cialdini institute

THE FIVE YESES

Influence, *From the Source*

The seven principles of persuasion as the research actually found them, turned into the Five Yeses: word-for-word scripts, tools and scorecards for the reply, the meeting, the trust, the follow-through and the decision.



From the research of Robert Cialdini, Ph.D., author of *Influence*

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START HERE

One word that gets more people to say yes

People waiting at an office copier were asked to let someone go first with five pages. Only the wording of the request changed.



"Because I have to make copies" gives no reason at all. It worked almost as well.

The part most retellings leave out: when the request was twenty pages, the empty reason stopped working. Only a real reason raised agreement. For anything that matters, the reason has to be true.

Langer, Blank & Chanowitz, 1978

WHY IT WORKS

We rely on shortcuts. Life is too busy to weigh every request in full, so a cue like "because" triggers a response before we think. Dr. Cialdini called it *click, whirr*.

He began studying these shortcuts for a personal reason:

"I can admit it freely now. All my life I've been a patsy."

He spent nearly three years inside the professions whose business is getting a yes, learning what they knew. The seven principles on page 4 are what he found.

TRY IT TODAY

Give the real reason with every request. "Could you review this by Thursday, because the board sees it on Friday?"

THREE MORE, FOR THIS WEEK

To a client

"Could we move the call to Thursday, because your finance lead can join then?"

To your manager

"Can I take Friday for the proposal, because the client decides on Monday?"

To your team

"Please log every call today, because we review the pipeline at nine tomorrow."

Each reason is true and specific. That is the version that still works when the request is big.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

Seven principles, and the rule for each

Each principle is a shortcut people rely on to decide. The quoted rules are Dr. Cialdini's own, from his *Harvard Business Review* article "Harnessing the Science of Persuasion" (2001).

Reciprocity

We say yes to people we owe.

"Give what you want to receive."

One extra mint, given personally, lifted tips 21%. *The Follow-Up*, p.6

Liking

We say yes to people we like.

"Uncover real similarities and offer genuine praise."

A short personal call first: 59% of pairs reached a deal, against 39%. *The First Meeting*, p.12

Social proof

We say yes if people like us do.

"Use peer power whenever it's available."

"Most guests in this room" raised towel reuse 33%. *The Proof Page*, p.18

Authority

We say yes to trustworthy experts.

"Expose your expertise; don't assume it's self-evident."

A receptionist naming credentials: 15% more signed contracts. *The First Meeting*, p.12

Consistency

We say yes to what fits what we've said.

"Make their commitments active, public, and voluntary."

A small sign first: 76% agreed to a big one, against 17%. *The Yes That Sticks*, p.23

Scarcity

We say yes to what is limited.

"Highlight unique benefits and exclusive information."

Scarce product, exclusive news: six times the orders. *The Moment Before the Ask*, p.29

Unity

We say yes to people who are "of us."

Speak to the identity you genuinely share.

The seventh principle, introduced in *Pre-Suasion* (2016). *The Moment Before the Ask*, p.29

And one amplifier. Contrast is not a principle: what comes first changes how the next thing feels, and it strengthens all seven. *The Follow-Up*, p.6 and *The Moment Before the Ask*, p.29 use it.

TWO MINUTES

Which principle do you leave out?

Think about the last month of emails, meetings and requests. Score each statement for how often it was true, from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always).

PRINCIPLE	HOW OFTEN IS THIS TRUE OF YOU?	1–5	START ON
Reciprocity	I give something genuinely useful before I ask for anything.		p.6
Liking	Before I make my case, I find something I really have in common with the person.		p.12
Social proof	I tell people what others like them have chosen, with specifics.		p.18
Authority	My relevant expertise is known before a meeting starts, ideally through someone else.		p.12
Consistency	I ask people to say or write what they'll do, rather than assuming they will.		p.23
Scarcity	I explain what's genuinely unique about my offer, and what is lost without it.		p.29
Unity	I talk about what "we" are trying to do, not only what I want.		p.29

Your highest score is your natural style, and the principle you're most likely to overuse. **Your lowest** is the quickest gain. Most people have one principle they almost never use. Start with its section, on the page shown.

WRITE IT DOWN

The principle I use least _____

The section I'll start with _____

This week, with _____

A self-rating shows what you believe about yourself. To measure it, the free Influence Assessment takes about twelve minutes and names your style and your biggest gap.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Start with the principle you wrote down

Each of the Five Yeses gives you the research, a four-part framework, scripts for five moments, a tool and a scorecard. Words in [brackets] are yours to replace. Every study is named where it's used and listed in full, with a link, at the back.

THE STANDARD EVERY SCRIPT HOLDS TO

True The principle is really present: the testimonial is real, the limit exists, the expertise is earned.

Natural It fits the situation. You bring it to the surface; you don't manufacture it.

Wise It leaves both sides better off, so the next yes is easier than the first.

A FOUR-WEEK WAY TO USE IT

Week 1 Take the self-check. Read the section for your lowest principle. Send one script.

Week 2 Run all five moments. Score your last five attempts.

Week 3 Use the tool before every relevant meeting or message.

Week 4 Score again, compare, and sign the action plan for the next principle.

IF YOU WANT TO GO FURTHER

To measure your own style rather than estimate it, take the free Influence Assessment. To talk a real situation through, there is AI Bob, built on Dr. Cialdini's work. To study all seven principles with him on video, there is the Cialdini Certified Practitioner program. The last pages say more.

01 · RECIPROCITY

The Follow-Up

The yes to a reply

THE PROBLEM IT FIXES

"Our follow-ups get ignored."

Most follow-ups ask for time and attention and give nothing back, so the easiest reply is none. Reciprocity, the rule that obliges us to repay what we have been given, is the most reliable way to

change that. It works whether or not the gift was asked for, and whether or not the recipient likes the giver.

THE RESEARCH

A small, unexpected gift beats a big, expected one

STUDY 1 · THE COCA-COLA EXPERIMENT

An unasked-for soft drink doubled sales

Participants in what they thought was an art study were paired with "Joe," who worked for the researcher. In one version Joe left the room and came back with two Cokes, handing one over unprompted. Later he asked if they would buy raffle tickets.

2×

as many tickets bought by those given the drink

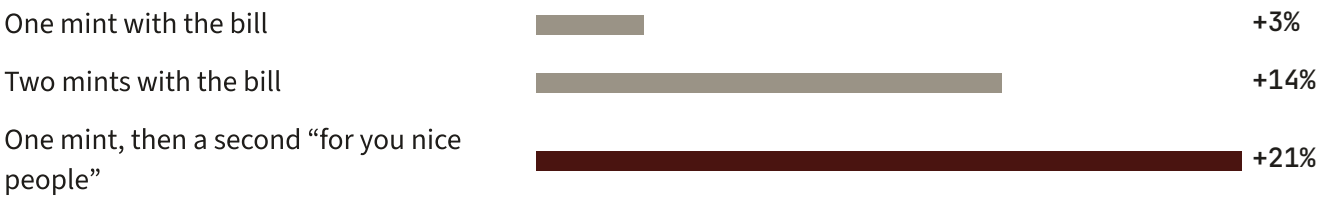
Regan also measured how much people liked Joe. Without the drink, liking predicted sales. With it, liking stopped mattering. The favour did the work on its own.

Regan, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1971

STUDY 2 · THE RESTAURANT MINTS

Same mint. Different delivery.

Servers gave diners a mint with the bill in three ways. The cost barely changed. What changed was how personal and unexpected it felt.



Increase in tips against no mint. The third server turned back to the table, so the second mint felt chosen for those guests.

Strohmetz, Rind, Fisher & Lynn, Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 2002

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

The size of the gift matters less than whether it came first, felt made for this person, and wasn't expected.

THE FRAMEWORK

Give First: four tests, then the ask

Before any follow-up goes out, it must pass four tests. A message that passes all four is a gift. One that passes none is a request.

1 First → 2 Meaningful → 3 Personalized → 4 Unexpected → **ASK**

1 First

Did we give before we asked?

The gift comes before the request, not with it. A gift that arrives with the ask attached is a trade.

2 Meaningful

Would they value it if they never bought?

Useful on its own terms: an answer, an introduction, a draft, a fix. Not a brochure about us.

3 Personalized

Could only they have received it?

Made for this person, from something they said. The second mint worked because it was “for you.”

4 Unexpected

Was it beyond what they expect?

What’s part of the deal doesn’t register as a gift. The recap is expected. The thing you noticed isn’t.

Then, ask.

Reciprocity opens the door; it doesn’t walk through it for you. After the gift, make one clear, specific request. Goodwill that is never asked for quietly expires.

THE ETHICS TEST

Would you be content for them to know exactly why you gave it? If not, it is a lure, not a gift.

THE PROCEDURE

Five moments that win or lose the reply

A Before the first meeting

24–48 HOURS AHEAD

Send one useful thing built from what you know about them, before any request exists.

EMAIL

"Hi [Name], ahead of Thursday I read [their annual letter / the job posting / their last talk] and noticed [one specific thing]. I put together [a one-page note / three examples] on it. It's attached. No need to reply; it's yours either way."

B The day after the meeting

WITHIN 24 HOURS

The recap is expected, so it earns nothing on its own. Add one thing they didn't ask for, tied to something they said.

EMAIL

"Thanks for yesterday. The recap and next steps are below. One more thing: you mentioned [problem raised in passing]. Here is [the contact / article / template] that helped [a similar team] with it. Unrelated to our work; I thought you should have it."

C The stalled deal

NO REPLY AFTER 10+ DAYS

This is where "just checking in" lives. Replace every nudge with a gift that moves their decision forward, whether or not they choose you.

~~*INSTEAD OF*~~

~~*"Just checking in to see if you've had a chance to look at the proposal."*~~

SEND THIS

"[Name], you said the board meets on the [date]. I've condensed the proposal into the one-page format boards usually want. Use it with or without us. Would 15 minutes before then help?"

D When they say no to the big ask

THE SECOND REQUEST

A concession is a gift too. When a real, larger request is declined, stepping back to a smaller one reads as giving ground, and people tend to meet a concession with one of their own.

SAY THIS

"Understood. The full rollout isn't right this quarter. Would it make sense to start with [one team / a 30-day pilot / a single workshop] so you have your own results to judge by?"

The evidence: in one study, 50% agreed to chaperone a zoo trip after first refusing a two-year volunteer commitment, against 17% asked directly (Cialdini et al., 1975).

The line not to cross: the first request must be one you genuinely want. An inflated ask built to be refused is a manipulation, and people can tell.

E When they thank you

THE MOMENT MOST PEOPLE WASTE

"No problem" tells them the favour cost you nothing, so it creates no obligation. Name the relationship instead, a reply Dr. Cialdini recommends.

~~*INSTEAD OF*~~

~~*"No problem!" "No worries." "Anytime."*~~

SAY THIS

"Of course. I know you'd do the same for me."

THE TOOL

The Gift Library: 24 gifts that cost nothing but attention

Before every follow-up, pick one. Then personalize it: the same gift sent to everyone fails test 3.

INFORMATION

1. A one-page summary of a report in their industry
2. The three questions their customers ask most
3. A teardown of a competitor's public page
4. What you see across similar teams, anonymized
5. A checklist you use internally
6. An answer to something they asked in passing

CONNECTION

1. An introduction to a peer who solved the same problem
2. An introduction to a potential customer for them
3. A seat at a small peer roundtable
4. A vendor you trust who isn't you
5. A strong candidate for their open role
6. Their name put forward as a speaker or guest

EFFORT

1. A draft of the internal email they need to send
2. A quick audit of one page or process

3. One slide in their deck, rewritten
4. A business case in their finance team's format
5. A two-minute video walking through the answer
6. The meeting notes they didn't have to take

RECOGNITION

1. Their post shared with a genuine comment
2. A note to their manager about their work
3. Their idea credited in your newsletter, with permission
4. A handwritten note after a milestone
5. Congratulations on a launch, with one specific observation
6. Their work cited in your own presentation

THE SCORECARD

Grade your last five follow-ups

Open your sent folder. Take the last five follow-ups to someone who owed you a reply. Score each 1–5 on every test. Be strict: a 5 means nobody else could have received that message.

FOLLOW-UP (TO WHOM, WHEN)	FIRST Gift before any ask?	MEANINGFUL Useful if they never buy?	PERSONAL Built from something they said?	UNEXPECTED Beyond what the deal promised?	CLEAR ASK One specific next step?	TOTAL /25
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

20–25 You give first Teach one moment to a teammate.

13–19 You give, then ask too soon Usually weak on Personal. Rework moment B.

5–12 You ask, not give Start with moment C. Retire "just checking in."

MISTAKES THAT BACKFIRE

i. **Attaching a condition**
"I'll send the report if you book a call" is a trade. Once a condition is named, reciprocity stops and bargaining begins.

ii. **Giving too much**
A gift that looks like a purchase of influence invites suspicion. They start working out what it will cost them.

iii. **Giving and never asking**
Goodwill doesn't convert on its own. If you never make the request, the debt quietly expires.

Go deeper. Read the full principle: Reciprocity. See whether it's your strength or your gap with the free Influence Assessment. CCP Module 04 goes through the whole of reciprocity, with Dr. Cialdini on video. (CCP)

02 · AUTHORITY · LIKING

The First Meeting

The yes to being heard

THE PROBLEM IT FIXES

"Prospects don't take us seriously, or don't warm to us."

People say yes to those they see as credible and to those they like. Most professionals try to earn both by talking about themselves. The research points the other way: let someone else state your expertise, admit a weakness early, and find what you genuinely have in common.

THE RESEARCH

Credibility comes best from others. Liking comes from common ground.

STUDY 1 · THE ESTATE AGENCY

A true introduction lifted appointments 20%

At an estate agency, receptionists changed one thing. Instead of simply transferring a caller to an agent, they first mentioned that agent's relevant credentials, such as how many years of experience they had with properties like the caller's.

+15%

more signed contracts, with 20% more appointments booked

Every word was true, and the agents couldn't have said it about themselves without sounding boastful. Coming from someone else, it registered as information.

Reported by Dr. Cialdini and colleagues at Influence at Work

STUDY 2 · THE MBA NEGOTIATIONS

A few minutes of small talk changed the outcome

MBA students at Stanford and Kellogg negotiated with each other by email. Before starting, half the pairs had a short phone call to get to know each other, with no talk of the deal. The other half went straight to business.



Share of pairs reaching a deal. The pairs who talked first also reached better joint outcomes. The sample was small, so treat the size of the gap with care; the direction is consistent with the wider research on liking.

Morris, Nadler, Kurtzberg & Thompson, Group Dynamics, 2002

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Don't spend the first minutes proving yourself. Have your credibility arrive before you do, then spend the time finding real common ground.

THE FRAMEWORK

Credible and Likeable: four tests for the first ten minutes

Authority opens the door to being heard; liking decides whether they want to keep listening. The four tests cover both, in the order they happen.

1 Introduced → 2 Candid → 3 Common → 4 Same side → **ASK**

1 Introduced

Did someone else state our expertise?

A colleague, an assistant, a host or a calendar invite states your credentials before you arrive.

2 Candid

Did we admit a weakness early?

A small, true drawback stated up front makes every strength that follows more believable.

3 Common

Did we find something real in common?

A shared background, place, path or problem. Real, specific, and mentioned once.

4 Same side

Are we working on it together?

Frame the conversation as a joint effort to decide whether this fits, not a pitch to be survived.

Then, ask.

When credibility and rapport are in place, make the ask plain: the next meeting, the pilot, the proposal. Liking and authority make people receptive; they don't make the request for you.

THE ETHICS TEST

Is every credential true, every similarity real, every compliment meant? One invented detail, once discovered, undoes all of it.

THE PROCEDURE

Five moments in a first meeting

A The introduction

BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Arrange for someone else to state your relevant expertise: the person who books the meeting, the colleague who hands over, the invite itself.

> *COLLEAGUE'S EMAIL*
>
> *"I'd like to introduce [Name], who leads our work with [industry]. [She] has spent [11] years on exactly this problem and ran [the project they'd recognise]. I've asked [her] to join us Thursday."*

B The similarity hunt

FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE

Look for things you genuinely share: a school or city, a first career, a mutual contact, a problem you've both faced, an interest in their public posts. Write down three. Use one.

The standard: similarity works only when it is real and specific. “I love travel too” is nothing. “You started in nursing; so did my co-founder” is something.

C The first five minutes

THE OPENING

Open with the similarity and a specific, sincere compliment. Then move on. Rapport is built in a minute and spoiled by lingering.

SAY THIS

“Before we start: I saw you began in [field]. So did I, and it still shapes how I think about [topic]. And the [launch / article / result] last month was impressive; the way you [specific detail] is something we’ve been talking about since.”

D The candid turn

WHEN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR OFFER

State a genuine, minor weakness first, then the strength it sets up. Avis turned “We’re No. 2” into “so we try harder.” The admission buys belief for what comes next.

SAY THIS

“I’ll be straight with you: we’re not the cheapest option, and we’re not trying to be. What we are is [strength], which is why [result that matters to them].”

The rule: choose a weakness that is real but not fatal, and link it directly to a strength with “which is why” or “it means.”

WHEN THEY ASK “WHY SHOULD WE TRUST YOU?”

“Fair question. Here’s what we’re not good at: [weakness]. Here’s what [client] would tell you we are good at: [result]. You’re welcome to call them.”

E The cooperative close

THE LAST TEN MINUTES

Put yourself on their side of the table. You are working out together whether this fits, and saying you’ll tell them if it doesn’t is itself a signal of trustworthiness.

~~*INSTEAD OF*~~

~~*“Let me show you why we’re the best choice for you.”*~~

SAY THIS

“Let’s work out together whether this is right for you. If it isn’t, I’ll tell you, and I’ll point you to someone better.”

THEN ASK

“Based on what you’ve said, the sensible next step is [specific step] on [date]. Does that work for you?”

THE TOOL

The Meeting Prep Sheet

Fifteen minutes before every first meeting. Copy this page, fill it in, and keep it beside you.

MEETING WITH · DATE · WHAT THEY WANT

---

1 · WHO INTRODUCES ME, AND WHAT THEY'LL SAY

Colleague, host, invite bio. Write the sentence.

---

2 · THREE CREDENTIALS THAT MATTER TO THIS PERSON

Not your whole CV: the three they'd care about.

---

3 · MY HONEST WEAKNESS → THE STRENGTH IT SETS UP

"We're [weakness], which is why [strength]."

---

4 · THREE REAL SIMILARITIES

Place, path, people, problem. Use one.

---

5 · ONE SPECIFIC, SINCERE COMPLIMENT

About something they did, not something they are.

---

6 · MY COOPERATIVE LINE

How I'll say we're deciding this together.

---

7 · THE ONE ASK I'LL MAKE AT THE END

Specific action, specific date.

THE SCORECARD

Grade your last five first meetings

Think back over your last five first meetings or first calls. Score each 1–5 on every test. If you can't remember what you said, that is usually a 1.

MEETING (WHO, WHEN)	INTRODUCED Introduced by others?	CANDID Weakness admitted?	COMMON Real similarity?	SAME SIDE Deciding together?	CLEAR ASK Next step agreed?	TOTAL /25
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

20–25 Credible and liked Write your best intro sentence down and share it.

13–19 Liked, not yet credible Usually weak on Introduced. Fix moment A.

5–12 Pitching, not meeting Use the prep sheet for every meeting this month.

MISTAKES THAT BACKFIRE

i. **Inventing common ground**
A similarity that turns out to be false costs more liking than it ever earned.

ii. **Reciting your own credentials**
The same facts that impress from a colleague sound like bragging from you.

iii. **Admitting a fatal weakness**
Candour works with a drawback that doesn't matter much and sets up a strength. Not with one that ends the conversation.

iv. **Generic flattery**
"Great company" says you didn't look. A compliment works when it is specific and true.

Go deeper. Read the full principle: Authority · Liking. See whether it's your strength or your gap with the free Influence Assessment. CCP Modules 05 and 08 cover liking and authority in full. (CCP)

The Proof Page

The yes to trust

THE PROBLEM IT FIXES

"Our testimonials and case studies don't move anyone."

When people are uncertain, they look at what others like them are doing. Most proof fails because it shows the wrong others: famous logos to a small firm, vague praise instead of results, or, worst of all, a statistic about how many people get it wrong.

THE RESEARCH

The right crowd persuades. The wrong message backfires.

STUDY 1 · THE HOTEL TOWELS

"Guests in this room" beat saving the planet

Hotel bathrooms carried different cards asking guests to reuse towels. The standard card made the environmental case. Others told guests that most people who stayed at the hotel reused their towels, or that most who had stayed in *this room* had.



Increase in towel reuse against the environmental card. The more similar the crowd, the stronger the effect.

Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius, Journal of Consumer Research, 2008

STUDY 2 · THE PETRIFIED FOREST

A warning sign that increased theft

In Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park, researchers placed marked pieces of wood along paths and tested two signs. One said many past visitors had removed wood, destroying the forest. The other simply asked visitors not to remove it.



Share of marked pieces stolen. Telling people that many others do the wrong thing makes the wrong thing normal.

Cialdini, Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2003

AND ONE MORE

When a Beijing restaurant chain marked its most popular dishes on the menu, each became 13–20% more popular. *(Cai, Chen & Fang, American Economic Review, 2009)*

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Show that many people like your reader already do what you want. Never advertise how many people fail to.

THE FRAMEWORK

Many, Similar, Specific, Positive

Every piece of proof you show, whether a testimonial, a number, a logo or a line in a pitch, should pass four tests.

1 Many → 2 Similar → 3 Specific → 4 Positive → **ASK**

1 Many

Does it show a crowd?

A number, a share, a count. “Chosen by [1,200] teams” outperforms a single glowing quote on its own.

2 Similar

Is it people like them?

Same role, industry, size or problem. The hotel room beat the hotel; a peer beats a celebrity.

3 Specific

Is there a concrete result?

“Cut onboarding from six weeks to three” persuades. “Amazing to work with” doesn’t.

4 Positive

Does it show the right behaviour as normal?

Show how many do the right thing. Never how many get it wrong: that is the Petrified Forest mistake.

Then, ask.

Put the proof directly before the request: the testimonial beside the button, the peer result just before the proposal. Proof works at the moment of uncertainty, not in a case-study library nobody opens.

THE ETHICS TEST

Is every number true, current and fairly counted? Is every testimonial real, attributed and used with permission? Social proof is borrowed trust; fake it once and all of it goes.

THE PROCEDURE

Five moments where proof is made or wasted

A Collecting it

RIGHT AFTER A WIN

Ask while the result is fresh, and ask questions that produce specific, similar, useful answers. "Would you write us a testimonial?" gets adjectives.

THE REQUEST EMAIL

"[Name], congratulations on [result]. Would you answer three quick questions? I'd like to share your experience with teams in a similar position.

1. What were you worried about before you started? 2. What changed, in numbers if you have them? 3. What would you tell a [role] at a [company type] who's where you were?

I'll send you the final wording to approve before it goes anywhere."

Why it works: question 1 answers the next buyer's objection, question 2 makes it specific, and question 3 makes it similar.

B Choosing it

BEFORE EVERY PITCH

Match proof to the person in front of you. The best testimonial is the one from someone most like them, not the one from your biggest client.

Same role A CFO trusts a CFO.

Same size A 40-person firm discounts a Fortune 500 logo.

Same industry "Hospitals like yours" beats "clients."

Same doubt Proof that answers their objection first.

THE ONE-SENTENCE PROOF, FOR ANY EMAIL

"Most [role]s at [company type] we work with start with [option]. [Client], a team about your size, cut [metric] by [amount] in [time]."

C Writing it down

YOUR WEBSITE, PROPOSAL AND DECK

Lead with the crowd, then segment by similarity, then show specific results. Label your most-chosen option: popularity is information.

INSTEAD OF

~~*"Trusted by leading companies worldwide."*~~

WRITE THIS

"[1,200] [sales teams] have run this program. Here's what [three] of them, at companies your size, changed in the first 90 days."

D Fixing negative proof

AUDIT EVERYTHING YOU'VE PUBLISHED

Search your pages and decks for sentences that tell people how many others fail, forget or fall behind. Rewrite each to show what the successful majority does.

INSTEAD OF

~~*"Most managers never get trained in how to give feedback."*~~

WRITE THIS

"More and more companies now train every new manager in feedback in their first 90 days."

When it isn't a majority: when the right behaviour isn't yet the majority, describe the trend ("more and more"), which research by Sparkman & Walton (*Psychological Science*, 2017) shows also moves people. Only when it is true.

E Saying it

IN THE CONVERSATION

Proof isn't only written. When a buyer hesitates, tell them what people like them usually do, if it's true.

SAY THIS

"Most [role]s in your position start with [option]. It lets them [benefit] before committing to [bigger step]."

THE TOOL

The Proof Inventory

Fill in one row for each of your main buyer types. Gaps in this grid are the testimonials to collect this month.

BUYER TYPE	BEST TRUE NUMBER	MOST SIMILAR TESTIMONIAL	MOST SPECIFIC RESULT	OBJECTION IT ANSWERS

15 PLACES PROOF BELONGS, AND USUALLY ISN'T

Beside the buy button · Pricing page, per plan · Proposal cover page · Slide two of the deck · Email signature · Meeting invite · Cold-email P.S. · Webinar opening minute · Onboarding email one · Renewal notice · Reply to an objection · Event sign-up page · Voicemail · LinkedIn banner · Careers page

THE SCORECARD

Grade your five most-used pieces of proof

List the five testimonials, stats or logos you use most: on your homepage, in your deck, in your emails. Score each 1–5 on every test.

PROOF (WHERE IT'S USED)	MANY Shows a crowd?	SIMILAR People like the reader?	SPECIFIC A concrete result?	POSITIVE Right behaviour as normal?	PLACED Right before the ask?	TOTAL /25
1.						
2.						
3.						

4.						
5.						

20–25 Proof that persuades Now segment it by buyer type.

13–19 True, but not theirs Usually weak on Similar. Run the Proof Inventory.

5–12 Decoration Start with moment A: collect three new testimonials.

MISTAKES THAT BACKFIRE

i. **Advertising the problem**
"Most people fail to…" tells readers that failing is normal. Show the successful majority instead.

ii. **Dissimilar proof**
The famous logo can say "not for people like you." Match the proof to the reader.

iii. **Adjectives instead of results**
"Fantastic partner" is courtesy. "Cut churn by a third" is evidence.

iv. **Inflated numbers**
Rounding up, counting trials as customers, or quoting old figures. Borrowed trust, once found out, is gone.

Go deeper. Read the full principle: Social proof. See whether it's your strength or your gap with the free Influence Assessment. CCP Module 07 covers social proof online and offline. (CCP)

04 · CONSISTENCY

The Yes That Sticks

The yes to follow-through

THE PROBLEM IT FIXES

"People say yes, then don't follow through."

Once people take a stand, they feel pressure, from inside and out, to act in line with it. But not every yes creates that pressure. The commitments that stick are the ones people make actively, publicly, with some effort, and of their own free choice.

THE RESEARCH

Small, active commitments change what people do next

STUDY 1 · THE DRIVE CAREFULLY SIGN

A small yes made a big yes four times as likely

Researchers asked California homeowners to put a large, poorly lettered "Drive Carefully" sign on their front lawn. Most refused. But homeowners who, two weeks earlier, had agreed to display a small three-inch "Be a safe driver" sign said yes in striking numbers.



The small yes changed how they saw themselves: as people who cared about safe driving.

Freedman & Fraser, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966

STUDY 2 · THE CLINIC APPOINTMENTS

Writing it themselves cut missed appointments

In UK medical practices, the usual routine was for reception staff to write the next appointment on a card. In the test, patients filled in the card themselves. Nothing else changed.

–18%

fewer missed appointments when patients wrote the details themselves

A restaurant owner Dr. Cialdini describes in *Influence*, Gordon Sinclair, did something similar. By changing "Please call if you change your plans" to "Will you please call?" and waiting for the answer, he cut no-shows from 30% to 10%.

Martin, Bassi & Dunbar-Rees, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 2012

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

A yes that people say, write or show others is a yes they'll keep. A yes you assumed, wrote for them, or pressured out of them isn't.

THE FRAMEWORK

Active, Public, Effortful, Chosen

Four features make a commitment stick. Build every agreement in your process so it has as many as possible.

1 Active → 2 Public → 3 Effortful → 4 Chosen → **ASK**

1 Active

Did they say or write it?

Spoken or written by them, not nodded at. The patient writing the card; the caller saying “yes, I will.”

2 Public

Does anyone else know?

A commitment made in front of colleagues, or sent to them, carries the weight of their reputation.

3 Effortful

Did it cost them something?

Time, thought or work. Commitments that take effort are valued more and kept longer.

4 Chosen

Was it genuinely their choice?

No pressure, no big reward. People own the decisions they feel they made freely.

Then, ask.

Once the commitment is made, ask for the next step that fits it: “You said [their words]. The step that makes that happen is [specific action].” Consistency does the rest, if the step genuinely serves the goal they stated.

THE ETHICS TEST

Does the commitment serve their goal as well as yours? Using a small yes to lock someone into something against their interest is the lowball, and it is how trust is lost for good.

THE PROCEDURE

Five moments that turn agreement into action

A The first small yes

EARLY IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Start with a step small enough to say yes to easily and meaningful enough to shape how they see themselves: a diagnostic, a pilot, a short session with their team.

SAY THIS

"Before we talk about the full program, would you be open to [a 20-minute diagnostic with two of your managers]? It'll show us both whether the rest is worth doing."

B The meeting close

THE LAST FIVE MINUTES

Don't summarize for them. Ask them to say what they'll do and by when, then ask whether they will tell you if it changes, and wait for the yes.

SAY THIS

"Before we wrap, so I get this right: what will you take back to your team, and by when?"

[Let them answer in full.]

"And will you let me know if that date moves?" [Wait for the yes.]

Why it works: the second question is Gordon Sinclair's. A question needs an answer; a statement doesn't.

C The written commitment

THE DAY AFTER

Ask them to put the goal in their own words. You build the proposal around what they wrote, and they are now consistent with themselves, not with you.

EMAIL

"Could you send me two lines on what you'd want this to achieve by [date]? I'll build the proposal around your words rather than mine."

D Going public

WHEN A DECISION IS TAKING SHAPE

Invite them to share the goal with the people it affects. A commitment known to their team is one they will defend.

SAY THIS

"Who else on your side should hear this before we go further? I'm happy to join for ten minutes if it helps you present it."

IN THE PROPOSAL

A line on the first page of the proposal: "The goal, in your words: _____." Ask them to fill it in before they sign.

E Reconnecting to what they said

WHEN MOMENTUM STALLS

People want to be consistent with their stated values and goals. Remind them of their own words, not your pitch. Quote them exactly.

INSTEAD OF

~~*"I wanted to follow up on our proposal."*~~

SEND THIS

"In March you said developing your first-time managers was the priority this year. This is the piece that makes that happen. Shall we set the start date?"

Why it works: it's their commitment, in their words. Your only job is to connect it to the next step.

IF IT STALLS AGAIN

"When we spoke on [date], you said [their words]. Is that still the priority? If it has changed, tell me and I'll stop following up."

THE TOOL

The Commitment Ladder

Map your sales, onboarding or change process as five rungs. Each rung should be a little bigger than the last and have at least two of the four features.

5 The decision

Purchase, rollout, signed plan. Made by them, in front of their team.

---

4 Going public

They introduce you to their team, or present the goal internally.

---

3 Effort

They share data, complete a diagnostic, or write their goal.

---

2 Time

A meeting they chose to take, with an agenda they shaped.

---

1 The small yes

A reply, a question answered, a resource accepted.

TEN QUESTIONS THAT SECURE FOLLOW-THROUGH

1. What would make this a success for you?
2. Why does that matter now, rather than next year?

3. What will you do first?
4. By when?
5. Who else needs to be part of this?
6. Will you introduce us?
7. What could get in the way?
8. What will you do if it does?
9. When should I check back?
10. Will you let me know if that changes?

THE SCORECARD

Grade your last five agreements

Take the last five times someone agreed to something with you: a next meeting, a trial, a decision. Score each 1–5 on every test.

AGREEMENT (WHO, WHAT)	ACTIVE They said or wrote it?	PUBLIC Others knew?	EFFORTFUL It took some effort?	CHOSEN Freely, no pressure?	NEXT STEP Linked to the next step?	TOTAL /25
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

20–25 Yeses that stick Build the ladder into your CRM stages.

13–19 Agreed, not committed Usually weak on Active. Use moment B every meeting.

5–12 Polite nods Start with moment C: get it in their words.

MISTAKES THAT BACKFIRE

i. Pressured commitments

A yes squeezed out under pressure is not owned. People attribute it to the pressure and drop it.

ii. Paying for the yes

A large incentive tells people they did it for the reward, not because they believe in it.

iii. Writing it for them

Your recap commits you. Their words commit them.

iv. The lowball

Securing a yes on one set of terms, then changing them. It works once and ends the relationship.

Go deeper. Read the full principle: Consistency. See whether it's your strength or your gap with the free Influence Assessment. CCP Module 09 covers consistency in full. (CCP)

05 · SCARCITY · UNITY

The Moment Before the Ask

The yes to the decision

THE PROBLEM IT FIXES

"Our request lands cold, however good the offer."

What people are focused on just before a request shapes how they respond to it. Dr. Cialdini calls this pre-suasion: the most effective persuaders prepare the moment before they make the case. This section covers what to put in front of people, how to frame what they stand to lose, and how to speak as "we."

THE RESEARCH

What people attend to first shapes what they choose

STUDY 1 · THE FURNITURE WEBSITE

Clouds sold comfort. Pennies sold price.

Shoppers visited an online furniture store. For some, the landing page background showed soft, fluffy clouds. For others, it showed pennies. Nothing else about the products or prices changed.

Comfort vs. price

Shoppers shown clouds rated comfort as more important and leaned toward comfortable, pricier sofas. Those shown pennies focused on cost and leaned toward cheaper ones.

Most said afterwards that the background had no effect on them.

Mandel & Johnson, Journal of Consumer Research, 2002

STUDY 2 · THE BEEF IMPORTER

Exclusive information multiplied orders

A beef importer's customers were called with the standard pitch, or told that a shortage of Australian beef was expected, or told the same news along with the fact that it came from exclusive contacts and wasn't widely known.



Orders against the standard pitch. Both the product and the information about it were scarce, and both were true.

Knishinsky, 1982, reported in Cialdini, Influence

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Before you ask, decide what they should be thinking about. Then say what they genuinely stand to lose, and speak as someone on their side.

THE FRAMEWORK

Attention, Identity, Loss, We

Four tests for the minute before any significant request: a proposal, a price, a decision, a favour.

1 Attention → 2 Identity → 3 Loss → 4 We → **ASK**

1 Attention

What are they focused on right now?

Put the thing that matters to the decision in front of them first: the outcome before the price, the goal before the plan.

2 Identity

Which side of them are we speaking to?

Remind them of the part of themselves the request fits: the leader who develops people, the team that tries new things.

3 Loss

What do they genuinely lose by waiting?

People weigh losses more heavily than equal gains. State the real cost of standing still, and what is truly limited.

4 We

Are we speaking as insiders?

Shared identity, shared goals, “we” language. Ask for their advice, not their opinion.

Then, ask.

After the moment is prepared, ask directly and briefly. Pre-suasion makes people receptive to the request; the request still has to be made, clearly, by you.

THE ETHICS TEST

Is the focus relevant, the loss real, the scarcity true and the shared identity genuine? Manufactured deadlines and invented shortages are the fastest way to lose a buyer for good.

THE PROCEDURE

Five ways to prepare the moment

A Put the outcome first

THE FIRST LINE, SLIDE OR MINUTE

Whatever comes first frames everything after. Open with their goal and the result, then the plan, then the price. Never the price first.

~~*INSTEAD OF*~~

~~*Slide 1: About us. Slide 2: Our services. Slide 3: Pricing.*~~

BUILD THIS

Slide 1: Your goal, in your words. Slide 2: What teams like yours achieved. Slide 3: The plan. Slide 4: The investment.

B Open with the right question

BEFORE THE REQUEST

A question that invites people to see themselves in a certain light makes them more likely to act in line with it. Only ask one that is relevant and true to them.

SAY THIS

“Before I show you the plan, would you say your team is one that’s willing to try a new approach when the old one stops working?”

Why it works: people who describe themselves one way tend to act consistently with it. The question must fit the request, and they must be free to say no.

C Frame the real loss

WHEN YOU STATE THE STAKES

Describe what stays lost if nothing changes, rather than only what could be gained. Use only numbers you can stand behind.

INSTEAD OF

~~*"This could help you save around [$40,000] a year."*~~

SAY THIS

"At the moment you're losing roughly [$40,000] a year to [the problem]. Every quarter we wait is another [$10,000]."

D State what is truly limited

WHEN THERE IS A GENUINE LIMIT

Scarcity works when the limit and the information are both real. Say what is limited and why, then stop. Never invent a deadline.

SAY THIS, IF IT IS TRUE

"We run [four] open workshops a year, because each has a trainer with every table. The [March] one has [six] seats left. If it suits you, I can hold two until Friday."

The line not to cross: an invented deadline works once. When the buyer finds the "last seats" still available next month, you've lost the sale and the next one.

WHEN NOTHING IS LIMITED

"Nothing about this is limited, and I won't pretend it is. What is true is that each month at the current rate costs you roughly [$X]."

E Speak as "we"

THROUGHOUT

Unity, the seventh principle, is about shared identity: people say yes more readily to those they see as one of "us." Name real shared identities, and ask for advice, which puts people on your side of the problem.

INSTEAD OF

~~*"What do you think of our plan?"*~~

SAY THIS

"What advice would you give us on this plan? You know your team better than we do."

THE TOOL

The Pre-Ask Checklist

Two minutes before any significant request. If you can't answer a question, that's the thing to prepare.

1. What should they be thinking about the moment before I ask?
2. What will they see or hear first, and does it point there?
3. Which part of their identity does this request fit?
4. Is there a relevant question that invites that identity?
5. What do they genuinely lose if nothing changes?
6. Can I put a real number on it?
7. Is anything truly limited? Why, and until when?
8. What do we genuinely share: role, place, history, goal?
9. Where can I ask for their advice?
10. What exactly am I asking for, in one sentence?

THE WORDS THAT FRAME

INSTEAD OF	TRY	PRINCIPLE
"You could save..."	*"You're currently losing..."*	LOSS
"What do you think?"	*"What advice would you give us?"*	UNITY
"I'll send you our proposal."	*"We'll build the plan together."*	UNITY
"Our price is..."	*"For [the outcome you described], the investment is..."*	ATTENTION
"Limited time offer!"	*"[Six] seats, because [reason]."*	SCARCITY

THE SCORECARD

Grade your last five requests

Take the last five significant requests you made: a proposal, a price, a decision, a favour. Score each 1–5 on every test.

REQUEST (TO WHOM, WHAT)	ATTENTION The right focus first?	IDENTITY Fitted to who they are?	LOSS The real cost stated?	WE Spoken as insiders?	CLEAR ASK One direct request?	TOTAL /25

1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

`20–25` **The moment was ready** Write your opening down and reuse it.

`13–19` **A good offer, cold start** Usually weak on Attention. Rebuild your first slide.

`5–12` **Asking into the void** Run the Pre-Ask Checklist before every request.

MISTAKES THAT BACKFIRE

i. **False scarcity**
Invented deadlines and fake “last seats” work until they’re noticed. Then nothing you say is believed.

ii. **Irrelevant priming**
A focus that has nothing to do with the decision feels like a trick, because it is one.

iii. **Borrowed identity**
Claiming a shared background you don’t have is the fastest way to become one of “them.”

iv. **Loss in every sentence**
Used constantly, loss framing reads as fear-mongering. Use it once, where it matters.

Go deeper. Read the full principle: Scarcity · Unity. See whether it’s your strength or your gap with the free Influence Assessment. CCP Modules 03, 06 and 10 cover contrast, unity and scarcity. (CCP)

HOW TO SAY NO

The same principles are used on you, every day

Every chapter of *Influence* ends with a defence, because a principle that works for you also works on you. The honest use of influence and the ability to resist its dishonest use are the same skill. Here is the defence for each.

Reciprocity

Accept favours and gifts in good faith. If one turns out to be a sales device rather than a gift, redefine it as exactly that. Tricks don’t need to be repaid, and the obligation goes with the redefinition.

Consistency

When you feel trapped by an earlier yes, listen to the signal in your stomach. Then ask the question from your heart of hearts: “Knowing what I now know, if I could go back, would I make the same choice?”

Social proof

Watch for counterfeit evidence: staged crowds, planted reviews, canned laughter. And look up from the crowd now and then. Other people’s choices are evidence, not a verdict.

Liking

If you find yourself liking someone more than you would expect in the time you’ve known them, notice it. Then separate the person from the request and judge the deal on its own.

Authority

Ask two questions. Is this authority truly an expert on this particular matter? And how truthful can I expect them to be here, given what they stand to gain?

Scarcity

Treat a rush of urgency as the signal to slow down. Then ask why you want the thing: to own it, or to use it? If to use it, being scarce doesn’t make it work any better.

Unity

When someone claims to be one of “us,” ask whether the shared identity is real, and whether it has anything to do with the decision in front of you.

THE RULE UNDERNEATH

The shortcuts are sound when the cue is real. Your job is not to stop using them; it is to check the cue is genuine before you let it decide for you.

YOUR ACTION PLAN

One principle, one moment, four weeks

Reading changes what you know. Using changes what you do. Fill this in now, while the section you need is fresh.

THE PRINCIPLE I’LL WORK ON

The one you wrote down on page 5.

THE MOMENT

Which of A–E in its section.

THE REAL SITUATION THIS WEEK

The person, the request, the date.

WHAT I'LL SAY, IN MY OWN WORDS

Start from the script; make it yours.

HOW I'LL KNOW IT WORKED

A reply, a yes, a date agreed.

DOES IT PASS TRUE, NATURAL, WISE?

If not, change the script, not the standard.

WEEK	WHAT I TRIED	WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT I'LL CHANGE
1			
2			
3			
4			

Signed _____

Date _____

The colleague I've told _____

Why tell someone: a commitment that is active, public and voluntary is the one people keep (page 23). Use it on yourself.

The Cialdini Certified Practitioner program builds a plan like this module by module, across all seven principles. For a situation that won't fit on a page, talk it through with AI Bob.

WHERE THESE PRINCIPLES CAME FROM

The people who learned them from the source

The principles in these pages come from one body of research, begun in the 1970s and first gathered in *Influence* in 1984. Since then they have spread into marketing, sales, negotiation, leadership and public policy. Some of the people who learned them from the source:



BUSINESS

"'Influence' is one of the best business books of all time."

Warren Buffett CEO, Berkshire Hathaway



BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS

"...my nomination would be Bob Cialdini, the world's most practical social psychologist."

Richard Thaler Nobel laureate in economics



ORGANISATIONS & PEOPLE

"Without Bob Cialdini, I would not be a psychologist."

Adam Grant Professor of Management and Psychology



ADVERTISING

"His work in codifying human behavior has been priceless."

Rory Sutherland Vice Chairman, Ogilvy & Mather



SALES & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"'Influence' is a must-read for entrepreneurship, sales, and marketing."

Alex Hormozi Entrepreneur, investor



COMMERCE

"'Influence' is a book that made me a billionaire."

Tobias Lütke Founder, Shopify

4.6 / 5 from 24,000+ Amazon ratings of *Influence*, *Influence, New and Expanded* and *Pre-Suasion* (checked September 2026). The ratings are for the books.



Robert Cialdini, Ph.D. is Regents' Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University and the founder of the Cialdini Institute. His books, including *Influence* and *Pre-Suasion*, have sold more than 7 million copies in 44 languages.

SOURCES

The research behind every page

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Written by the Cialdini Institute from the published research of Robert Cialdini, Ph.D., and the studies he cites. Every figure was checked against the original paper before publication; where a popular retelling differs from the paper, the paper's numbers are used. Dr. Cialdini's rules are quoted word for word from his *Harvard Business Review* article; wording that is ours is not in quotation marks.

HOW TO CITE IT

Cialdini Institute. (2026). *Influence, From the Source: The Five Yeses.* cialdini.com.

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WHERE TO GO NEXT

A workbook tells you what to do. *Practice is what makes it automatic.*

On page 5 you wrote down the principle you use least. Running its scripts under pressure, on a live call or in a stalled deal, is a skill built with practice and feedback. Choose the step that fits where you are.

FREE

The Influence Assessment

Sixteen questions, about twelve minutes. Your style and your biggest gap.

cialdini.com/assessment

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TEAM

The POP Workshop

Two days of hands-on training for your team, led by a Cialdini Method Certified Trainer.

cialdini.com/contact?product=pop-workshops

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