

WHY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS PRESENT YOUR CRAZIEST IDEAS

I hate to admit this, but I am horrible at negotiations. Whenever we go to a yard sale or outdoor market, I dread haggling. Which makes my wife furious, because she is a natural born negotiator. She thinks I am insane for just accepting the initial price, but I think she is insane when she starts the negotiation with some outlandish number. She sets the tone from the beginning, and then is able to find some compromise that is always better than whatever I would have negotiated.

But being a great negotiator is not something you are just born with. Persuasion is a skill that you can learn, and once you learn it you can apply it to many different areas of your life. Of course, being able to persuade people is great for haggling for a better price, but persuasion is also a critical skill to help you convince people your idea is better than other ideas.

It shouldn't surprise you that persuading others is one of the most researched and written about skills. I mean, what business wouldn't want to dramatically improve the persuasion abilities of their salespeople? Unfortunately, it can be tough to find the good lessons hidden under the heap of generic "How to win more deals" or "How to influence without authority" books. That is why I recommend *Influence*, by Robert Cialdini. This book is one of the best books on influence and persuasion that I have ever read. So, I hope you like this article on how you can bold starting positions to help you persuade others.

Would you chaperone a group of juvenile delinquents at the zoo?

In order to study how sales and persuasion worked, Robert Cialdini (a professor at Arizona State) spent three "undercover" years working for used car dealerships, fund-raising organizations, and telemarketing firms to observe real-life situations of persuasion. At each company, he would learn the different sales techniques, and eventually he started to notice some patterns. One such pattern was that people liked to reciprocate if a compromise were made.

In his famous 1975 study, researchers approached college students and asked them an extreme request: to chaperone a group of juvenile delinquents on a trip to the zoo. Not surprisingly, 83% of the students said no. This experiment was conducted again, but this time the students were asked to volunteer two hours a week mentoring at risk juvenile delinquents. And when the student said no, they were asked a follow up request to become chaperons for the zoo trip.

In theory, both of these experiments asked students the same request (zoo chaperone), and one could expect that the going to the zoo would be rejected at a similar rate. But that wasn't the case. In reality, three times as many students signed up to be zoo chaperones after they had said no to being a mentor. Think about that for a second. They improved their ability to persuade people to become zoo chaperones from 17% to 50%, just by presenting an even bigger request first.

Why we say yes to the second idea.

At the root of Cialdini's theory of reciprocity is that people want to compromise. When the researcher reduced their request, the students saw this as a move towards compromise, and that made them more willing to say yes. This persuasion technique has been replicated in countless other studies. These studies demonstrated that starting with an extreme request will make people more open to hearing your lesser request (even if the lesser request is the actual goal).

Unfortunately for us, our brains are hardwired to fall for this trap. When we think about requests, we do not think about them individually. Instead, we compare the requests, and rate them against each other. In the case, Cialdini's study both being a mentor and being a chaperon are significantly large requests and are seen that way when viewed independently. But when they are compared, the zoo request is seen as a smaller request.

This compromise effect is a trap we fall into all the time, and the majority of restaurants and shops know how to use it against you. For example, when an electronic store sells two types of TVs (an expensive kind and a cheap kind), the sales are close to 50/50 between the types. But when they add a third option (very expensive, expensive, and cheap), that middle option shoots up to 80% of the purchases. Even though the expensive

PROFESSIONAL CORNER

TV didn't change, by making it seem like the compromise choice, significantly more people bought it, and the store made significantly more profit.

How to apply reciprocity and the compromise effect at work.

I hope by now you can see clear ways to apply reciprocity and the compromise effect within your marketing and sales organizations. If you don't have 3 levels of service or products, then you are missing a golden opportunity to guide your customers to your desired products / services. In addition, salespeople should start with their biggest proposals for their customer, and then compromise to reach their original goal.

But these persuasion tactics are not just limited to sales and marketing. I see these as tools that you could be using when presenting your own ideas. Instead of starting with your idea, present the extreme version of your idea, knowing it will hit push back. Then you can 'scale' the idea back, and make compromises, eventually getting close to the idea you were aiming for.

The most persuasive people I know use these tactics but make people feel included and a part of the process. While they present the extreme idea, they use active listening and questioning skills to get the other people to make compromise recommendations. By getting the other people to shape the compromise, they are effectively building something that becomes even more persuasive to them. It becomes a shared idea, that we all believe in.

Don't fall into the trap yourself.

By being actively aware of the compromise effect and reciprocity, you can be more persuasive and influential. But more importantly, you can become more aware when people are trying to persuade you. When your colleague presents three ideas to you, you will know you will overrate the compromise option, and hopefully you will assess the options independently, not comparatively.

The best way to avoid this trap is to make sure you review each idea independently on its own merits, not comparatively. Maybe mentoring a young delinquent AND going to the zoo are too much. Maybe the cheap tv is better suited for your needs than the super expensive and the middle expensive tv. Once you stop comparing solutions and ideas, you can stop yourself from being unduly influenced.

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