. The program claimed it could teach a unique brand of meditation that would allow us to achieve all manner of desirable things, ranging from simple inner peace to the more spectacular abilities to fly and pass through walls at the program's advanced (and more expensive) stages.

I had decided to attend the meeting to observe the kind of compliance tactics used in recruitment lectures of this sort and had brought along an interested friend, a university professor whose areas of specialization were statistics and symbolic logic. As the meeting progressed and the lecturers explained the theory behind TM, I noticed my logician friend becoming increasingly restless. Looking more and more pained and shifting about constantly in his seat, he was finally unable to resist. When the leaders called for questions at the completion of the lecture, he raised his hand and gently but surely demolished the presentation we had just heard. In less than two minutes, he pointed out precisely where and why the lecturers' complex argument was contradictory, illogical, and unsupportable. The effect on the discussion leaders was devastating. After a confused silence, each attempted a weak reply only to halt midway to confer with his partner and finally to admit that my colleague's points were good ones "requiring further study."

More interesting to me, though, was the effect upon the rest of the audience. At the end of the question period, the two recruiters were faced with a crush of audience members submitting their seventy-five-dollar down payments for admission to the TM program. Nudging, shrugging, and chuckling to one another as they took in the payments, the recruiters betrayed signs of giddy bewilderment. After what appeared to have been an embarrassingly clear collapse of their presentation, the meeting had somehow turned into a great success, generating mystifyingly high levels of compliance from the audience. Although more than a bit puzzled, I chalked up the audience response to a failure to understand the logic of my colleague's arguments. As it turned out, however, just the *reverse* was the case.

Outside the lecture room after the meeting, we were approached by three members of the audience, each of whom had given a down payment immediately after the lecture. They wanted to know why we had come to the session. We explained, and we asked the same question of them. One was an aspiring actor who wanted desperately to succeed at his craft and had come to the meeting to learn if TM would allow him to achieve the necessary self-control to master the art; the recruiters had assured him that it would. The second described herself as a severe insomniac who had hopes that TM would provide her with a way to relax and fall asleep easily at night. The third served as unofficial spokesman. He also had a sleep-related problem. He was failing college

because there didn't seem to be enough time to study. He had come to the meeting to find out if TM could help by training him to need fewer hours of sleep each night; the additional time could then be used for study. It is interesting to note that the recruiters informed him as well as the insomniac that Transcendental Meditation techniques could solve their respective, though opposite, problems.

Still thinking that the three must have signed up because they hadn't understood the points made by my logician friend, I began to question them about aspects of his argument. To my surprise, I found that they had understood his comments quite well; in fact, all too well. It was precisely the cogency of his argument that drove them to sign up for the program on the spot. The spokesman put it best: "Well, I wasn't going to put down any money tonight because I'm really quite broke right now; I was going to wait until the next meeting. But when your buddy started talking, I knew I'd better give them my money now, or I'd go home and start thinking about what he said and *never* sign up."

All at once, things began to make sense. These were people with real problems; and they were somewhat desperately searching for a way to solve those problems. They were seekers who, if our discussion leaders were to be believed, had found a potential solution in TM. Driven by their needs, they very much wanted to believe that TM was their answer.

Now, in the form of my colleague, intrudes the voice of reason, showing the theory underlying their newfound solution to be unsound. Panic! Something must be done at once before logic takes its toll and leaves them without hope again. Quickly, quickly, walls against reason are needed; and it doesn't matter that the fortress to be erected is a foolish one. "Quick, a hiding place from thought! Here, take this money. Whew, safe in the nick of time. No need to think about the issues any longer. The decision has been made, and from now on the consistency tape can be played whenever necessary: 'TM? Certainly I think it will help me; certainly I expect to continue; certainly I believe in TM. I already put my money down for it, didn't I?' Ah, the comforts of mindless consistency. I'll just rest right here for a while. It's so much nicer than the worry and strain of that hard, hard search."

If, as it appears, automatic consistency functions as a shield against thought, it should not be surprising that such consistency can also be exploited by those who would prefer that we not think too much in response to their requests for our compliance. For the exploiters, whose interest will be served by an unthinking, mechanical reaction to their requests, our tendency for automatic consistency is a gold mine. So clever are they at arranging to have us play our consistency tapes when it profits them that we seldom realize we have been taken. In fine jujitsu

fashion, they structure their interactions with us so that our *own* need to be consistent will lead directly to their benefit.

Certain large toy manufacturers use just such an approach to reduce a problem caused by seasonal buying patterns. Of course, the boom time for toy sales occurs before and during the Christmas holiday season. The toy companies make fat profits during this period. Their problem is that toy sales then go into a terrible slump for the next couple of months. Their customers have already spent the full amount in their toy budgets and are stiffly resistant to their children's pleas for more. Even those children whose birthdays fall soon after the holidays receive fewer toys because of the recent Christmas spree.

So the toy manufacturers are faced with a dilemma: how to keep sales high during the peak season and, at the same time, retain a healthy demand for toys in the immediately following months. Their difficulty certainly doesn't lie in convincing our naturally insatiable offspring to want a continuous flow of new amusements. A series of flashy television commercials placed among the Saturday morning cartoon shows will produce the usual amounts of begging, whining, and wheedling no matter when it appears during the year. No, the problem is not in motivating kids to want more toys after Christmas.

The problem is in motivating postholiday spent-out parents to reach down for the price of yet another plaything for their already toy-glutted children. What could the toy companies possibly do to produce that unlikely behavior? Some have tried a greatly increased advertising campaign, others have reduced prices during the slack period, but neither of those standard sales devices has proved successful. Not only are both tactics costly, but both have also been ineffective in increasing sales to desired levels. Parents are simply not in a toy-buying mood, and the influences of advertising or reduced expense are not enough to shake that stony resistance.

Certain large toy manufacturers, however, think they have found a solution. It's an ingenious one, involving no more than a normal advertising expense and an understanding of the powerful pull of the need for consistency. My first hint of how the toy companies' strategy worked came after I fell for it and then, in true patsy form, fell for it again.

It was January, and I was in the town's largest toy store. After purchasing all too many gifts there for my son a month before, I had sworn not to enter that place or any like it for a long, long time. Yet there I was, not only in the diabolic place but also in the process of buying my son another expensive toy—a big, electric road-race set. In front of the road-race display, I happened to meet a former neighbor who was buying his son the same toy. The odd thing was that we almost never saw each other anymore. In fact, the last time was a year earlier in that

same store where we were both buying our sons an expensive post-Christmas gift—that time a robot that walked, talked, and laid waste. We laughed about our strange pattern of seeing each other only once a year at the same time, in the same place, while doing the same thing. Later that day, I mentioned the coincidence to a friend who, it turned out, had once worked in the toy business.

"No coincidence," he said knowingly.

"What do you mean, 'No coincidence'?"

"Look," he said, "let me ask you a couple of questions about the road-race set you bought this year. First, did you promise your son that he'd get one for Christmas?"

"Well, yes, I did. Christopher had seen a bunch of ads for them on the Saturday morning cartoon shows and said that was what he wanted for Christmas. I saw a couple of the ads myself and it looked like fun, so I said okay."

"Strike one," he announced. "Now for my second question. When you went to buy one, did you find all the stores sold out?"

"That's right, I did! The stores said they'd ordered some but didn't know when they'd get any more in. So I had to buy Christopher some other toys to make up for the road-race set. But how did you know?"

"Strike two," he said. "Just let me ask one more question. Didn't this same sort of thing happen the year before with the robot toy?"

"Wait a minute…you're right. That's just what happened. This is incredible. How did you know?"

"No psychic powers; I just happen to know how several of the big toy companies jack up their January and February sales. They start prior to Christmas with attractive TV ads for certain special toys. The kids, naturally, want what they see and extract Christmas promises for these items from their parents. Now here's where the genius of the companies' plan comes in: They *undersupply* the stores with the toys they've gotten the parents to promise. Most parents find those things sold out and are forced to substitute other toys of equal value. The toy manufacturers, of course, make a point of supplying the stores with plenty of these substitutes. Then, after Christmas, the companies start running the ads again for the other, special toys. That juices up the kids to want those toys more than ever. They go running to their parents whining, 'You promised, you promised,' and the adults go trudging off to the store to live up dutifully to their words."

"Where," I said, beginning to seethe now, "they meet other parents they haven't seen for a year, falling for the same trick, right?"

"Right. Uh, where are you going?"

"I'm going to take that road-race set right back to the store." I was so angry I was nearly shouting.

"Wait. Think for a minute first. Why did you buy it this morning?"

"Because I didn't want to let Christopher down and because I wanted to teach him that promises are to be lived up to."

"Well, has any of that changed? Look, if you take his toy away now, he won't understand why. He'll just know that his father broke a promise to him. Is that what you want?"

"No," I said, sighing, "I guess not. So, you're telling me that they doubled their profit on me for the past two years, and I never even knew it; and now that I do, I'm still trapped—by my own words. So, what you're really telling me is, 'Strike three.'"

He nodded, "And you're out."

COMMITMENT IS THE KEY

Once we realize that the power of consistency is formidable in directing human action, an important practical question immediately arises: How is that force engaged? What produces the *click* that activates the *whirr* of the powerful consistency tape? Social psychologists think they know the answer: commitment. If I can get you to make a commitment (that is, to take a stand, to go on record), I will have set the stage for your automatic and ill-considered consistency with that earlier commitment. Once a stand is taken, there is a natural tendency to behave in ways that are stubbornly consistent with the stand.

As we've already seen, social psychologists are not the only ones who understand the connection between commitment and consistency. Commitment strategies are aimed at us by compliance professionals of nearly every sort. Each of the strategies is intended to get us to take some action or make some statement that will trap us into later compliance through consistency pressures. Procedures designed to create commitment take various forms. Some are fairly straightforward; others are among the most subtle compliance tactics we will encounter.

For instance, suppose you wanted to increase the number of people in your area who would agree to go door-to-door collecting donations for your favorite charity. You would be wise to study the approach taken by social psychologist Steven J. Sherman. He simply called a sample of Bloomington, Indiana, residents as part of a survey he was taking and asked them to predict what they would say if asked to spend three hours collecting money for the American Cancer Society. Of course, not wanting to seem uncharitable to the survey taker or to themselves, many of these people said that they would volunteer. The consequence of this sly commitment procedure was a 700 percent increase in volunteers when, a few days later, a representative of the American Cancer Society did call and ask for neighborhood canvassers.

Using the same strategy, but this time asking Columbus, Ohio, residents to predict whether they would vote on Election Day, a team of researchers led by Anthony Greenwald were able to increase significantly the turnout in a U.S. presidential election among those called.

Perhaps an even more crafty commitment technique has been developed recently by telephone solicitors for charity. Have you noticed that callers asking you to contribute to some cause or another these days seem to begin things by inquiring about your current health and well-being? "Hello Mr./Ms. Targetperson," they say. "How are you feeling this evening?" Or, "How are you doing today?" The caller's intent with this sort of introduction is not merely to seem friendly and caring. It is to get you to respond—as you normally do to such polite, superficial inquiries—with a polite, superficial comment of your own: "Just fine" or "Real good" or "I'm doing great, thanks." Once you have publicly stated that all is well, it becomes much easier for the solicitor to corner you into aiding those for whom all is not well: "I'm glad to hear that, because I'm calling to ask if you'd be willing to make a donation to help out the unfortunate victims of…"

The theory behind this tactic is that people who have just asserted that they are doing/feeling fine—even as a routine part of a sociable exchange—will consequently find it awkward to appear stingy in the context of their own admittedly favored circumstances. If all this sounds a bit farfetched, consider the findings of consumer researcher Daniel Howard, who put the theory to test. Dallas, Texas, residents were called on the phone and asked if they would agree to allow a representative of the Hunger Relief Committee to come to their homes to sell them cookies, the proceeds from which would be used to supply meals for the needy. When tried alone, that request (labeled the "standard solicitation approach") produced only 18 percent agreement. However, if the caller initially asked, "How are you feeling this evening?" and waited for a reply before proceeding to the standard approach, several noteworthy things happened. First, of the 120 individuals called, most (108) gave the customary favorable reply ("Good," "Fine," "Real well," etc.). Second, 32 percent of the people who got the "How are you feeling tonight" question agreed to receive the cookie seller at their homes, nearly twice the success rate of the standard solicitation approach. Third, true to the consistency principle, almost everyone who agreed to such a visit did, in fact, make a cookie purchase when contacted at home (89 percent).

To make sure that this tactic doesn't generate its successes simply because a solicitor who uses it seems more concerned and courteous than one who doesn't use it, Howard conducted another study. This time callers began either with the question "How are you feeling this

evening?" (and waited for a response before proceeding) or with the statement "I hope you are feeling well this evening" and then proceeded to the standard solicitation approach. Despite the fact that the caller started each type of interaction with a warm and friendly comment, the "How are you feeling" technique was, by far, superior to its rival (33 percent vs. 15 percent compliance), because it alone drew an exploitable public commitment from its targets. Note that the commitment was able to get twice as much compliance from those targets even though at the time it occurred it must have seemed to them an altogether inconsequential reply to an altogether superficial question—yet another fine example of social jujitsu at work.

The question of what makes a commitment effective has a number of answers. A variety of factors affect the ability of a commitment to constrain our future behavior. One large-scale program designed to produce compliance illustrates nicely how several of the factors work. The remarkable thing about this program is that it was systematically employing these factors decades ago, well before scientific research had identified them.

During the Korean War, many captured American soldiers found themselves in prisoner-of-war (POW) camps run by the Chinese Communists. It became clear early in the conflict that the Chinese treated captives quite differently than did their allies, the North Koreans, who favored savagery and harsh punishment to gain compliance. Specifically avoiding the appearance of brutality, the Red Chinese engaged in what they termed their "lenient policy," which was in reality a concerted and sophisticated psychological assault on their captives. After the war, American psychologists questioned the returning prisoners intensively to determine what had occurred. The intensive psychological investigation took place, in part, because of the unsettling success of some aspects of the Chinese program. For example, the Chinese were very effective in getting Americans to inform on one another, in striking contrast to the behavior of American POWs in World War II. For this reason, among others, escape plans were quickly uncovered and the escape attempts themselves almost always unsuccessful. "When an escape did occur," wrote Dr. Edgar Schein, a principal American investigator of the Chinese indoctrination program in Korea, "the Chinese usually recovered the man easily by offering a bag of rice to anyone turning him in." In fact, nearly all American prisoners in the Chinese camps are said to have collaborated with the enemy in one form or another.[2]

An examination of the Chinese prison-camp program shows that its personnel relied heavily on commitment and consistency pressures to

gain the desired compliance from prisoners. Of course, the first problem facing the Chinese was how to get any collaboration at all from the Americans. These were men who were trained to provide nothing but name, rank, and serial number. Short of physical brutalization, how could the captors hope to get such men to give military information, turn in fellow prisoners, or publicly denounce their country? The Chinese answer was elementary: Start small and build.

For instance, prisoners were frequently asked to make statements so mildly anti-American or pro-Communist as to seem inconsequential ("The United States is not perfect." "In a Communist country, unemployment is not a problem."). But once these minor requests were complied with, the men found themselves pushed to submit to related yet more substantive requests. A man who had just agreed with his Chinese interrogator that the United States is not perfect might then be asked to indicate some of the ways in which he thought this was the case. Once he had so explained himself, he might be asked to make a list of these "problems with America" and to sign his name to it. Later he might be asked to read his list in a discussion group with other prisoners. "After all, it's what you really believe, isn't it?" Still later he might be asked to write an essay expanding on his list and discussing these problems in greater detail.

The Chinese might then use his name and his essay in an anti-American radio broadcast beamed not only to the entire camp, but to other POW camps in North Korea, as well as to American forces in South Korea. Suddenly he would find himself a "collaborator," having given aid to the enemy. Aware that he had written the essay without any strong threats or coercion, many times a man would change his image of himself to be consistent with the deed and with the new "collaborator" label, often resulting in even more extensive acts of collaboration. Thus, while "only a few men were able to avoid collaboration altogether," according to Dr. Schein, "the majority collaborated at one time or another by doing things which seemed to them trivial but which the Chinese were able to turn to their own advantage…. This was particularly effective in eliciting confessions, self-criticism, and information during interrogation."[3]

If the Chinese know about the subtle power of this approach, it should not be surprising that another group of people interested in compliance is also aware of its usefulness. Many business organizations employ it regularly.

For the salesperson, the strategy is to obtain a large purchase by starting with a small one. Almost any small sale will do, because the purpose of that small transaction is not profit. It is commitment. Further

purchases, even much larger ones, are expected to flow naturally from the commitment. An article in the trade magazine *American Salesman* put it succinctly:

> The general idea is to pave the way for full-line distribution by starting with a small order…. Look at it this way—when a person has signed an order for your merchandise, even though the profit is so small it hardly compensates for the time and effort of making the call, he is no longer a prospect—he is a customer.[4]

The tactic of starting with a little request in order to gain eventual compliance with related larger requests has a name: the foot-in-the-door technique. Social scientists first became aware of its effectiveness in the mid-1960s when psychologists Jonathan Freedman and Scott Fraser published an astonishing set of data.[5] They reported the results of an experiment in which a researcher, posing as a volunteer worker, had gone door to door in a residential California neighborhood making a preposterous request of homeowners. The homeowners were asked to allow a public-service billboard to be installed on their front lawns. 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. Although the request was normally and understandably refused by the great majority (83 percent) of the other residents in the area, this particular group of people reacted quite favorably. A full 76 percent of them offered the use of their front yards.

The prime reason for their startling compliance has to do with something that had happened to them about two weeks earlier: They had made a small commitment to driver safety. A different volunteer worker had come to their doors and asked them to accept and display a little three-inch-square sign that read BE A SAFE DRIVER. It was such a trifling request that nearly all of them had agreed to it. But the effects of that request were enormous. Because they had innocently complied with a trivial safe-driving request a couple of weeks before, these homeowners became remarkably willing to comply with another such request that was massive in size.

Freedman and Fraser didn't stop there. They tried a slightly different procedure on another sample of homeowners. These people first received a request to sign a petition that favored "keeping California beautiful." Of course, nearly everyone signed, since state beauty, like efficiency in government or sound prenatal care, is one of those issues almost no one is against. After waiting about two weeks, Freedman and Fraser sent a new "volunteer worker" to these same homes to ask the residents to allow the big DRIVE CAREFULLY sign to be erected on

their lawns. In some ways, their response was the most astounding of any of the homeowners in the study. Approximately half of these people consented to the installation of the DRIVE CAREFULLY billboard, even though the small commitment they had made weeks earlier was not to driver safety but to an entirely different public-service topic, state beautification.

At first, even Freedman and Fraser were bewildered by their findings. Why should the little act of signing a petition supporting state beautification cause people to be so willing to perform a different and much larger favor? After considering and discarding other explanations, Freedman and Fraser came upon one that offered a solution to the puzzle: Signing the beautification petition changed the view these people had of themselves. They saw themselves as public-spirited citizens who acted on their civic principles. When, two weeks later, they were asked to perform another public service by displaying the DRIVE CAREFULLY sign, they complied in order to be consistent with their newly formed self-images. According to Freedman and Fraser,

> What may occur is a change in the person's feelings about getting involved or taking action. Once he has agreed to a request, his attitude may change, he may become, in his own eyes, the kind of person who does this sort of thing, who agrees to requests made by strangers, who takes action on things he believes in, who cooperates with good causes.[6]

What the Freedman and Fraser findings tell us, then, is to be very careful about agreeing to trivial requests. Such an agreement can not only increase our compliance with very similar, much larger re-quests, it can also make us more willing to perform a variety of larger favors that are only remotely connected to the little one we did earlier. It's this second, general kind of influence concealed within small commitments that scares me.

It scares me enough that I am rarely willing to sign a petition anymore, even for a position I support. Such an action has the potential to influence not only my future behavior but also my self-image in ways I may not want. And once a person's self-image is altered, all sorts of subtle advantages become available to someone who wants to exploit that new image.

Who among Freedman and Fraser's homeowners would have thought that the "volunteer worker" who asked them to sign a state beautification petition was really interested in having them display a safe-driving billboard two weeks later? And who among them could have suspected that their decision to display the billboard was largely due to the act of signing the petition? No one, I'd guess. If there were any regrets after

the billboard went up, who could they conceivably hold responsible but *themselves* and their own damnably strong civic spirit? They probably never even considered the guy with the "keeping California beautiful" petition and all that knowledge of jujitsu.

Notice that all of the foot-in-the-door experts seem to be excited about the same thing: You can use small commitments to manipulate a person's self-image; you can use them to turn citizens into "public servants," prospects into "customers," prisoners into "collaborators." And once you've got a man's self-image where you want it, he should comply *naturally* with a whole range of your requests that are consistent with this view of himself.

Not all commitments affect self-image, however. There are certain conditions that should be present for a commitment to be effective in this way. To discover what they are, we can once again look to the American experience in the Chinese prison camps of Korea. It is important to understand that the major intent of the Chinese was not simply to extract information from their prisoners. It was to indoctrinate them, to change their attitudes and percep-tions of themselves, of their political system, of their country's role in the war, and of communism. And there is evidence that the program often worked alarmingly well.

Dr. Henry Segal, chief of the neuropsychiatric evaluation team that examined returning POWs at the war's end, reported that war-related beliefs had been substantially shifted. The majority of the men believed the Chinese story that the United States had used germ warfare, and many felt that their own forces had been the initial aggressors in starting the war. Similar inroads had been made in the political attitudes of the men:

> Many expressed antipathy toward the Chinese Communists but at the same time praised them for "the fine job they have done in China." Others stated that "although communism won't work in America, I think it's a good thing for Asia."[7]

It appears that the real goal of the Chinese was to modify, at least for a time, the hearts and minds of their captives. If we measure their achievement in terms of "defection, disloyalty, changed attitudes and beliefs, poor discipline, poor morale, poor *esprit*, and doubts as to America's role," Dr. Segal concluded that "their efforts were highly successful." Because commitment tactics were so much a part of the effective Chinese assault on hearts and minds, it is quite informative to examine the specific features of the tactics they used.

The Magic Act

Our best evidence of what people truly feel and believe comes less from their words than from their deeds. Observers trying to decide what a man is like look closely at his actions. What the Chinese have discovered is that the man himself uses this same evidence to decide what he is like. His behavior tells him about himself; it is a primary source of information about his beliefs and values and attitudes. Understanding fully this important principle of self-perception, the Chinese set about arranging the prison-camp experience so that their captives would consistently *act* in desired ways. Before long, the Chinese knew, these actions would begin to take their toll, causing the men to change their views of themselves to align with what they had done.

Writing was one sort of confirming action that the Chinese urged incessantly upon the men. It was never enough for the prisoners to listen quietly or even to agree verbally with the Chinese line; they were always pushed to write it down as well. So intent were the Chinese on securing a written statement that if a prisoner was not willing to write a desired response freely, he was prevailed upon to copy it. The American psychologist Edgar Schein describes a standard indoctrination session tactic of the Chinese in these terms:

> A further technique was to have the man write out the question and then the [pro-Communist] answer. If he refused to write it voluntarily, he was asked to copy it from the notebooks, which must have seemed like a harmless enough concession.

But, oh, those "harmless" concessions. We've already seen how apparently trifling commitments can lead to extraordinary further behavior. And the Chinese knew that, as a commitment device, a written declaration has some great advantages. First, it provides physical evidence that the act occurred. Once a man wrote what the Chinese wanted, it was very difficult for him to believe that he had not done so. The opportunities to forget or to deny to himself what he had done were not available, as they are for purely verbal statements. No; there it was in his own handwriting, an irrevocably documented act driving him to make his beliefs and his self-image consistent with what he had undeniably done.

A second advantage of a written testament is that it can be shown to other people. Of course, that means it can be used to persuade those people. It can persuade them to change their own attitudes in the direction of the statement. But more important for the purpose of commitment, it can persuade them that the author genuinely believes what

was written. People have a natural tendency to think that a statement reflects the true attitude of the person who made it. What is surprising is that they continue to think so even when they know that the person did not freely choose to make the statement.

Some scientific evidence that this is the case comes from a study by psychologists Edward Jones and James Harris, who showed people an essay that was favorable to Fidel Castro and asked them to guess the true feelings of its author.[8] Jones and Harris told some of these people that the author had chosen to write a pro-Castro essay; and they told the other people that the author had been required to write in favor of Castro. The strange thing was that even those people who knew that the author had been assigned to do a pro-Castro essay guessed that he liked Castro. It seems that a statement of belief produces a *click, whirr* response in those who view it. Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, observers automatically assume that someone who makes such a statement means it.

Think of the double-barreled effects on the self-image of a prisoner who wrote a pro-Chinese or anti-American statement. Not only was it a lasting personal reminder of his action, it was also likely to persuade those around him that the statement reflected his actual beliefs. And, as we will see in Chapter 4, what those around us think is true of us is enormously important in determining what we ourselves think is true. For example, one study found that after hearing that they were considered charitable people, New Haven, Connecticut, housewives gave much more money to a canvasser from the Multiple Sclerosis Association.[9] Apparently the mere knowledge that someone viewed them as charitable caused these women to make their actions consistent with another's perception of them.

Once an active commitment is made, then, self-image is squeezed from both sides by consistency pressures. From the inside, there is a pressure to bring self-image into line with action. From the outside, there is a sneakier pressure—a tendency to adjust this image according to the way others perceive us. And because others see us as believing what we have written (even when we've had little choice in the matter), we will once again experience a pull to bring self-image into line with the written statement.

In Korea, several subtle devices were used to get the prisoners to write, without direct coercion, what the Chinese wanted. For example, the Chinese knew that many prisoners were eager to let their families know that they were alive. At the same time, the men knew that their captors were censoring the mails and that only some letters were being allowed out of camp. To ensure that their own letters would be released, some prisoners began including in their messages peace appeals, claims

of kind treatment, and statements sympathetic to communism. The hope was that the Chinese would want such letters to surface and would, therefore, allow their delivery. Of course, the Chinese were happy to cooperate because those letters served their interests marvelously. First, their worldwide propaganda effort benefited greatly from the appearance of pro-Communist statements by American servicemen. Second, in the service of prisoner indoctrination, they had, without raising a finger of physical force, gotten many men to go on record as supporting the Chinese cause.

A similar technique involved political essay contests that were regularly held in camp. The prizes for winning were invariably small—a few cigarettes or a bit of fruit—but were sufficiently scarce that they generated a lot of interest from the men. Usually the winning essay was one that took a solidly pro-Communist stand…but not always. The Chinese were wise enough to realize that most of the prisoners would not enter a contest that they could win only by writing a Communist tract. And the Chinese were clever enough to know how to plant small commitments to communism in the men that could be nurtured into later bloom. So the prize was occasionally given to an essay that generally supported the United States but that bowed once or twice to the Chinese view. The effects of this strategy were exactly what the Chinese wanted. The men continued to participate voluntarily in the contests because they saw that they could win with an essay highly favorable to their own country. But perhaps without realizing it, they began to shade their essays a bit toward communism in order to have a better chance of winning. The Chinese were ready to pounce on any concession to Communist dogma and to bring consistency pressures to bear upon it. In the case of a written declaration within a voluntary essay, they had a perfect commitment from which to build toward collaboration and conversion.

Other compliance professionals also know about the committing power of written statements. The enormously successful Amway Corporation, for instance, has hit upon a way to spur their sales personnel to greater and greater accomplishments. Members of the staff are asked to set individual sales goals and commit themselves to those goals by personally recording them on paper:

> One final tip before you get started: Set a goal and *write it down*. Whatever the goal, the important thing is that you set it, so you've got something for which to aim—and that you write it down. There is something magical about writing things down. So set a goal and

write it down. When you reach that goal, set another and write that down. You'll be off and running.[10]

If the Amway people have found "something magical about writing things down," so have other business organizations. Some door-to-door sales companies use the magic of written commitments to battle the "cooling-off" laws recently passed in many states. The laws are designed to allow customers a few days after purchasing an item to cancel the sale and receive a full refund. At first this legislation hurt the hard-sell companies deeply. Because they emphasize high-pressure tactics, their customers often buy, not because they want the product but because they are duped or intimidated into the sale. When the new laws went into effect, these customers began canceling in droves.

The companies have since learned a beautifully simple trick that cuts the number of such cancellations drastically. They merely have the customer, rather than the salesman, fill out the sales agreement. According to the sales-training program of a prominent encyclopedia company, that personal commitment alone has proved to be "a very important psychological aid in preventing customers from backing out of their contracts." Like the Amway Corporation, then, these organizations have found that something special happens when people personally put their commitments on paper: They live up to what they have written down.

Another common way for businesses to cash in on the "magic" of written declarations occurs through the use of an innocent-looking promotional device. Before I began to study weapons of social influence, I used to wonder why big companies such as Procter & Gamble and General Foods are always running those "25-, 50-, or 100 words or less" testimonial contests. They all seem to be alike. The contestant is to compose a short personal statement that begins with the words, "Why I like…" and goes on to laud the features of whatever cake mix or floor wax happens to be at issue. The company judges the entries and awards some stunningly large prizes to the winners. What had puzzled me was what the companies got out of the deal. Often the contest requires no purchase; anyone submitting an entry is eligible. Yet, the companies appear to be strangely willing to incur the huge costs of contest after contest.

I am no longer puzzled. The purpose behind the testimonial contests is the same as the purpose behind the political essay contests of the Chinese Communists. In both instances, the aim is to get as many people as possible to go on record as liking the product. In Korea, the product was a brand of Chinese communism; in the United States, it might be a brand of cuticle remover. The type of product doesn't matter; the

process is the same. Participants voluntarily write essays for attractive prizes that they have only a small chance to win. But they know that for an essay to have any chance of winning at all, it must include praise for the product. So they find praiseworthy features of the product and describe them in their essays. The result is hundreds of men in Korea or hundreds of thousands of people in America who testify in writing to the product's appeal and who, consequently, experience that "magical" pull to believe what they have written.

The Public Eye

One reason that written testaments are effective in bringing about genuine personal change is that they can so easily be made public. The prisoner experience in Korea showed the Chinese to be quite aware of an important psychological principle: Public commitments tend to be lasting commitments. The Chinese constantly arranged to have the pro-Communist statements of their captives seen by others. A man who had written a political essay the Chinese liked, for example, might find copies of it posted around camp, or might be asked to read it to a prisoner discussion group, or even to read it on the camp radio broadcast. As far as the Chinese were concerned, the more public the better. Why?

Whenever one takes a stand that is visible to others, there arises a drive to maintain that stand in order to *look* like a consistent person. Remember that earlier in this chapter we described how desirable good personal consistency is as a trait; how someone without it could be judged as fickle, uncertain, pliant, scatterbrained, or unstable; how someone with it is viewed as rational, assured, trustworthy, and sound. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that people try to avoid the look of inconsistency. For appearances' sake, then, the more public a stand, the more reluctant we will be to change it.

An illustration of how public commitments can lead to doggedly consistent further action is provided in a famous experiment performed by a pair of prominent social psychologists, Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard. The basic procedure was to have college students first estimate in their own minds the length of lines they were shown. At this point, one sample of the students had to commit themselves publicly to their initial judgments by writing them down, signing their names to them, and turning them in to the experimenter. A second sample of students also committed themselves to their first estimates, but they did so privately by putting them on a Magic Writing Pad and then erasing them by lifting the Magic Pad's plastic cover before anyone could see what they had written. A third set of students did not commit them-

selves to their initial estimates at all; they just kept the estimates in mind privately.

In these ways, Deutsch and Gerard had cleverly arranged for some students to commit themselves publicly, some privately, and some not at all to their initial decisions. What Deutsch and Gerard wanted to find out was which of the three types of students would be most inclined to stick with their first judgments after receiving information that those judgments were incorrect. So all of the students were given new evidence suggesting that their initial estimates were wrong, and they were then given the chance to change their estimates.

The results were quite clear. The students who had never written down their first choices were the least loyal to those choices. When new evidence was presented that questioned the wisdom of decisions that had never left their heads, these students were the most influenced by the new information to change what they had viewed as the "correct" decision. Compared to these uncommitted students, those who had merely written their decisions for a moment on a Magic Pad were significantly less willing to change their minds when given the chance. Even though they had committed themselves under the most anonymous of circumstances, the act of writing down their first judgments caused them to resist the influence of contradictory new data and to remain consistent with the preliminary choices. But Deutsch and Gerard found that, by far, it was the students who had publicly recorded their initial positions who most resolutely refused to shift from those positions later. Public commitment had hardened them into the most stubborn of all.

This sort of stubbornness can occur even in situations where accuracy should be more important than consistency. In one study, when six- or twelve-person experimental juries were deciding a close case, hung juries were significantly more frequent if the jurors had to express their opinions with a visible show of hands rather than by secret ballot. Once jurors had stated their initial views publicly, they were reluctant to allow themselves to change publicly, either. Should you ever find yourself as the foreperson of a jury under these conditions, then, you could reduce the risk of a hung jury by choosing a secret rather than public balloting technique.[11]

The Deutsch and Gerard finding that we are truest to our decisions if we have bound ourselves to them publicly can be put to good use. Consider the organizations dedicated to helping people rid themselves of bad habits. Many weight-reduction clinics, for instance, understand that often a person's private decision to lose weight will be too weak to withstand the blandishments of bakery windows, wafting cooking scents, and late-night Sara Lee commercials. So they see to it that the

decision is buttressed by the pillars of public commitment. They require their clients to write down an immediate weight-loss goal and *show* that goal to as many friends, relatives, and neighbors as possible. Clinic operators report that frequently this simple technique works where all else has failed.

Of course, there's no need to pay a special clinic in order to engage a visible commitment as an ally. One San Diego woman described to me how she employed a public promise to help herself finally stop smoking:

> I remember it was after I heard about another scientific study showing that smoking causes cancer. Every time one of those things came out, I used to get determined to quit, but I never could. This time, though, I decided I had to do something. I'm a proud person. It matters to me if other people see me in a bad light. So I thought, "Maybe I can use that pride to help me dump this damn habit." So I made a list of all the people who I really wanted to respect me. Then I went out and got some blank business cards and I wrote on the back of each card, "I promise you that I will never smoke another cigarette."

Within a week, I had given or sent a signed card to everybody on the list—my dad, my brother back East, my boss, my best girlfriend, my ex-husband, everybody but one—the guy I was dating then. I was just crazy about him, and I really wanted him to value me as a person. Believe me, I thought twice about giving him a card because I knew that if I couldn't keep my promise to him I'd die. But one day at the office—he worked in the same building as I did—I just walked up to him, handed him the card, and walked away without saying anything.

Quitting "cold turkey" was the hardest thing I've ever done. There must have been a thousand times when I thought I *had* to have a smoke. But whenever that happened, I'd just picture how all of the people on my list, especially this one guy, would think less of me if I couldn't stick to my guns. And that's all it took. I've never taken another puff.

You know, the interesting thing is the guy turned out to be a real schmuck. I can't figure out what I saw in him back then. But at the time, without knowing it, he helped me get through the toughest part of the toughest thing I've ever had to do. I don't even like him anymore. Still, I do feel grateful in a way because I think he saved my life.

The Effort Extra

Yet another reason that written commitments are so effective is that they require more work than verbal ones. And the evidence is clear that

the more effort that goes into a commitment, the greater is its ability to influence the attitudes of the person who made it. We can find that evidence quite close to home or as far away as the back regions of the primitive world. For example, there is a tribe in southern Africa, the Thonga, that requires each of its boys to go through an elaborate initiation ceremony before he can be counted a man of the tribe. As with many other primitive peoples, a Thonga boy endures a great deal before he is admitted to adult membership in the group. Anthropologists Whiting, Kluckhohn, and Anthony have described this three-month ordeal in brief but vivid terms:

> When a boy is somewhere between 10 and 16 years of age, he is sent by his parents to "circumcision school," which is held every 4 or 5 years. Here in company with his age-mates he undergoes severe hazing by the adult males of the society. The initiation begins when each boy runs the gauntlet between two rows of men who beat him with clubs. At the end of this experience he is stripped of his clothes and his hair is cut. He is next met by a man covered with lion manes and is seated upon a stone facing this "lion man." Someone then strikes him from behind and when he turns his head to see who has struck him, his foreskin is seized and in two movements cut off by the "lion man." Afterward he is secluded for three months in the "yard of mysteries," where he can be seen only by the initiated.
>
> During the course of his initiation, the boy undergoes six major trials: beatings, exposure to cold, thirst, eating of unsavory foods, punishment, and the threat of death. On the slightest pretext, he may be beaten by one of the newly initiated men, who is assigned to the task by the older men of the tribe. He sleeps without covering and suffers bitterly from the winter cold. He is forbidden to drink a drop of water during the whole three months. Meals are often made nauseating by the half-digested grass from the stomach of an antelope, which is poured over his food. If he is caught breaking any important rule governing the ceremony, he is severely punished. For example, in one of these punishments, sticks are placed between the fingers of the offender, then a strong man closes his hand around that of the novice, practically crushing his fingers. He is frightened into submission by being told that in former times boys who had tried to escape or who had revealed the secrets to women or to the uninitiated were hanged and their bodies burned to ashes.[12]

On the face of it, these rites seem extraordinary and bizarre. Yet, at the same time, they can be seen to be remarkably similar in principle

and even in detail to the common initiation ceremonies of school fraternities. During the traditional "Hell Week" held yearly on college campuses, fraternity pledges must persevere through a variety of activities designed by the older members to test the limits of physical exertion, psychological strain, and social embarrassment. At week's end, the boys who have persisted through the ordeal are accepted for full group membership. Mostly their tribulations have left them no more than greatly tired and a bit shaky, although sometimes the negative effects are more serious.

What is interesting is how closely the particular features of Hell Week tasks match those of the tribal initiation rites. Recall that anthropologists identified six major trials to be endured by a Thonga initiate during his stay in the "yard of mysteries." A scan of newspaper reports shows that each trial also has its place in the hazing rituals of Greek-letter societies:

- *Beatings*. Fourteen-year-old Michael Kalogris spent three weeks in a Long Island hospital recovering from internal injuries suffered during a Hell Night initiation ceremony of his high-school fraternity, Omega Gamma Delta. He had been administered the "atomic bomb" by his prospective brothers, who told him to hold his hands over his head and keep them there while they gathered around to slam fists into his stomach and back simultaneously and repeatedly.
- *Exposure to cold*. On a winter night, Frederick Bronner, a California junior-college student, was taken three thousand feet up and ten miles into the hills of a national forest by his prospective fraternity brothers. Left to find his way home wearing only a thin sweatshirt and slacks, Fat Freddy, as he was called, shivered in a frigid wind until he tumbled down a steep ravine, fracturing bones and hurting his head. Prevented by his injuries from going on, he huddled there against the cold until he died of exposure.
- *Thirst*. Two Ohio State University freshmen found themselves in the "dungeon" of their prospective fraternity house after breaking the rule requiring all pledges to crawl into the dining area prior to Hell Week meals. Once locked in the house storage closet, they were given only salty foods to eat for nearly two days. Nothing was provided for drinking purposes except a pair of plastic cups in which they could catch their own urine.
- *Eating of unsavory foods*. At Kappa Sigma house on the campus of the University of Southern California, the eyes of eleven pledges bulged when they saw the sickening task before them. Eleven quarter-pound slabs of raw liver lay on a tray. Cut thick and soaked in oil, each was to be swallowed whole, one to a boy. Gagging and choking re-

peatedly, young Richard Swanson failed three times to down his piece. Determined to succeed, he finally got the oil-soaked meat into his throat where it lodged and, despite all efforts to remove it, killed him.

- *Punishment*. In Wisconsin, a pledge who forgot one section of a ritual incantation to be memorized by all initiates was punished for his error. He was required to keep his feet under the rear legs of a folding chair while the heaviest of his fraternity brothers sat down and drank a beer. Although the pledge did not cry out during the punishment, a bone in each of his feet was broken.
- *Threats of death*. A pledge of Zeta Beta Tau fraternity was taken to a beach area of New Jersey and told to dig his "own grave." Seconds after he complied with orders to lie flat in the finished hole, the sides collapsed, suffocating him before his prospective fraternity brothers could dig him out.

There is another striking similarity between the initiation rites of tribal and fraternal societies: They simply will not die. Resisting all attempts to eliminate or suppress them, such hazing practices have been phenomenally resilient. Authorities, in the form of colonial governments or university administrations, have tried threats, social pressures, legal actions, banishments, bribes, and bans to persuade the groups to remove the hazards and humiliations from their initiation ceremonies. None has been successful. Oh, there may be a change while the authority is watching closely. But this is usually more apparent than real, the harsher trials occurring under more secret circumstances until the pressure is off and they can surface again.

On some college campuses, officials have tried to eliminate dangerous hazing practices by substituting a "Help Week" of civic service or by taking direct control of the initiation rituals. When such attempts are not slyly circumvented by fraternities, they are met with outright physical resistance. For example, in the aftermath of Richard Swanson's choking death at USC, the university president issued new rules requiring that all pledging activities be reviewed by school authorities before going into effect and that adult advisers be present during initiation ceremonies. According to one national magazine, "The new 'code' set off a riot so violent that city police and fire detachments were afraid to enter campus."

Resigning themselves to the inevitable, other college representatives have given up on the possibility of abolishing the degradations of Hell Week. "If hazing is a universal human activity, and every bit of evidence points to this conclusion, you most likely won't be able to ban it effectively. Refuse to allow it openly and it will go underground. You can't

ban sex, you can't prohibit alcohol, and you probably can't eliminate hazing!"[13]

What is it about hazing practices that make them so precious to these societies? What could make the groups want to evade, undermine, or contest any effort to ban the degrading and perilous features of their initiation rites? Some have argued that the groups themselves are composed of psychological or social miscreants whose twisted needs demand that others be harmed and humiliated. But the evidence does not support such a view. Studies done on the personality traits of fraternity members, for instance, show them to be, if anything, slightly healthier than other college students in their psychological adjustment. Similarly, fraternities are known for their willingness to engage in beneficial community projects for the general social good. What they are not willing to do, however, is substitute these projects for their initiation ceremonies. One survey at the University of Washington found that, of the fraternity chapters examined, most had a type of Help Week tradition but that this community service was in addition to Hell Week. In only one case was such service directly related to initiation procedures.[14]

The picture that emerges of the perpetrators of hazing practices is of normal individuals who tend to be psychologically stable and socially concerned but who become aberrantly harsh as a group at only one time—immediately before the admission of new members to the society. The evidence, then, points to the ceremony as the culprit. There must be something about its rigors that is vital to the group. There must be some function to its harshness that the group will fight relentlessly to maintain. What?

My own view is that the answer appeared in 1959 in the results of a study little known outside of social psychology. A pair of young researchers, Elliot Aronson and Judson Mills, decided to test their observation that "persons who go through a great deal of trouble or pain to attain something tend to value it more highly than persons who attain the same thing with a minimum of effort." The real stroke of inspiration came in their choice of the initiation ceremony as the best place to examine this possibility. They found that college women who had to endure a severely embarrassing initiation ceremony in order to gain access to a sex discussion group convinced themselves that their new group and its discussions were extremely valuable, even though Aronson and Mills had previously rehearsed the other group members to be as "worthless and uninteresting" as possible. Different coeds, who went through a much milder initiation ceremony or went through no initiation at all, were decidedly less positive about the "worthless" new group they had joined. Additional research showed the same results when

coeds were required to endure pain rather than embarrassment to get into a group. The more electric shock a woman received as part of the initiation ceremony, the more she later persuaded herself that her new group and its activities were interesting, intelligent, and desirable.[15]

Now the harassments, the exertions, even the beatings of initiation rituals begin to make sense. The Thonga tribesman watching, with tears in his eyes, his ten-year-old son tremble through a night on the cold ground of the "yard of mysteries," the college sophomore punctuating his Hell Night paddling of his fraternity "little brother" with bursts of nervous laughter—these are not acts of sadism. They are acts of group survival. They function, oddly enough, to spur future society members to find the group more attractive and worthwhile. As long as it is the case that people like and believe in what they have struggled to get, these groups will continue to arrange effortful and troublesome initiation rites. The loyalty and dedication of those who emerge will increase to a great degree the chances of group cohesiveness and survival. Indeed, one study of fifty-four tribal cultures found that those with the most dramatic and stringent initiation ceremonies were those with the greatest group solidarity.[16] Given Aronson and Mills's demonstration that the severity of an initiation ceremony significantly heightens the newcomer's *commitment* to the group, it is hardly surprising that groups will oppose all attempts to eliminate this crucial link to their future strength.

Military groups and organizations are by no means exempt from these same processes. The agonies of "boot camp" initiations to the armed services are legendary. The novelist William Styron, a former Marine, catalogs his own experiences in language we could easily apply to the Thongas (or, for that matter, to the Kappas or Betas or Alphas): "the remorseless close-order drill hour after hour in the burning sun, the mental and physical abuse, the humiliations, the frequent sadism at the hands of drill sergeants, all the claustrophobic and terrifying insults to the spirit which can make an outpost like Quantico or Parris Island one of the closest things in the free world to a concentration camp." But, in his commentary, Styron does more than recount the misery of this "training nightmare"—he recognizes its intended outcome: "There is no ex-Marine of my acquaintance, regardless of what direction he may have taken spiritually or politically after those callow gung-ho days, who does not view the training as a crucible out of which he emerged in some way more resilient, simply braver and better for the wear."

But why should we believe William Styron, the writer, in such matters? After all, for professional storytellers, the line between truth and fiction is often blurred. Indeed, why should we believe him when he alleges that the "infernal" character of his military training was not only

successful, it was specifically *intended*, intended to create desired levels of pride and camaraderie among those who endured and survived it? At least one reason to accept his assessment comes from unfictionalized reality—the case of West Point cadet John Edwards, who was expelled from the U.S. Military Academy in 1988 on charges involving the authorized hazing that all first-year cadets experience at the hands of upperclassmen to ensure that the newcomers can withstand the rigors of West Point training. It was not that Mr. Edwards, who ranked academically near the top of his eleven-hundred-member class, had been unable to bear up under the ritual when he was subjected to it. Nor was he expelled because he had been aberrantly cruel in his treatment of the younger cadets. His offense was that he would not expose the newcomers to what he felt was "absurd and dehumanizing" treatment. Once again, then, it appears that, for groups concerned about creating a lasting sense of solidarity and distinction, the hardship of demanding initiation activities provides a valuable advantage that they will not easily surrender—either to aspiring members who are unwilling to take the harshness *or* to give it out.

The Inner Choice

Examination of such diverse activities as the indoctrination practices of the Chinese Communists and the initiation rituals of college fraternities has provided some valuable information about commitment. It appears that commitments are most effective in changing a person's self-image and future behavior when they are active, public, and effortful. But there is another property of effective commitment that is more important than the other three combined. To understand what it is, we first need to solve a pair of puzzles in the actions of Communist interrogators and fraternity brothers.

The first puzzle comes from the refusal of fraternity chapters to allow public-service activities to be part of their initiation ceremonies. Recall that one survey showed that community projects, though frequent, were nearly always separated from the membership-induction program. But why? If an effortful commitment is what fraternities are after in their initiation rites, surely they could structure enough distasteful and strenuous civic activities for their pledges; there is plenty of exertion and unpleasantness to be had in the world of old-age-home repairs, mental-health-center yard work, and hospital bedpan duty. Besides, community-spirited endeavors of this sort would do much to improve the highly unfavorable public and media image of fraternity Hell Week rites; a survey showed that for every positive newspaper story concerning Hell Week, there were five negative stories. If only for public-rela-

tions reasons, then, fraternities should want to incorporate community-service efforts into their initiation practices. But they don't.

To examine the second puzzle, we need to return to the Chinese prison camps of Korea and the regular political essay contests held for American captives. The Chinese wanted as many Americans as possible to enter these contests so that, in the process, they might write things favorable to the Communist view. If, however, the idea was to attract large numbers of entrants, why were the prizes so small? A few extra cigarettes or a little fresh fruit were often all that a contest winner could expect. In the setting, even these prizes were valuable, but still there were much larger rewards—warm clothing, special mail privileges, increased freedom of movement in camp—that the Chinese could have used to increase the number of essay writers. Yet they specifically chose to employ the smaller rather than the larger, more motivating rewards.

Although the settings are quite different, the surveyed fraternities refused to allow civic activities into their initiation ceremonies for the same reason that the Chinese withheld large prizes in favor of less powerful inducements: They wanted the men to *own* what they had done. No excuses, no ways out were allowed. A man who suffered through an arduous hazing could not be given the chance to believe he did so for charitable purposes. A prisoner who salted his political essay with a few anti-American comments could not be permitted to shrug it off as motivated by a big reward. No, the fraternity chapters and Chinese Communists were playing for keeps. It was not enough to wring commitments out of their men; those men had to be made to take inner responsibility for their actions.

Given the Chinese Communist government's affinity for the political-essay contest as a commitment device, it should come as no surprise that a wave of such contests appeared in the aftermath of the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square, where pro-democracy protesters were gunned down by government soldiers. In Beijing alone, nine state-run newspapers and television stations sponsored essay competitions on the "quelling of the counterrevolutionary rebellion." Still acting in accord with its long-standing and insightful de-emphasis of rewards for public commitments, the Beijing government left the contest prizes unspecified.

Social scientists have determined that we accept inner responsibility for a behavior when we think we have chosen to perform it in the absence of strong outside pressures. A large reward is one such external pressure. It may get us to perform a certain action, but it won't get us to accept inner responsibility for the act. Consequently, we won't feel committed to it. The same is true of a strong threat; it may motivate immediate compliance, but it is unlikely to produce long-term commitment.

All this has important implications for rearing children. It suggests that we should never heavily bribe or threaten our children to do the things we want them truly to believe in. Such pressures will probably produce temporary compliance with our wishes. However, if we want more than just that, if we want the children to believe in the correctness of what they have done, if we want them to continue to perform the desired behavior when we are not present to apply those outside pressures, then we must somehow arrange for them to accept inner responsibility for the actions we want them to take. An experiment by Jonathan Freedman gives us some hints about what to do and what not to do in this regard.

Freedman wanted to see if he could prevent second- to fourth-grade boys from playing with a fascinating toy, just because he had said that it was wrong to do so some six weeks earlier. Anyone familiar with seven-to-nine-year-old boys must realize the enormity of the task. But Freedman had a plan. If he could first get the boys to convince themselves that it was wrong to play with the forbidden toy, perhaps that belief would keep them from playing with it thereafter. The difficult thing was making the boys believe that it was wrong to amuse themselves with the toy—an extremely expensive, battery-controlled robot.

Freedman knew it would be easy enough to have a boy obey temporarily. All he had to do was threaten the boy with severe consequences should he be caught playing with the toy. As long as he was nearby to deal out stiff punishment, Freedman figured that few boys would risk operating the robot. He was right. After showing a boy an array of five toys and warning him, "It is wrong to play with the robot. If you play with the robot, I'll be very angry and will have to do something about it," Freedman left the room for a few minutes. During that time, the boy was observed secretly through a one-way mirror. Freedman tried this threat procedure on twenty-two different boys, and twenty-one of them never touched the robot while he was gone.

So a strong threat was successful while the boys thought they might be caught and punished. But Freedman had already guessed that. He was really interested in the effectiveness of the threat in guiding the boys' behavior later on, when he was no longer around. To find out what would happen then, he sent a young woman back to the boys' school about six weeks after he had been there. She took the boys out of the class one at a time to participate in an experiment. Without ever mentioning any connection with Freedman, she escorted each boy back to the room with the five toys and gave him a drawing test. While she was scoring the test, she told the boy that he was free to play with any toy in the room. Of course, almost all the boys played with a toy. The interesting result was that, of the boys playing with a toy, 77 percent

chose to play with the robot that had been forbidden to them earlier. Freedman's severe threat, which had been so successful six weeks before, was almost totally unsuccessful when he was no longer able to back it up with punishment.

But Freedman wasn't finished yet. He changed his procedure slightly with a second sample of boys. These boys, too, were initially shown the array of five toys by Freedman and warned not to play with the robot while he was briefly out of the room because "It is wrong to play with the robot." But this time, Freedman provided no strong threat to frighten a boy into obedience. He simply left the room and observed through the one-way mirror to see if his instruction against playing with the forbidden toy was enough. It was. Just as with the other sample, only one of the twenty-two boys touched the robot during the short time Freedman was gone.

The real difference between the two samples of boys came six weeks later, when they had a chance to play with the toys while Freedman was no longer around. An astonishing thing happened with the boys who had earlier been given no strong threat against playing with the robot: When given the freedom to play with any toy they wished, most avoided the robot, even though it was by far the most attractive of the five toys available (the others were a cheap plastic submarine, a child's baseball glove without a ball, an unloaded toy rifle, and a toy tractor). When these boys played with one of the five toys, only 33 percent chose the robot.

Something dramatic had happened to both groups of boys. For the first group, it was the severe threat they heard from Freedman to back up his statement that playing with the robot was "wrong." It had been quite effective at first when Freedman could catch them should they violate his rule. Later, though, when he was no longer present to observe the boys' behavior, his threat was impotent and his rule was, consequently, ignored. It seems clear that the threat had not taught the boys that operating the robot was wrong, only that it was unwise to do so when the possibility of punishment existed.

For the other boys, the dramatic event had come from the inside, not the outside. Freedman had instructed them, too, that playing with the robot was wrong, but he had added no threat of punishment should they disobey him. There were two important results. First, Freedman's instruction alone was enough to prevent the boys from operating the robot while he was briefly out of the room. Second, the boys took personal responsibility for their choice to stay away from the robot during that time. They decided that they hadn't played with it because *they* didn't want to. After all, there were no strong punishments associated with the toy to explain their behavior otherwise. Thus, weeks later,

when Freedman was nowhere around, they still ignored the robot because they had been changed inside to believe that they did not want to play with it.[17]

Adults facing the child-rearing experience can take a cue from the Freedman study. Suppose a couple wants to impress upon their daughter that lying is wrong. A strong, clear threat ("It's bad to lie, honey; so if I catch you at it, I'll cut your tongue out") might well be effective when the parents are present or when the girl thinks she can be discovered. But it will not achieve the larger goal of convincing her that she does not want to lie because *she* thinks it's wrong. To do that, a much subtler approach is required. A reason must be given that is just strong enough to get her to be truthful most of the time but is not so strong that she sees *it* as the obvious reason for her truthfulness. It's a tricky business, because exactly what this barely sufficient reason will be changes from child to child. For one little girl, a simple appeal may be enough ("It's bad to lie, honey; so I hope you won't do it"); for another child, it may be necessary to add a somewhat stronger reason ("…because if you do, I'll be disappointed in you"); for a third child, a mild form of warning may be required as well ("…and I'll probably have to do something I don't want to do"). Wise parents will know which kind of reason will work on their own children. The important thing is to use a reason that will initially produce the desired behavior and will, at the same time, allow a child to take personal responsibility for that behavior. Thus, the less detectable outside pressure such a reason contains, the better. Selecting just the right reason is not an easy task for parents. But the effort should pay off. It is likely to mean the difference between short-lived compliance and long-term commitment.

For a pair of reasons we have already talked about, compliance professionals love commitments that produce inner change. First, that change is not just specific to the situation where it first occurred; it covers a whole range of related situations, too. Second, the effects of the change are lasting. So, once a man has been induced to take action that shifts his self-image to that of, let's say, a public-spirited citizen, he is likely to be public-spirited in a variety of other circumstances where his compliance may also be desired, and he is likely to continue his public-spirited behavior for as long as his new self-image holds.

There is yet another attraction in commitments that lead to inner change—they grow their own legs. There is no need for the compliance professional to undertake a costly and continuing effort to reinforce the change; the pressure for consistency will take care of all that. After our friend comes to view himself as a public-spirited citizen, he will automatically begin to see things differently. He will convince himself that

it is the correct way to be. He will begin to pay attention to facts he hadn't noticed before about the value of community service. He will make himself available to hear arguments he hadn't heard before favoring civic action. And he will find such arguments more persuasive than before. In general, because of the need to be consistent within his system of beliefs, he will assure himself that his choice to take public-spirited action was right. What is important about this process of generating additional reasons to justify the commitment is that the reasons are *new*. Thus, even if the original reason for the civic-minded behavior was taken away, these newly discovered reasons might be enough by themselves to support his perception that he had behaved correctly.

The advantage to an unscrupulous compliance professional is tremendous. Because we build new struts to undergird choices we have committed ourselves to, an exploitative individual can offer us an inducement for making such a choice, and after the decision has been made, can remove that inducement, knowing that our decision will probably stand on its own newly created legs. New-car dealers frequently try to benefit from this process through a trick they call "throwing a lowball." I first encountered the tactic while posing as a sales trainee at a local Chevrolet dealership. After a week of basic instruction, I was allowed to watch the regular salesmen perform. One practice that caught my attention right away was the lowball.

For certain customers, a very good price is offered on a car, perhaps as much as four hundred dollars below competitors' prices. The good deal, however, is not genuine; the dealer never intends it to go through. Its only purpose is to cause a prospect to *decide* to buy one of the dealership's cars. Once the decision is made, a number of activities develop the customer's sense of personal commitment to the car—a raft of purchase forms are filled out, extensive financing terms are arranged, sometimes the customer is encouraged to drive the car for a day before signing the contract "so you can get the feel of it and show it around in the neighborhood and at work." During this time, the dealer knows, customers automatically develop a range of new reasons to support the choice they have now made.

Then something happens. Occasionally an "error" in the calculations is discovered—maybe the salesman forgot to add in the cost of the air conditioner, and if the buyer still requires air conditioning, four hundred dollars must be added to the price. To keep from being suspected of gouging by the customer, some dealers let the bank handling the financing find the mistake. At other times, the deal is disallowed at the last moment when the salesman checks with his boss, who cancels it because "We'd be losing money." For only another four hundred dollars the car can be had, which, in the context of a multithousand-dollar deal,

doesn't seem too steep since, as the salesman emphasizes, the cost is equal to competitors' and "This is the car you chose, right?" Another, even more insidious form of lowballing occurs when the salesman makes an inflated trade-in offer on the prospect's old car as part of the buy/trade package. The customer recognizes the offer as overly generous and jumps at the deal. Later, before the contract is signed, the used-car manager says that the salesman's estimate was four hundred dollars too high and reduces the trade-in allowance to its actual, blue-book level. The customer, realizing that the reduced offer is the fair one, accepts it as appropriate and sometimes feels guilty about trying to take advantage of the salesman's high estimate. I once witnessed a woman provide an embarrassed apology to a salesman who had used the last version of lowballing on her—this while she was signing a new-car contract giving him a huge commission. He looked hurt but managed a forgiving smile.

No matter which variety of lowballing is used, the sequence is the same: An advantage is offered that induces a favorable purchase decision; then, sometime after the decision has been made but before the bargain is sealed, the original purchase advantage is deftly removed. It seems almost incredible that a customer would buy a car under these circumstances. Yet it works—not on everybody, of course, but it is effective enough to be a staple compliance procedure in many, many car showrooms. Automobile dealers have come to understand the ability of a personal commitment to build its own support system, a support system of new justifications for the commitment. Often these justifications provide so many strong legs for the decision to stand on that when the dealer pulls away only one leg, the original one, there is no collapse. The loss can be shrugged off by the customer who is consoled, even made happy, by the array of other good reasons favoring the choice. It never occurs to the buyer that those additional reasons might never have existed had the choice not been made in the first place.[18]

The impressive thing about the lowball tactic is its ability to make a person feel pleased with a poor choice. Those who have only poor choices to offer us, then, are especially fond of the technique. We can find them throwing lowballs in business, social, and personal situations. For instance, there's my neighbor Tim, a true lowball aficionado. Recall that he's the one who, by promising to change his ways, got his girlfriend, Sara, to cancel her impending marriage to another and to take him back. Since her decision for Tim, Sara has become more devoted to him than ever, even though he has not fulfilled his promises. She explains this by saying that she has allowed herself to see all sorts of positive qualities in Tim she had never recognized before.

I know full well that Sara is a lowball victim. Just as sure as I had watched buyers fall for the give-it-and-take-it-away-later strategy in the car showroom, I watched her fall for the same trick with Tim. For his part, Tim remains the guy he has always been. But because the new attractions Sara has discovered (or created) in him are quite real for her, she now seems satisfied with the same arrangement that was unacceptable before her enormous commitment. The decision to choose Tim, poor as it may have been objectively, has grown its own supports and appears to have made Sara genuinely happy. I have never mentioned to Sara what I know about lowballing. The reason for my silence is not that I think her better off in the dark on the issue. As a general guiding principle, more information is always better than less information. It's just that, if I said a word, I am confident she would hate me for it.

Depending on the motives of the person wishing to use them, any of the compliance techniques discussed in this book can be employed for good or for ill. It should not be surprising, then, that the lowball tactic can be used for more socially beneficial purposes than selling new cars or reestablishing relationships with former lovers. One research project done in Iowa, for example, shows how the lowball procedure can influence homeowners to conserve energy.[19] The project, headed by Dr. Michael Pallak, began at the start of the Iowa winter when residents who heated their homes with natural gas were contacted by an interviewer. The interviewer gave them some energy-conservation tips and asked them to try to save fuel in the future. Although they all agreed to try, when the researchers examined the utility records of these families after a month and again at winter's end, it was clear that no real savings had occurred. The residents who had promised to make a conservation attempt used just as much natural gas as a random sample of their neighbors who had not been contacted by an interviewer. Just good intentions coupled with information about saving fuel, then, were not enough to change habits.

Even before the project began, Pallak and his research team had recognized that something more would be needed to shift long-standing energy patterns. So they tried a slightly different procedure on a comparable sample of Iowa natural-gas users. These people, too, were contacted by an interviewer, who provided energy-saving hints and asked them to conserve. But for these families, the interviewer offered something else: Those residents agreeing to save energy would have their names publicized in newspaper articles as public-spirited, fuel-conserving citizens. The effect was immediate. One month later, when the utility companies checked their meters, the homeowners in this sample had saved an average of 422 cubic feet of natural gas apiece.

The chance to have their names in the paper had motivated these residents to substantial conservation efforts for a period of a month.

Then the rug was pulled out. The researchers extracted the reason that had initially caused these people to save fuel. Each family that had been promised publicity received a letter saying it would not be possible to publicize their names after all.

At the end of the winter, the research team examined the effect that letter had had on the natural-gas usage of the families. Did they return to their old, wasteful habits when the chance to be in the newspaper was removed? Hardly. For each of the remaining winter months, they actually conserved *more* fuel than they had during the time they thought they would be publicly celebrated for it! In terms of percentage of energy savings, they had managed a 12.2 percent first-month gas savings because they expected to see themselves lauded in the paper. But after the letter arrived informing them to the contrary, they did not return to their previous energy-use levels; instead, they increased their savings to a 15.5 percent level for the rest of the winter.

Although we can never be completely sure of such things, one explanation for their persistent behavior presents itself immediately. These people had been lowballed into a conservation commitment through a promise of newspaper publicity. Once made, that commitment started generating its own support: The homeowners began acquiring new energy habits, began feeling good about their public-spirited efforts, began convincing themselves of the vital need to reduce American dependence on foreign fuel, began appreciating the monetary savings in their utility bills, began feeling proud of their capacity for self-denial, and, most important, began viewing themselves as conservation-minded. With all these new reasons present to justify the commitment to use less energy, it is no wonder that the commitment remained firm even after the original reason, newspaper publicity, had been kicked away.

But strangely enough, when the publicity factor was no longer a possibility, these families did not merely maintain their fuel-saving effort, they heightened it. Any of a number of interpretations could be offered for that still stronger effort, but I have a favorite. In a way, the opportunity to receive newspaper publicity had prevented the homeowners from fully owning their commitment to conservation. Of all the reasons supporting the decision to try to save fuel, it was the only one that had come from the outside; it was the only one preventing the homeowners from thinking that they were conserving gas because they believed in it. So when the letter arrived canceling the publicity agreement, it removed the only impediment to these residents' images of themselves as fully concerned, energy-conscious citizens. This un-

qualified, new self-image then pushed them to even greater heights of conservation. Whether or not such an explanation is correct, a repeat study done by Pallak indicates that this hidden benefit of the lowball tactic is no fluke.

The experiment was done in summer on Iowans whose homes were cooled by central air-conditioning. Those homeowners who were promised newspaper publicity decreased their electricity use by 27.8 percent during July, as compared to similar homeowners who were not promised any coverage or who were not contacted at all. At the end of July, a letter was sent canceling the publicity promise. Rather than reverting to their old habits, the lowballed residents increased their August energy savings to a stunning 41.6 percent. Much like Sara, they appeared to have become committed to a choice through an initial inducement and were still more dedicated to it after the inducement had been removed.

HOW TO SAY NO

"Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Or, at least, so goes a frequently heard quotation attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson. But what a very odd thing to say. Looking around, it is obvious that, quite contrary to what Emerson seems to have suggested, internal consistency is a hallmark of logic and intellectual strength, while its lack characterizes the intellectually scattered and limited among us. What, then, could a thinker of Emerson's caliber have meant when he assigned the trait of consistency to the small-minded? I was sufficiently intrigued to go back to the original source of his statement, the essay "Self-Reliance," where it was clear that the problem lay not in Emerson, but in the popular version of what he had said. Actually he wrote, "A *foolish* consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." For some obscure reason, a central distinction had been lost as the years eroded the accurate version of his statement to mean something entirely different and, upon close inspection, entirely silly.[20]

That distinction should not be lost on us, however, because it is vital to the only effective defense I know against the weapons of influence embodied in the combined principles of commitment and consistency. Although consistency is generally good, even vital, there is a foolish, rigid variety to be shunned. It is this tendency to be automatically and unthinkingly consistent that Emerson referred to. And it is this tendency that we must be wary of, for it lays us open to the maneuvers of those who want to exploit the mechanical commitment → consistency sequence for profit.

But since automatic consistency is so useful in allowing us an econom-

ical and appropriate way of behaving most of the time, we can't decide merely to eliminate it from our lives altogether. The results would be disastrous. If, rather than whirring along in accordance with our prior decisions and deeds, we stopped to think through the merits of every new action before performing it, we would never have time to accomplish anything significant. We need even that dangerous, mechanical brand of consistency. The only way out of the dilemma is to know when such consistency is likely to lead to a poor choice. There are certain signals—two separate kinds of signals, in fact—to tip us off. We register each type in a different part of our bodies.

The first sort of signal is easy to recognize. It occurs right in the pit of our stomachs when we realize we are trapped into complying with a request we *know* we don't want to perform. It has happened to me a hundred times. An especially memorable instance, though, took place on a summer evening well before I began to study compliance tactics. I answered my doorbell to find a stunning young woman dressed in shorts and a revealing halter top. I noticed, nonetheless, that she was carrying a clipboard and was asking me to participate in a survey. Wanting to make a favorable impression, I agreed and, I do admit, stretched the truth in my interview answers so as to present myself in the most positive light. Our conversation went as follows:

STUNNING YOUNG WOMAN: Hello, I'm doing a survey on the entertainment habits of city residents, and I wonder if you could answer a few questions for me.

CIALDINI: Do come in.

SYW: Thank you. I'll just sit right here and begin. How many times per week would you say that you go out to dinner?

C: Oh, probably three, maybe four times a week. Whenever I can, really; I love fine restaurants.

SYW: How nice. And do you usually order wine with your dinner?

C: Only if it's imported.

SYW: I see. What about movies? Do you go to the movies much?

C: The cinema? I can't get enough of good films. I especially like the

sophisticated kind with the words on the bottom of the screen. How about you? Do you like to see films?

SYW: Uh…yes, I do. But let's get back to the interview. Do you go to many concerts?

C: Definitely. The symphonic stuff mostly, of course; but I do enjoy a quality pop group as well.

SYW *(writing rapidly):* Great! Just one more question. What about touring performances by theatrical or ballet companies? Do you see them when they're in town?

C: Ah, the ballet—the movement, the grace, the form—I love it. Mark me down as *loving* the ballet. See it every chance I get.

SYW: Fine. Just let me recheck my figures here for a moment, Mr. Cialdini.

C: Actually, it's Dr. Cialdini. But that sounds so formal; why don't you call me Bob?

SYW: All right, *Bob*. From the information you've already given me, I'm pleased to say that you could save up to twelve hundred dollars a year by joining Clubamerica! A small membership fee entitles you to discounts on most of the activities you've mentioned. Surely someone as socially vigorous as yourself would want to take advantage of the tremendous savings our company can offer on all the things you've already told me you do.

C *(trapped like a rat):* Well…uh…I…uh…I guess so.

I remember quite well feeling my stomach tighten as I stammered my agreement. It was a clear call to my brain, "Hey, you're being taken here!" But I couldn't see a way out. I had been cornered by my own words. To decline her offer at that point would have meant facing a pair of distasteful alternatives: If I tried to back out by protesting that I was not actually the man-about-town I had claimed to be during the interview, I would come off a liar; but trying to refuse without that protest would make me come off a fool for not wanting to save twelve hundred dollars. So I bought the entertainment package, even though

I knew I had been set up so that the need to be consistent with what I had already said would snare me.

No more, though. I listen to my stomach these days. And I have discovered a way to handle people who try to use the consistency principle on me. I just tell them exactly what they are doing. It works beautifully. Most of the time, they don't understand me; they just become sufficiently confused to want to leave me alone. I think they suspect lunacy in anyone who responds to their requests by explaining what Ralph Waldo Emerson meant in distinguishing between consistency and foolish consistency. Usually they have already begun edging away by the time I have mentioned "hobgoblins of the mind" and are gone long before I have described the *click, whirr* character of commitment and consistency. Occasionally, though, they realize that I am on to their game. I always know when that happens—it's as clear as the egg on their faces. They invariably become flustered, bumble through a hasty exit line, and go for the door.

This tactic has become the perfect counterattack for me. Whenever my stomach tells me I would be a sucker to comply with a request merely because doing so would be consistent with some prior commitment I was tricked into, I relay that message to the requester. I don't try to deny the importance of consistency; I just point out the absurdity of foolish consistency. Whether, in response, the requester shrinks away guiltily or retreats in bewilderment, I am content. I have won; an exploiter has lost.

I sometimes think about how it would be if that stunning young woman of years ago were to try to sell me an entertainment-club membership now. I have it all worked out. The entire interaction would be the same, except for the end:

SYW:…Surely someone as socially vigorous as yourself would want to take advantage of the tremendous savings our company can offer on all the things you've already told me you do.

C *(with great self-assurance):* Quite wrong. You see, I recognize what has gone on here. I know that your story about doing a survey was just a pretext for getting people to tell you how often they go out and that, under those circumstances, there is a natural tendency to exaggerate. I also realize that your bosses selected you for this job because of your physical attractiveness and told you to wear clothes showing a lot of your resilient body tissue because a pretty, scantily clad woman is likely to get men to brag about what swingers they are in order to impress her. So I'm not interested in your entertainment club because of what Emerson said about foolish consistency and hobgoblins of the mind.

SYW *(staring blankly):* Huh?

C: Look. What I told you during your fake survey doesn't matter. I refuse to allow myself to be locked into a mechanical sequence of commitment and consistency when I know it's wrongheaded. No *click, whirr* for me.

SYW: Huh?

C: Okay, let me put it this way: (1) It would be stupid of me to spend money on something I don't want. (2) I have it on excellent author-ity, direct from my stomach, that I don't want your entertainment plan. (3) Therefore, if you still believe that I will buy it, you probably also still believe in the Tooth Fairy. Surely, someone as intelligent as yourself would be able to understand that.

SYW *(trapped like a stunning young rat):* Well…uh…I…uh…I guess so.

Stomachs are not especially perceptive or subtle organs. Only when it is obvious that we are about to be conned are they likely to register and transmit that message. At other times, when it is not clear that we are being taken, our stomachs may never catch on. Under those circumstances we have to look elsewhere for a clue. The situation of my neighbor Sara provides a good illustration. She made an important commitment to Tim by canceling her prior marriage plans. That commitment has grown its own supports, so that even though the original reasons for the commitment are gone, she remains in harmony with it. She has convinced herself with newly formed reasons that she did the right thing, so she stays with Tim. It is not difficult to see why there would be no tightening in Sara's stomach as a result. Stomachs tell us when we are doing something we think is wrong for us. Sara *thinks* no such thing. To her mind, she has chosen correctly and is behaving consistently with that choice.

Yet, unless I badly miss my guess, there is a part of Sara that recognizes her choice as a mistake and her current living arrangement as a brand of foolish consistency. Where, exactly, that part of Sara is located we can't be sure. But our language does give it a name: heart of hearts. It is, by definition, the one place where we cannot fool ourselves. It is the place where none of our justifications, none of our rationalizations penetrate. Sara has the truth there, although, right now, she can't hear its signal clearly through the noise and static of the new support apparatus she has erected.

If Sara has erred in her choice of Tim, how long could she go without