

# 6 Laws of Influence

Part 2

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In part one of this article I covered the first three of Robert Cialdini's 'Six Laws of Influence':

1. Reciprocation
2. Commitment and Consistency
3. Social Proof

(If you'd like to read part-1 you can get it free here:  
[www.blueiceconsulting.co.uk](http://www.blueiceconsulting.co.uk))

Here we complete our influence toolkit with the remaining three laws:

4. Authority
5. Liking
6. Scarcity

We look at examples of how these have been used and abused in society, and of how you can both avoid being manipulated against your best interests, and use the power of these laws yourself in an authentic and ethical manner.

## 4 Authority

In many areas of life we look to experts to give us answers and to tell us what we should be doing. It's not

because we're weak, powerless or don't know our own minds, it's simply that we can't all be experts about everything.

However, not everyone is a true authority, and it's possible to be misled into believing they are, often to our detriment.

Even the mere symbols of authority, like titles and clothing, which can be donned by anyone, are enough to trigger an automatic psychological and behavioural response. Most people are instantly deferential to those in positions of power.

It's not just security guards and people in uniforms who command our obedience though; it's anyone with authority, special knowledge, impressive credentials, the physical trappings of power or even just having an 'air' of confidence.

In other words, it's not just those with 'actual' power to whom we kowtow, it's anyone who 'appears' to be authoritative, to whom we defer, regardless of their real position.

How do you respond to and respect authority? Probably far more than you think or are prepared to admit.

## How would you behave...?

Imagine you are behind a car stopped at a red light. The car in front is a model from a low-cost manufacturer; it's about 10 years old and a little unkempt. The traffic lights change to green and the driver does not move. How many seconds elapse before you honk your horn?



Now imagine the car in front is different. This time it's a limousine, a Rolls Royce or a car with blacked out windows and diplomatic plates. Now how many seconds would elapse before you honk your horn?

My guess is you wait a little longer, you don't honk at all, or if you do, it's with more of a light 'tap' on the horn rather than a sustained blast!

## A personal example

A couple of years ago I had just finished delivering a keynote speech to an audience of almost 500 business people. As it had been a big event I went back to the hotel with a few colleagues, ordered a couple of bottles of celebratory Champagne to be served in the lounge for us and went to my room to get changed into jeans and a T-shirt.



I came back down to the lounge and sat alone waiting for the Champagne. A waiter came over to me and asked me to move.

"I'm sorry" I said, "Why do you want me to move?"

"Because, sir".... he explained... "We have a rather important party of people who have reserved this area of the lounge and I need to serve them Champagne."

Yes, I know," I replied... "It's me. I'm the one who ordered the Champagne!"

I give this story not to belittle the waiter, but to make the point that people often make instant assumptions and generalisations about a person's level of authority based upon things as simple as the way they are dressed.

If I had still been sat there in my suit and tie then I imagine the waiter would have approached me to ask me if it were I who had ordered the champagne. He certainly wouldn't have asked me to move in such a dismissive manner.

## Would you answer the door?

What you would do if your doorbell rings at 11pm and you see through the security spy hole two men in police uniform? Would you open the door?

How might you behave if you saw the same unknown men dressed in street clothes?

I suggest in the second case you would not, or you would hesitate. In order to overcome your resistance they would have to hold up more proofs of their authority like police badges or a search warrant; even then you may not open the door.

*"It's not just those with 'actual' power to whom we kowtow, it's anyone who 'appears' to be authoritative"*

So, clothing such as hospital whites, army greens, priestly black, police blues or a dark business suit, and other outward signals that accompany authoritative positions, such as guns, security badges, prestigious letterheads, expensive cars and watches, all play their part.

Titles too, such as Dr, Professor, PhD, President, Lady or Chairman, have an instant impact upon those who hear or see them.



So why do people respond automatically to authority figures? Perhaps it's because we grow up surrounded by those bigger, smarter, and more experienced than ourselves. We're taught to do what we're told, and often punished for disobedience.

Parents, teachers, policemen, politicians, bosses, lawyers, priests, and gurus, and now sadly even B- or C-list celebrities, are looked up to by many, to guide their decisions and tell them what to do. "Which diet plan should I follow?" Well, here's a nationally recognised authority or popular celebrity who says she has the answer.



Doctors, surgeons and airline pilots are particularly seen as unquestionable 'Gods' in whom we quite literally place our lives.

However, no one's infallible, and there are plenty of examples that testify to the folly of blind faith towards real or perceived authority figures. Dr. Shipman, Bernard Maydoff, fanatical religious and cult leaders and more recently the pilot of the flight carrying the Polish President (and 140 other, now deceased dignitaries), who insisted that he was in command and knew best. He ordered the pilots to land at the fog-shrouded airport and they obeyed, even though they did not have to.

***What price authority?***

## 'Fake Authority' in Action

Decked out in a uniform, badge, and baton, a television reporter stationed himself in front of a Las Vegas bank. On the ATM, he placed a sign with large lettering that read, "OUT OF ORDER — GIVE DEPOSITS TO GUARD ON DUTY." In the centre of the sign was the shape of a large, gold badge.



When bank customers approached the ATM, the 'guard' smiled, looked them straight in the eyes, and asked... "Do you need to make a deposit or a withdrawal?"

No bank would ever allow a guard to conduct private transactions like this, but were people suspicious? Not a bit. Without hesitation, customer after customer handed over not only cash and cheques, but also Social Security numbers, credit cards, account numbers, PIN codes... private information that in the wrong hands could leave people penniless.

In fact, out of every 10 customers, only one showed any signs of hesitation, and most of those customers eventually acceded.

When the reporter revealed the deception and asked the flabbergasted victims why they so readily handed him money and private information, they all gave pretty much the same answer: "Because of the uniform; because of the sign." In other words... "because you looked authoritative."

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Many people fall for similar deceptions when they click on 'fake' financial websites and enter or change their private security information... because they look authoritative.

So, in some circumstances authority is helpful, needed, or it brings the 'owner' justifiable power and influence. However, like anything that is powerful, it can also be dangerous.

For the well-meaning influencer, for the person who wishes to influence through integrity, then I would suggest that building genuine *credibility* is better than relying upon questionable authority. So what does it take to establish genuine credibility?

## How to build credibility

According to a mountain of psychological research, there are four basic elements of credibility:

### 1. Expertise

Having relevant knowledge, education and experience is key to expertise. Have you demonstrated unusual competence in your area? What are your big successes? What about awards or public recognition within your chosen field? For what are you the 'go to person' when people seek specialist knowledge or experience?

### 2. Trustworthiness

Do people feel they can trust you? Do you regard yourself as a trustworthy person? Are your intentions honourable? If others think that your background, experience or position prevents you from being objective, or they think you're just saying what people want to hear, then they're unlikely to trust you. There are plenty of examples within the political and commercial world that illustrate the importance integrity and trust, or rather the lack of either.

You'll be more persuasive when you are perceived as saying and standing for what you really believe, which often means stating that there are two or more perspectives to an issue, and/or acknowledging flaws in your own argument when presenting your position. A response to you of "Yes, well you would say *that wouldn't you.*" Is a sure sign that you're not building trust.

### 3. Credibility and Sameness

As referred to in part 1 of this article, the law of 'Social Proof' states that we tend to pay more attention to those who are like us, think like us, share our beliefs and values about what is important in life, look like and dress like us, or are from the same social class. When in the company of people who are not like us we can feel uncomfortable.

An unkempt man got into the 1<sup>st</sup> class compartment of a train the other day, plonked four cans of lager on the table and proceeded to drink them one by one. The small number of other passengers in the carriage looked at each other; they were clearly uncomfortable with the man's presence, and were silently signalling to each other "*What should we do, should we say something?*" The train inspector came into the carriage and told the man that the carriage was for 1<sup>st</sup> class ticket holders only. "*I know,*" replied the man. At which point he took out his 1<sup>st</sup> class ticket replying...

..."*You can't be too careful these days can you?*"

### 4. Physical Attractiveness

See the next law for more information on the power of physical attractiveness.

To close this section, here are some tips to make the law of Authority work for you?

1. Cite authoritative sources to support your ideas
2. Look and act like an authority figure yourself
3. Ensure that others know about your relevant education and experience
4. Show how you are similar to those whom you wish to influence
5. Dress like the people who are already in the positions of authority that you seek i.e. dress for 'the next level up'

## 5. Liking & Similarity

No matter how reasonable we may think ourselves to be, studies show that we're always more likely to say "Yes" to those we know and like.

Is this true for you too?

Think of the opposite; do you find yourself saying "No" more often to those whom you don't know, don't understand or don't like? Of course you do.

### Similarity

Research shows that we readily comply with requests from those who are similar to us and for whom we have good feelings. It's what makes refusing to buy Tupperware from a friend or relative next to impossible! It's largely the principle on which the Tupperware, 'home party' and multi-level marketing industry was founded.

People like to be liked, and they like people who are like themselves. Some people are so driven by this that they go to extraordinary lengths to 'fit in' in order to be liked. Others are drawn to be members of groups who are like themselves.

Wouldn't you rather work with or buy from someone who is pleasant, easy to deal with, respectful, pays you genuine compliments, listens to you,

is cooperative and responds to your needs?

Do you not get on better with those who are similar to you, share the same interests, views, values and beliefs?

People tend to like others who appear to have similar opinions, personality traits, background, or lifestyle to themselves. More people will say "yes" to you if they like you, and the more similar to them you appear to be, the more *likely* they are to like you.

**Similarity = Likeness  
= Liking**

**All of which means more  
chance of saying, "Yes"**

Many people are also suckers for flattery. Remarkably, this can apply even when they know it isn't true! A person who has a good opinion of themselves will accept praise and will tend to like those who provide it.

Those with low self-esteem, however, reject even well-earned praise, and they distrust the source. People with low self-esteem have other issues, and in any case they are probably not the type of people who are high on your target list to either be like or to

be liked by. Unless, of course, you sell self-help books!

All good salespeople have mastered the flattery tactic. Despite what you might think of flattery, they know it works often enough for them to keep using it.

Genuine compliments often enhance liking and can be used as a means to gain compliance. Where this can backfire is if the flattery becomes crudely transparent or is not genuine. Trust breaks down if a person senses that they are being manipulated with undeserved praise or fake flattery.

### Physical Attractiveness

Like it or not, it's true. You and I are more likely to pay attention to attractive people. Numerous studies have shown that attractive people are seen as better communicators and more fluent, though there are, of course, some notable exceptions!

Attractiveness and physical height are also positively correlated with financial income and wealth; CEO's are significantly taller than the average person, and the WAGS (Wives and Girlfriends) of famous footballers, golfers and racing drivers tend to be amongst the most physically attractive in society. The data doesn't lie, and it gives a



revealing insight into human emotion, fallibility, fickleness and subjectivity.

Physical attractiveness seems to engender a 'halo' effect that gives a favourable impression of other traits such as talent, kindness, competence and intelligence. As a result, attractive people are more persuasive both in terms of getting what they request and in changing others' attitudes. It's a self-fulfilling virtuous circle, just as the rich get richer, success breeds success, and some people seem to have 'all the luck', whilst others find themselves locked in a vicious cycle of bad 'luck', failure and disappointment.

A caveat on extreme physical attractiveness, and the aspect that inspired me to write this 2-part article, is that when someone is compellingly attractive it can be distracting and may paradoxically reduce their ability to communicate and persuade. I even wonder if some people shouldn't be allowed onto the street, they have, on occasion, been the cause of car accidents!

Speaking personally, I find that at the end of a TV weather forecast presented by an attractive female, I have no recollection whatsoever of what the weather will be like tomorrow! I suspect that I am not alone in this regard and it works for both sexes. My recommendation, if you want to know the weather forecast, is stick to radio!



### Familiarity

People also tend to like and trust things that are familiar. The best way to build this familiarity is to have frequent, relatively short, pleasant contacts.

For example, if you spend three hours with someone you've never met before, you would get a sense of who they are. However, if you divided the same time into 30-minute segments of pleasant interaction over six consecutive weeks, you would each have a much stronger and positive knowledge about the other. You have established a comfort level, familiarity, and a history with them; you've built a 'relationship'. Repeated pleasant contacts with you and/or your organisation's services or products help build familiarity, liking, trust and acceptance of you and your ideas.

A particular positive circumstance that works well is mutual and successful cooperation, in which you are collaborating with another person to achieve something that is beneficial

to both of you.

So, in order to be more influential you need to work on making yourself as likeable as possible by...

- Having and displaying a bright and cheerful disposition
- Being friendly and welcoming towards others
- Making yourself as physically attractive as possible (making the best of what you've been given!)
- Mirroring body language (not mimicking)
- Taking a genuine interest in other people, with the key word being 'genuine'
- Paying others genuine compliments and praising them when deserved
- Saying less (particularly about yourself) and listening more to others

## 6 Scarcity

Fear of loss is a powerful motivator, as is the fear of losing out on a possible gain. By leveraging the instinctive tendency to avoid losing what one already possesses, or avoid losing out on the chance to possess something desirable, you can trigger a psychological and therefore a behavioural response.



On weeks where the lottery prize money is higher than normal, even more people rush out to purchase tickets, or buy more tickets than usual, as they are driven by the fear of losing out on an even bigger prize. Of course, this only makes the prize fund grow further which accelerates the buying frenzy.

You will have spotted that the law of 'Social Proof' is also in operation here, as individuals are influenced by the fact that 'everyone else is buying tickets'.

We're all vulnerable to some form of the principle of scarcity. Opportunities seem more valuable when they are less available. Hard-to-get things are perceived as better than easy-to-get things. That which is rare, or which is becoming less available, is always more appealing. For example, the object you've almost decided to buy is out of stock. The salesperson offers to check their other stores. And guess what? A store across town has one left! Do you reserve it there and then? Of course!

In the aftermath of the explosion of the Icelandic volcano with the unpronounceable name, travellers on the European continent were paying up to €3,000 to hire a car; ten times the normal hire charge, for

fear of not being able to get home. It was the same with bus, train and taxi fares.

So, if you want to leverage the law of Scarcity, without taking unfair advantage of people (as in the car hire example above), what do you do?

You should show genuine scarcity in the most tangible way you can. Point out what will be lost by not responding. People fear loss, so generate a feeling of potential loss. You can also refer to limited resources, stock running out, or you could impose time limits to increase the perceived value of whatever you are offering or suggesting.

The possibility of losing something is a more powerful motivator than of gaining something. So, let others (a customer, your boss, a lover) know what they will be losing if they don't say "Yes" to your offer.

Scarcity is a central concept in economics. In fact economics has been described as *'the study of the allocation of scarce goods amongst competing ends'*. In other words, scarcity means not having sufficient resources to meet everyone's needs.



Do you want to be the one who misses out? Witness queues at petrol stations when fears of oil supply disruption arise, or the bulk buying and stockpiling of sugar, coffee, bread and other commodities whenever their supply is threatened.

The opposite, the cache of having something that very few people possess, is also a powerful driver of behaviour. Hence the perceived value of 'exclusivity' associated with products such as expensive cars and watches. Whilst many high-end products do contain quality components, much of their value is intangible. It is manufactured in the

mind of the purchaser or owner, fuelled of course by marketing and advertising departments, playing on the fact that the vast majority of other people do not have, and cannot have what they have.

So, things that are, or are 'perceived' to be difficult to attain, are typically regarded as more valuable.

The availability of an item or experience can also be perceived as a clue to its quality. Certain tangible goods, such as diamonds, are likely to remain scarce simply because there is limited supply in the world. DeBeers, who control the largest share of global diamond mining reported in May 2010 that they were cutting production by 30% due to dwindling supplies. Of course this caused an immediate rise in the price of diamonds, purely as a result of a company announcement. Did a physical diamond change from one day to the next? No. Its 'perceived value' rose, based upon its perceived rarity.

*"The possibility of losing something is a more powerful motivator than of gaining something"*

If you have to work hard in order to gain membership of an exclusive club then the value of being a member is far higher than if they accept just about anyone. As Groucho Marx famously quipped *"I don't wish to be a member of a club that would have me as a member!"*

The opposite of Scarcity is Abundance. Take some women's interest in owning a Prada or Gucci bag for example.



Due to the high demand for such bags, but the inability of many women to afford them, a market for counterfeit bags has appeared. As there are now so many fake (and genuine) Prada and Gucci bags around, and it's often difficult to tell the difference, the exclusivity and value of carrying a genuine bag has also fallen.

Some time ago the makers of American whisky brand 'Knob Creek' took out a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, stating that due to high demand they were running low on whisky and that supply shortages may arise very soon. Whilst this may of course be true, it is a brilliant marketing ploy and a great example of the application of the law of Scarcity. There could be several positive outcomes for Knob Creek marketers:



1. Readers of the advertisement who do not normally drink Knob Creek may wonder why, if lots of people are buying Knob Creek whisky, they don't too? (Social Proof).
2. It may prompt them to try a bottle, or a glass in a bar to see what all the fuss is about.
3. Regular consumers, fearing a shortage of their favourite tittle, may decide to buy several bottles so that they don't lose out (Scarcity)
4. Even if they do not stockpile, the marketing message subtly reinforces the decision of existing drinkers of Knob Creek (Commitment & Consistency).

Of course, the above reactions are likely to increase sales of Knob Creek, which may then lead to a genuine shortage of supply, therefore enabling the manufacturers to 'honestly' affirm that stocks are genuinely running low! Chicken or egg, which comes first?

*"I don't wish to be a member of a club that would have me as a member!"*

Groucho Marx



Online and TV shopping channels use a 'limited number of items available' strategy. Whilst this may or may not be true, the psychological impact of potentially missing out on something kicks in and you are more likely to impulse buy. The fact that a countdown timer and/or continually updated reducing 'number of items left' counter is added adds to the time pressure and heightened perceived value of the goods.

Scarcity does not just impact goods and services, but also information. 'Scarce' information is perceived as more valuable and more interesting to the consumer. Once information becomes censored for example, many people become obsessed with wanting access to the information being held back, even if before censorship they had not even thought about the subject.

Many newspaper and media organisations are today losing money from traditional print media due to the free availability of news and other information on the web. Some are now experimenting with 'paid for' web sites, which grant access to more exclusive information, such as detailed articles and insights into financial markets, for a monthly or 'pay per view' fee. Time will tell if people are prepared to pay for such exclusive access; it seems they may. However, media organisations know that for people to pay for something it has to have a perceived value over and above that which they can obtain from free services such as the BBC website. It has to be exclusive.

### Summary

So, we have reviewed Cialdini's six laws of influence, and illustrated their continuing relevance and power of persuasion with some recent and present day examples.

I wish to end on is a question...

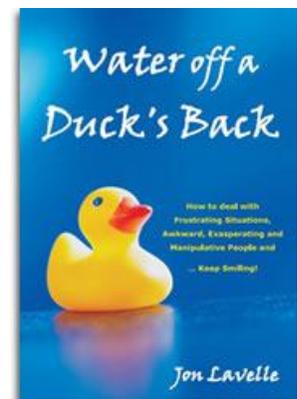
Is this manipulation?

My answer is that it depends upon your motives. If your motive is to trick and deceive people into thinking or behaving in a way that is not helpful to them or others around them then yes, you can use these laws to manipulate others unfairly. Unfortunately for you, it's a short-term win because you're likely to trip yourself up and lose out in the longer term.

However, if your intention is honourable, and you wish to influence with integrity then you can use the power of the psychological automatic responses that these laws trigger, to help you achieve your objectives by helping others to make the right decisions for themselves.

Like any set of tools, it is how you use them that counts.

The 2nd edition of Jon's latest, most popular book to date; **Water Off a Duck's Back** is available from Waterstones, Amazon UK, Amazon US, and all good book stores. For a 'signed by the author' copy, visit [www.blueiceconsulting.co.uk](http://www.blueiceconsulting.co.uk)



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