Influence Book Summary


A book by Robert B. Cialdini

Robert Cialdini’s shows us why it is so easy to trick us and what we can do to protect us from being manipulated by con artists and salespersons. You will also learn how to influence people.

In dangerous environments, we need to be able to act fast. So fast indeed that there is not enough time to think a situation through. Therefore, we use shortcuts to avoid time-consuming thinking. We learn these automatic, hard-wired responses from our parents and other people we trust. This is a good thing, but shortcuts are also used against us.

There are even whole industries studying human behavior and finding ways to manipulate us. Influence reveals many of those devious tactics.

These are the things I learned by reading the Blinks:

- How scarcity offers can be optimized
- Manipulation vs. influence
This post is based on the Blinks I listened to while walking to work. I learn from Blinkist's content each and every day. So if you enjoy this post, you will like their content even more.

**Key Ideas**

*Embarrassment is a villain to be crushed.*

Why is it so easy to manipulate us?

The world is complex. All creatures alike need to take shortcuts to speed up decision making. Humans are no exception; they use shortcuts in their reasoning as well. Typically making quicker decisions is good for us. But you need to be aware of your automatic responses as it is quite easy that other people use those against us.

The author gives an example for such a shortcut from the animal world. Turkeys recognize their chicks by the sound they make. If a chick makes a cheep-cheep sound, the bird *knows* that it is a turkey baby. But if a polecat also makes a similar cheep-cheep sound the turkey will also accept the polecat as its chick.

This decision-making shortcut serves the turkey well. **We humans have to make fast decisions as well and therefore have the tendency to avoid thinking and give learned, automatic responses in certain environments.** Just like the bird in the above example did.

**Salespersons and advertisers certainly know about the shortcuts humans take.** For example, everybody working in sales knows that consumers often think that *price equals quality.* Now, if a
shop carries an unpopular item, we would assume that the shop owner will lower the price because then more people can afford it. But the owner or clerk can use his sales knowledge and increase the price of the item. Some customer will perceive the shelf warmer to be of higher quality because of its higher price and buys it.

If we know this shortcut in our decision-making process, we can protect ourselves from such manipulations.

How favors can be used to trick you

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.

One of the pillars of our society is that we have the urge to give back to those who are treating us well. This need is called the urge of reciprocation.

We do not want to be perceived as being freeloaders or lazybones. Therefore, we want to return a favor.

Often we return much larger favors just to rid ourselves of the psychological weight of having to pay back.

Again, the author provides an excellent example; the Krishna organization gave flowers as a present to people walking by. After handing over the flower, they asked for a donation. The gifting of the flower before pleading resulted in more money collected because people felt the urge to give back the favor.

Certainly a favor is a favor and for such it is a good thing. But we need to separate the good favors from those which are just given to
We are easily tricked into giving our money away

Do you know what the rejection-then-retreat strategy is? It is yet another approach which can be used to influence us.

For example, somebody working for a human rights organization might ask you first to pay $50 per year to become a member, but then asks you to just give a $5 contribution. It is very likely that you give the $5 donation.

This strategy works well because it also uses the contrast principle. In the example above the difference between the $50 membership fee and the $5 donation is magnified because one option is presented after another. We perceive the $5 donation as the much cheaper choice.

Without the first offer of the $50 membership, we were less likely to give anything at all.

How salespersons double and triple their sales

We all hate to lose an opportunity. The fear of losing a lucky chance is often used to manipulate us.

One such example is a sale which is only available for a limited time. If an offer is labeled as being available only for a short time span, it will result in 3 times more sales of the item.

Scarcity works. If you are a shop owner, you can use this to bring your customers to make a decision quickly. But as a buyer, you want to look
at the offer more carefully.

The author explained an interesting finding. **When a time-limited offer was coupled with the information that only a few people know about it, the opportunity seemed to be even more attractive to customers.**

If you are a business owner, you should not only make a time-limited offer but label the proposal as being available to only a few.

As a customer, it is easy to identify such offers. Is there an expiration date on the tender? Does it say that it is available to only a few people, and you are one of those? This should trigger an alarm in your brain: do I really need this?

**Humans hate being left behind**

The grass is always greener on the other side. It seems that most of us long for what is not easily available to us. And we all hate to lose an opportunity. We dislike it even more if an opponent or competitor seizes the opportunity and we are left behind.

If you have kids you can see this quite often, a toy that covered dust in the shelf, suddenly gets exciting to a child, as soon as the toy is picked up by another kiddie.

**Humans have the tendency to value something more when they had to go through a lot of effort to obtain it.**

Realtors know that we hate to be left behind, that is why they will always let you know that there are more interested parties who are willing to buy the house or property.
The foot in the door technique

Salespeople often use a technique the author calls the **foot in the door technique**: they ask for a small commitment that will change the prospects self-image before making the bigger offer.

*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.*

Humans strive to be consistent with their earlier actions. We feel the urge to align our word with our actions. Public commitments work so well because of this urge. We want to be seen by our peers as a person of integrity.

We all look for social proof

When you make plans to go on a trip to Italy, and your good friend has lived there, you certainly will ask your friend for recommendations. A friend is a person we trust, and therefore, we can use his knowledge to make decisions for ourselves quicker, without thinking too much.

Social proofs come in various tastes.

When we are uncertain how to judge a situation, we watch the people around us closely and act accordingly. With all its good, or bad consequences.

Even street baggers use social proof. You rarely see an empty collection pot. When we see money in the pot, we have evidence that people before us were helping too.

By wearing the same clothes as our peers show that we are a part of the
team or group. You rarely see bankers with sneakers.

When companies want to sell their products to use, they show people like you and me using their products. This makes selling the products easier because a customer has already the social proof. When we watch people around us, our choices are influenced significantly.

We are more indulgent to people we like. You probably heard of the good cop, bad cop concept. When there are two police officers on patrol, one plays the good cop and the other the bad cop. This will make it easier for a criminal to make a confession to the good cop.

Authority negates independent thinking

We are trained to obey authorities. This start in pre-school and never stops after that. This obedience even goes so far that we stop to think for ourselves and follow the rules set by the authorities.

Often we cannot judge whether a person is an authority or not. So we automatically look for symbols to appraise the individual's power. These symbols can be titles, cloth, or language.

Following authority blindly can be wrong because authority negates independent thinking.

First Insight: How scarcity can be optimized

If you want to sell a lot of your product, your offer should be a scarcity offer, and it should be labeled as being available to only a few.
We all have come across scarcity offers.

**For a limited time only**

**Only three more in stock**

**Buy now and get 50% off**

But I was not aware of how important it is to use scarcity in your marketing. The numbers the author gives are very compelling. **You quickly can double or triple your sales if you use optimized scarcity offers.**

Sometimes easy tweaks in your marketing message can make a big difference. Cialdini gives an example; let the buyer know that he is only one of a selected few to see this offer. This information alone will add significantly to your sales numbers.

If you have a product to sell, especially a digital product, read my notes on [Jeff Walker’s book launch](#).

**Second Insight: Manipulation vs. Influence**

Honestly, my main reason to read the book was not to protect myself from dubious offers by salespersons but to learn more about how we humans work.

It is important to know how we function; in which situations we think and in which we only operate on learned shortcuts.

This knowledge then can be used to influence others or to protect us from manipulations.
Everybody tries to manipulate everybody else all the time. Your friends try to manipulate you. You try to manipulate your wife. I try to manipulate my readers: I want you to sign-up for my newsletter for example.

In my humble opinion, when you use your knowledge to manipulate somebody else to do the right thing, you are not a manipulator but an influencer.

**Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion**

This book will teach you a lot about how humans are wired. There are so many situations in our day to day life that we do not think about anymore. We just respond automatically. *Often this is good, and we can use it to our advantage.* Sometimes, though, other people and especially marketing departments of big corporations use these automatic responses against us.

The knowledge you gain by reading *Influence* will help you to defend yourself against many manipulations in everyday life. But you will also be able to use the book’s wisdom to persuade others. This skill is a very powerful.

**Resources**

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