Excerpts from Persuasion Without Pressure™

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Cognitive Dissonance

In 1957, Leon Festinger published *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. This theory has been one of the most influential theories of social psychology (Jones, 1985). As we begin to learn about this theory, we need to understand some definitions of terms, and how these terms relate to the operation of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitions, as defined by Festinger (1957), are simply elements of knowledge. A person can have cognitions about behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Cognitions can be about oneself, another person or group, or about things in the environment (Harmon-Jones, Mills). These cognitions will have one of three relationships with each other; they either have an irrelevant relationship, a consistent (consonant) relationship, or an inconsistent (dissonant) relationship. If red is your favorite color and you believed that smoking is bad for your health, these cognitions would have an irrelevant relationship. If, on the other hand, you think that smoking is bad for your health and you do not smoke, this would be an example of cognitions having a consistent relationship. If you believe that smoking is bad for your health and you smoke anyway, your cognitions could be said to have an inconsistent or dissonant relationship.

Dissonance, as defined by Festinger (1957), is the distressing mental state that people feel when they find themselves doing things that don't fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold. In other words, dissonance is a discord between actions (behavior) and/or attitudes (beliefs). Using these definitions of cognition and dissonance, Festinger's theory purports the following premises:

1. Humans have a basic need to avoid dissonance and establish consistency.
2. The tension of dissonance motivates the person to change either the behavior or the belief.

3. The greater the dissonance a person experiences, the greater the need and desire to reduce it
4. A person will avoid situations in which additional dissonance might be produced.

Using our smoking example, the more inconsistence your act of smoking is with your knowledge of its negative effects on your health, the more you will feel the pressures of dissonance.

Dissonance is produced as a result of two variables.

1. The importance of the cognitions.
2. The number of cognitions involved in the dissonance.

Simply stated, if you have several cognitions that are inconsistent, and these cognitions are important to you, you will experience a greater magnitude of dissonance (Littlejohn, 1999). If health issues are not important to you, cognitions about the ill effects of smoking on your health will more than likely not affect your behavior of smoking.

Reducing Dissonance

Dissonance can be reduced several ways:

1. Removing one or more of the dissonance cognitions. As a smoker for example, "you might either stop smoking or stop believing that smoking is bad for your health" (Littlejohn, 1999 p. 139).
2. Add new consistent cognitions to one side or the other of the tension. You might add cognitions about second hand smoke being detrimental to those around you, or you could add cognitions taken from literature produced by tobacco companies describing the benefits of smoking.

3. Reducing the importance of inconsistent cognitions. You might determine that health is not as important as the feeling of calm and a peaceful state of mind that you get when you smoke.
4. Increasing the importance of the consistent cognitions. You might decide that continuing to smoke is more important because it maintains your weight, and keeping your weight down is more important to good health than not smoking (Harmon-Jones, Mills).

People want consistency in their lives. It is important, as humans, to have a level of consistency in our beliefs and behaviors. This desire for consistency provides a great opportunity for influencing others. As an example, if someone asks you to sign a petition and after you sign it they ask you if you would consider making a donation to the cause as well; the chances of you giving a donation after signing the petition are greater than if you had simply been asked to make a donation right off the bat. Why? Because after signing the petition you showed yourself as someone who cares about the stated cause, and someone who gets involved with social issues. If you were to say no to the request for a donation, you would be creating inconsistency and thus dissonance in your two actions, one of signing the petition and one of refusing to give a donation. Therefore, the pressure of maintaining consistency and reducing dissonance will influence you to give a donation. This two-step process of influence will be discussed later, but it is one example of how dissonance can be used to influence.

Postdecision Dissonance

One type of dissonance that is of special importance to those who are in the sales profession is what is known as postdecision dissonance. Em Griffin in his book) *A First Look At Communication Theory* (2002) says that “close call decisions” can create large amounts of internal tension once the decision has been made. He goes on to state that three conditions increase postdecision dissonance:

1. The greater the importance the issue

2. The longer an individual delays in choosing between two equally attractive options
3. The greater the difficulty involved in reversing the decision once it's been made

As these conditions are present, the more the person will agonize over whether he or she has made the right choice. Sometimes postdecision dissonance is referred to as "morning-after" doubts; the misgivings or second thoughts that plague us after a tough choice motivates us to seek reassuring information and social support for our decision (Griffin, 2002). Because of postdecision dissonance, it is important to follow-up with your client after the decision has been made to offer the reassurance that he most likely is looking for, especially if the purchase was one high in cost or personal relevance.

As you can see cognitive dissonance theory is just as much about maintaining consistency as it is about reducing dissonance. In fact, most consistency theories are steeped in Festinger's work. As an influenced agent you can use the information provided by this theory to create dissonance or offer solutions to reduce dissonance. You can also be well equipped to handle the objections of the client if it is determined that he/she is struggling with dissonance over your presentation or offer. Because you now know what is going on inside the head of the client as it related to him/her feeling tension caused by dissonance, you can move them through this tension to a place of consistency. You now know that you can use dissonance to lead the client to change cognition, add new cognitions to your side of the tension, increase the importance of consistent cognitions (those in support of your proposal), or reduce the importance of inconsistent cognitions (those in opposition to your proposal). There are two final thoughts I would like to share before concluding this section.

Selective Exposure

As mentioned earlier, Festinger claimed that people will avoid information that is likely to heighten dissonance. To this point, Griffin (2002) states that not only do we tend to select reading material and television programs that are consistent with our beliefs; we usually choose to be with people who are like us. By taking care to "stick with our own kind," we can maintain the relative comfort of the status quo. Like-minded people buffer us from ideas that could cause discomfort. In that sense, the process of making friends is an example of selecting our own propaganda. It also is an indication of how identification and selective exposure work together in reducing dissonance and facilitating influence.

Minimal Justification for Action

This concept says that the best way for you stimulate long-term commitment to your product or service is to get the client to use your product or service. However, Festinger adds an important condition; instead of giving the client massive rewards for trying your product or service, only offer them the minimum incentive required to gain their compliance. Research has shown that when someone complies to a request with little incentive, they tend to be more committed to their decision than someone who was enticed by massive incentives. The reason for this is that the justification for their actions is based on the value of the incentive and not the product or service. Hence, their commitment to the decision will be shallow at best. On the other hand, when someone makes a decision in the absence of great incentives, they must justify their actions based on the quality of the decision, which is a reflection of the product or service they purchased. Because they are justifying their action based on the quality of your product or service they will attempt to maintain consistency with that decision which will create more commitment. Should dissonance be created by an opposing cognition, one person can more easily reduce their dissonance by reducing the importance of the product or service. This would work for them because they can reason that they made the purchase based on the quality of the incentives and not the quality of the product or service. The other person however, made their decision in the absence of massive incentives and therefore, in pursuit of consistency, the dissonance will be reduced more easily by adding importance to the product or service they purchased, and thus justifying their action.

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Elaboration Likelihood Theory

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a model developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), which offers an understanding of how attitude changes are achieved. Primarily, ELM attempts to explain how we choose what messages to consider in a very deliberate way, based on intellectual and factual processing and what messages to judge on their face value or on the perceived “flashiness” of the package or messenger. ELM helps explain what motivates you to process certain parts of different messages. The guidelines set forth in the model provide an invaluable framework to the field of persuasion.

Central Route - involves a careful presentation (speaker) of and attention to (listener) arguments supporting an issue.

Peripheral Route - avoids arguments about the issue, and concentrates on other things that make people agree.

Central Route

The central route is measured by, the extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant arguments contained in a persuasive communication. For someone to process through the central route, the following characteristics need to be present (Petty, & Cacioppo 1986b).

Motivation - Listeners have to care enough about a topic to pay attention to it. That’s not easy, because we can't care about every issue, and every issue is not going to be relevant. Therefore, we need to present a message that the client has some knowledge about or at least one that has some familiarity or relevance to him/her. Having this knowledge or relevance will encourage the client to process the message.

People have a lot to do in a day. They don't have a chance or the desire to think about every little thing that pops up. This is known as low involvement. When a person has little or no tie to a product or message, they have little involvement with it and thus little or no desire to hear much about it (Petty, & Cacioppo 1984).

On the other end of the spectrum there is high involvement. When a person has a high degree of experience or knowledge as it relates to the information being presented in the persuasive message, they tend to listen more closely and think more thoroughly about the message. As an example, a doctor who specializes in orthopedic surgery would be interested in a procedure or instrument that cuts down on the time in which an operation will take from start to completion. If you have arthritis you would have a special interest in a medication that could reduce your discomfort. If you were buying a car, information in regards to the model you are looking at would definitely peek your interest. Two other issues that play a part in determining if a person will be motivated to process through the central route are diversity and need for cognition.

Diversity says that a person will consider and deliberate the content of a message if it is heard from a variety of sources. The first time you hear a message it might be easy to ignore it or give it little attention. However, if you hear the message from many different sources, you will tend to think that there might be something to it and give it more consideration.

Need for cognition simply refers to people who like to think, and therefore are more likely to analyze a message more closely. This need for cognition will cause someone to utilize the central route of processing even if the topic has no personal relevance to him/her. This type of person is "hardwired" to analyze everything they see and hear. They have a high need for cognition.

<u>Ability</u> - Now that the receiver has been motivated to process your message, the question arises; does he or she have the ability to do so? Listeners have to be smart

enough to follow the argument, and things have to be settled enough so they can concentrate on what you have to say.

If the information being conveyed is to complex to comprehend, the client will not be able to process it regardless of his motivation. An asthma sufferer, for example, will surely want to know about a new product that promises quicker and longer lasting relief, but if the message contains a lot of technical and medical jargon, they are likely to be turned off because she or he simply cannot understand the diction. If this is the case, they will not *elaborate* on the message.

In addition to the complexity of the message, there may be a multitude of distractions that will prevent elaboration by the client. These distractions could include a variety of things: the kids screaming for dinner or attention, phone calls, the client is thirsty and wants a drink, the neighbor is mowing his lawn creating noise, employees coming in the office asking question and the list goes on. These distractions can be internal or external some controllable others not. Whatever the case, distracters can prevent careful thought and deliberation of your message, and therefore limiting the possibility of persuasion. If however, the receiver is motivated, can understand the message, and there are no distractions, he or she can then go to the next stage in the model.

<u>Prior Attitude</u> - If listeners already have a rigid opinion, their response to everything you say may be, "Yeah, but!" Your reasons for a different view won't change them, but rather cause them to create more counter arguments to defend against what you're saying. This is called "top-down" thinking. In most cases when this situation occurs your chances of persuasion are going to be very low, and a new message is going to be required.

If the receiver has become involved with the message this far into the central path but the message does not contain a cogent argument or if it contains false information there is likely to be a boomerang effect. This means that the receiver will reject the message and form negative thoughts and feelings about the message. This is especially true when the receiver is an expert or has a lot of previous knowledge about the subject of the message. She may disagree with the ideas expressed in a well-formed argument and simply reject the message. Or she may see the inadequacies of the message and dismiss it as unreliable information, failing to be persuaded.

If they have not previously formed an opinion, they're not already biased in their attitude toward your message then they will listen with a "bottom-up" style, weighing what you say as they form an opinion. People who fall into this category are prime for persuasion pending your ability to present a strong case for your argument or proposal.

Argument Strength - Listeners who get through 1-3 usually shift towards the speaker's view if the speaker's arguments are strong. If the message is perceived as containing strong, compelling argument, then thinking about the argument will cause favorable thoughts to be established and persuasion will result.

If the speaker’s arguments are weak the listener will move further away from the speaker's position. If the listener perceives the argument as weak and non-compelling, then thinking about them will cause negative thoughts and counterarguments to be established, resulting in the opinions and attitudes of the listener to move away from the position advocated in your message (boomerang effect).

Peripheral Route

Persuasion, using this route, occurs when a person can't utilize the central route, either because they aren't motivated, don't have the ability, or aren't impressed one way or the other by a speaker's arguments. Persuasion, using this route, takes place through the use of issue-irrelevant cues known as peripheral cues. Peripheral cues change a listener's opinion without relying on any active thinking about the attributes of the proposals being submitted for consideration.

Dr. Robert Cialdini, of Arizona State University, identifies six types of peripheral cues that people use when using this route of message processing (we will discuss in detail these six cues in the context of persuasion strategies in the next section). If someone cannot process your message through the central route, having any of these characteristics associated with you or your message will trigger the listener into using the peripheral route.

Reciprocation – We should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us. By virtue of the reciprocity rule, then, we are obligated to the future repayment of favors, gifts, invitations, and the like (Cialdini, 2001) People have a natural desire to repay someone for something they have received. Whether it be a concession in a bargaining situation, or a free gift prior to the presentation, people will tend to attempt to reciprocate.

Consistency – A desire and need to be and or appear to be consistent with what we have done or said in the past. People have a strong natural desire to be consistent in their thoughts and actions. Therefore establishing a point of reference with the client from which you can use as an anchor to form consistency in their future thoughts or actions will tend to lead the listener in the direction you desire.

1. Social Proof – Determining that an action or belief is correct because we see other performing the behavior or holding the belief, particularly those who are similar to us. Link your presentation to the actions, thoughts and/or attitudes of others similar to your client and you will increase your chances of persuasion.

2. Liking – We like people who are like us and who like us, and who appeal to our aesthetic, and personal senses. Sometimes it only takes a nice personality, sense of humor, or an eloquent speaking style to persuade someone. It could also be the way you dress, or your physical attractiveness, or a common background or experience that will tip the scales in your direction in the persuasion process.

3. Authority – Experience, titles, degrees**,** credentials, position or past success can create the perception of authority. If they believe that you know what you're talking about, that may be good enough for them if they deem you an authority.

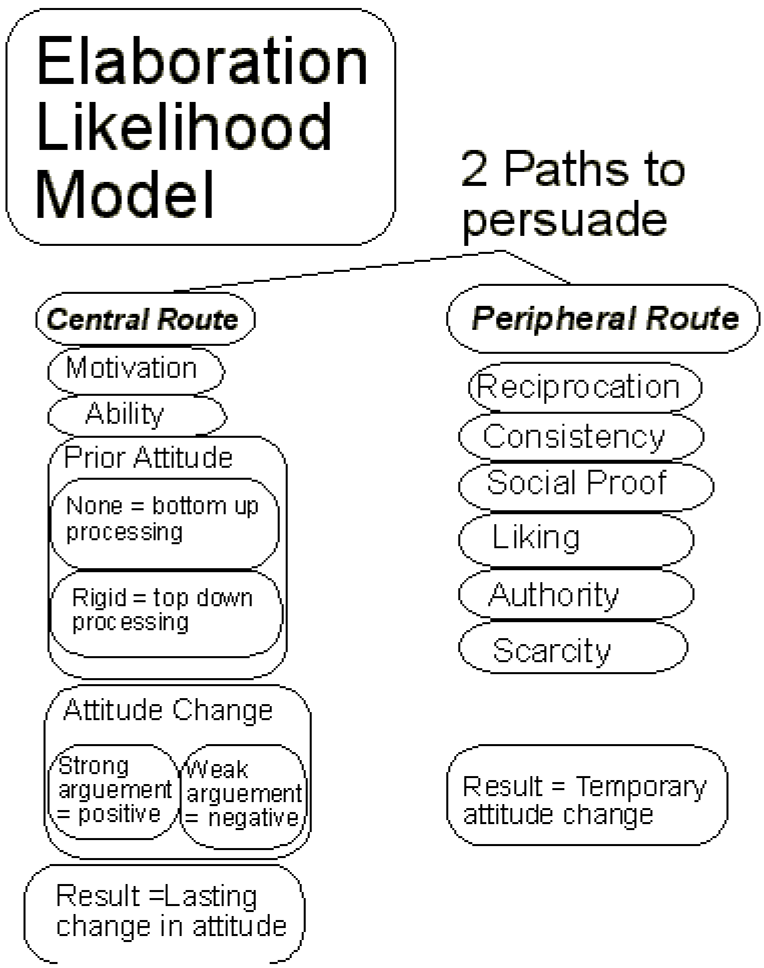
Anything that gives the listener the feeling that you have power over them by way of authority will help persuade using the peripheral route.

4. Scarcity - If an item is rare or becoming rare, it is more valuable. Opportunities seem more valuable to us when they are less available (Cialdini, 2001). Is your offer a limited time offer, or proposal? Is there a window of opportunity that will close if action isn't taken? Are there limited quantities, and therefore quick action needs to be taken. Can something be lost if action isn't taken? These are but a few examples of how scarcity can be used to persuade.

ELM suggests that audiences think about these things when they get bumped off the Central Route. Speakers can also direct audiences onto this route, by creating arguments that implicate some of the six cues listed above.

Peripherally processed messages, though capable of exacting attitude change (persuasion), are less likely to be persistent and resilient. However, what begins as a temporary attitude change via the peripheral route might end up being a more permanent change via the central route. For example, once a person decides to buy a certain product or to vote for a specific candidate, the principle of dissonance reduction predicts that he/she will become motivated to think about the product or issue and to generate thoughts and justifications for the choice (i.e., he/she will attempt to reduce the post-decision dissonance). In such case, the cognitive activity triggered by the dissonance associated with the original choice (that was cause by peripheral cues) may lead to permanent attitude change (via central route).

Becoming aware of how your client or prospect is processing your message can be very advantageous in persuading without pressure. Both the central and peripheral routes are natural and occur without the listener's awareness. Hence, you can utilize such knowledge by adapting your message to the process route the client is using at the time and in the process multiply your odds of persuading the client many times over.


Elaboration Likelihood Model
2 Paths to persuade
Central Route
Motivation
Ability
Prior Attitude
None = bottom up processing
Rigid = top down processing
Attitude Change
Strong arguement = positive
Weak arguement = negative
Result =Lasting change in attitude
Peripheral Route
Reciprocation
Consistency
Social Proof
Liking
Authority
Scarcity
Result = Temporary attitude change

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Social Judgment Theory

Social Judgment Theory (SJT) is the result of research performed by Muzafer Sherif and his associates (1965), and deals with the way people judge messages. SJT is base on psychological research, which studied subjects' ability to judge certain physical entities such as the brightness of a light or the weight of an object. This research served as an analogy for the development of social judgment theory (Littlejohn 1999). SJT holds that to best persuade someone you must have an understanding of his or her present views on the subject upon which the influence attempt is being made. From this understanding one can determine how and where to "place" their argument in order to best persuade. For our purposes, we will look at five primary principles of social judgment theory.

Anchor

People make judgments based on their anchors, or reference points. Anchors are internal, and based on past experience. The internal anchor is always present and influences the way a person responds to a message. The more important the issue is to the person, the greater the anchor will influence the perception and judgment of the message (Littlejohn, 1999).

- SJT assumes persuasion is mediated by the audience's evaluation of the position advocated in the persuasive message.
- Audience weighs and evaluates the advocated position against their initial beliefs/attitudes about the topic.
- Audience's initial beliefs/attitudes = Anchor.

To illustrate the power of anchors, consider this experiment. Three bowls of water are placed in front of the subject. One bowl has very hot water in it, the second bowl has ice-cold water in it, and the third bowl has water in it that is room temperature. The subject is not told about the temperature of the water in any of the bowels. The subject is then asked to place his right hand in the hot water and his left hand in the cold water. After some time has passed, the subject is then asked to take both his hands out of the bowls of water and place them in the third bowl with room temperature water. He is then asked to describe the temperature of the water. In most cases there is a strange and bewildered look on the face of the subject. Why? Because the right hand is feeling the water as being cold and the left hand is feeling the water as being hot. Why the discrepancy in the different judgments of the temperature of the water? Each hand had a different anchor and therefore judged the water temperature in comparison with that anchor.

In the same way people judge our messages of influence. They compare our message with what they have already experienced or know. If we present an opportunity that is room temperature and the client's perception of that opportunity is based on a hot past experience, they very well may evaluate our message as being cold, and not very attractive. Therefore, it is imperative that we know where the client is coming from and what his/her predetermined views of our proposal might be.

Latitudes of Acceptance

The moment someone hears your message they will compare your message with their present point of view (anchor). Different people will hold different anchors about a message. While there are those who share a similar anchor, individuals can still differ in their tolerance around a given point of view.

According to SJT, these tolerances, or personal attitude structures, fall into three zones.

Latitude of Acceptance = anchor + all other positions that are also acceptable.

Latitude of Rejection = all positions that are unacceptable.

Latitude of Non-commitment = all positions that are neither acceptable nor unacceptable.

To better see and understand how our own personal attitude structures work, we will perform the following ordered alternative questionnaire.

Read the following nine statements.

Place an A+ before the statement you most agree with.
Place an A before the statements you strongly agree with.
Place an R before the statements you strongly disagree with.
Place an R+ before the statement you most disagree with.
Place an N before the statement you do not feel strongly about.

1. ____Since alcohol is the curse of mankind, the sale and use of alcohol, including light beer, should be completely abolished.

2. ____Since alcohol is the main cause of corruption in public life, lawlessness, and immoral acts, its sale and use should be prohibited.

3.____Since it is hard to stop at a reasonable moderation point in the use of alcohol, it is safer to discourage its use.

4. ____Alcohol should not be sold or used except as a remedy for snake bites, cramps, colds, fainting, and other aches and pains.

5. ____The arguments in favor and against the sale and use of alcohol are nearly equal.

6. ____The sale of alcohol should be so regulated that it is available in limited quantities for special occasions.

7. ____The sale and use of alcohol should be permitted with proper state controls, so that the revenue from taxation may be used for the betterment of schools, highways, and other state institutions.

8. ____Since prohibition is a major cause of corruption in public life, lawlessness, immoral acts, and juvenile delinquency, the sale and use of alcohol should be legalized.

9. ____It has become evident that man cannot get along without alcohol; therefore there should be no restriction whatsoever on its sale and use.

(M. Sherif et al. 1961, p. 133).

As you can see there are statements here that you may absolutely agree with, some you absolutely disagree with and others that are somewhere in the middle. All of these opinions are going to be based on an anchor position you have concerning the use of alcohol. In the same way the propositions you present to your clients will be categorized in the same way. Their anchor, as it relates to the proposal you are presenting, will help them determine which latitude of acceptance your message will fall into.

Ego Involvement

The *more* you know the *less* you hear. At a first this may not seem rational, but when applied to Social Judgment Theory it becomes a simple truth. According to Sherif, an individual with high ego-involvement and/or substantial knowledge of a subject will not be easily persuaded. In contrast, individuals who have limited ego involvement and/or little knowledge on a subject tend to be more willing to listen and more susceptible to persuasion (Sherif, 1965).

Ego-involvement means how important the issue is to us, as well as our self-identity. As an example, if a claim is made that "social security payments must increase to cover the cost of living each year." How do you think someone just entering the work force and someone surviving completely on social security benefits would rate that claim? For the person who depends exclusively upon social security, you can be pretty sure that they are going to be highly ego involved, and to them, only one acceptable position. “It is absolutely essential that cost of living raises be added each year to social security benefits.” For a topic to be one that would demand ego involvement it would need these two characteristics.

- The topic is central to the person’s self-concept; it is self-defining.
- The topic is personally important to the person; it has high priority.

When the topic is important to us, and through our deliberation have decided that our stand on the issue is the "correct" position, we will then begin to build our self-concepts around that position. Thus, according to SJT, ego-involved people will often think in terms of “black and white” with highly defined categories of judgment, with little room for gray areas. (O Keefe, 1990).

Therefore, as we become ego-involved in an issue, our latitude of rejection gets larger and our latitudes of acceptance and non-commitment get smaller. It is because of this that the chances of persuading someone to another point of view, when they are highly ego involved in the issue, are slim to none. (Sherif et al. 1965)

To understand how ego involved you or your client is in a topic or subject; you need to answer these tree simple questions.

- How much does this topic or subject matter to you or him/her?
- How important is it to you or him/her that you or him/her be right?
- How much is your or their identity tied up in the concept?

Assimilation/Contrast Effects

- Assimilation = When the audience views the persuader's message as closer to their anchor than it actually is.

- Contrast = When the audience views the persuader's message as farther from their anchor than it really is.
  (Littlejohn, 1999).

- Assimilation/Contrast effects tend to occur when:

  - Audience is highly involved.

  - Persuasive message is unclear.

Therefore, perceptual distortion reduces persuasive effect. Booth-Butterfield (1996) provides the following example and commentary.

> I'm sure you've had this kind of experience. You are sitting in your house during the winter and you are feeling somewhat cold. Later, you do some light housecleaning. Afterwards, the house feels more comfortable. Even though the real temperature has not changed during day, we can have very different ratings of it. What is going on here?
>
> The answer is quite simple. Our judgments of "hot" and "cold" are comparative judgments. When we have been just sitting around the house and our body temperature is a bit lower, then the room feels colder. We warm up when we do housework and thus the room now feels more comfortable.

Interestingly, people make judgments about persuasive topics in much the same way they make judgments about hot and cold. The Theory holds that we will distort incoming information depending upon the "anchor position" we hold on a given issue. You recall that the anchor is the one position in our latitude of acceptance that we find to be the most acceptable.

Now, follow closely here. If incoming persuasive information falls within the latitude of acceptance and it is close to the anchor position, then people will "assimilate" the new position. That is, people will pull the new position closer to themselves and make it seem to be even more acceptable than it really is.

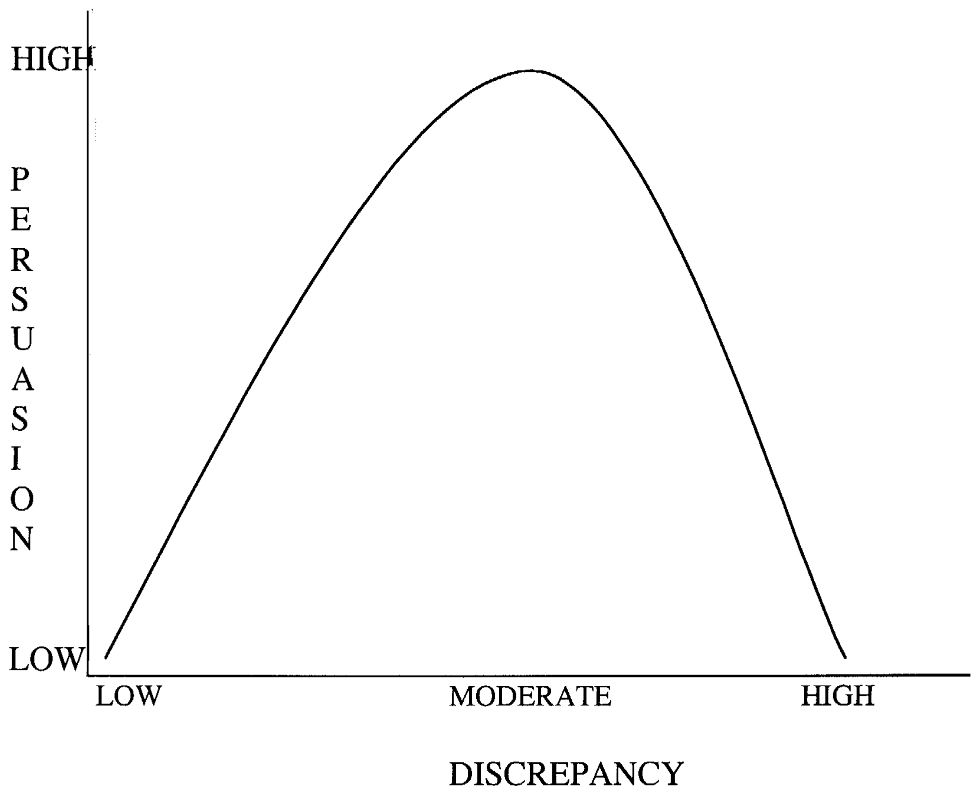
By contrast, if incoming persuasive information falls outside of the latitude of acceptance, then people will "contrast" that new position. That is, they will push the new position even farther away from themselves and make it seem worse than it really is.

Realize that both assimilation and contrast distort the "true" position of the new information. Recall the temperature example. The true room temperature may be 70 degrees, but if our "anchor" is low because we have a cold body, then we will distort our judgment of the room and contrast. That is, we will say that the room is "cold." Yet if our body temperature is higher due to work, then we will again distort our judgment of the room and claim that 70 degrees is "just right" (assimilation).

Now the net of effect of these distortion processes is subtle, but quite important. Through assimilation and contrast we alter the "true" position of the incoming information and make it seem closer or farther away from our anchor than it really is. When distortions like this occur, no persuasion will result! The new information cannot persuade us for one of two reasons. First, if we contrast, we push the new information out of our latitude of acceptance and probably into the latitude of rejection. No persuasion here. Second, if we assimilate, we pull the new information to our anchor and make it seem like it is already a position we accept. No persuasion here, either.

Size of Discrepancies for Persuasion

The size of discrepancies can determine whether or not persuasion will take place. The amount of change that can happen has an interesting property. It follows what is called an "upside-down U" curve. To understand this property, simply review the graph below.



A good illustration of this upside-down U is with medicine. When you get a prescription for medicine it tells you how much and how often to take it. You get the maximum benefit when you take the right amount at the right time. If you take too little medicine, you won't get better. And, if you take too much medicine you won't get better either (may even get worse). The same thing occurs with persuasion. As long as there is the "prescribed" amount of discrepancy between the anchor position and the new position, then persuasion can occur. If the amount of discrepancy is too small or too large, then persuasion will not happen.

Boomerang Effect

Communicators must work within the latitude of acceptance or at least the latitude of non-commitment to have success in persuasion. People tend to respond in a negative way to information that occurs within their latitude of rejection. One such reaction is called “Boomerang Effect.”

An example of the “Boomerang Effect” would be as follows: lets say you are a pro-life advocate, and a pro-choice advocate begins to speak about the abortion issue. They start out by saying that anyone who supports the pro-life position is against women and that there is no life until birth. They continue to say that while in the womb, it is not a child but a fetus, and deserves no protection under the constitution. They finish their thoughts by saying that pro-life people are simply espousing a right wing ideology that is completely out of step with mainstream society. The pro-life person hearing this argument will more than likely not be persuaded away from their current point of view. In fact, a boomerang effect will probably take place, causing the listener to be more entrenched in their views and move further away from the position of the speaker.

Therefore, one must be careful in their proposal to the client as to not have an argument that falls in their latitude of rejection, as you will run the chance of a boomerang effect occurring and your client moving away from your proposal or point of view.

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Framing Effects

"A frame is a psychological device that offers a perspective and manipulates salience in order to influence subsequent judgment."

~ Kelton Rhoads

Going all the way back to the 1950's social psychologist have focused on the mechanics of thought, and have formulated theories in regards to decision making. These theories have speculated that the way a question or decision is framed can and will impact the conclusion. Studies in cognitive psychology tell us that the way people make decisions is influenced by an array of factors. Research conducted by Shafir, Simionson, and Tversky (1993) revealed that having many options from which to choose from, often generates a higher degree of conflict in the decision making process. Tversky and Kahneman (1983) found that even when the problems were equivalent, people's conclusion would be different depending on whether the problem or solution was phrased in terms of gains or losses. Meyerowitz and Chaiken (1987) reported that a persuasive message could have different affects on the decision outcome depending on whether the question or choice options are presented in regards to the positive consequences of doing the proposed actions, or the negative consequences of not doing the proposed action. In addition, research has reported that things such as word choice, the ordering of questions, reference point position, and the lack of choice will also affect the outcome of decision-making.

How we ask a question will most of the time determine, in great part, what the answer will be. How we present our product or service will determine in great part what the client focuses on and how they will judge what they see as being important. How we present the solution to the client in terms of meeting his/her needs will determine the ultimate judgment the client makes about saying yes or no to our proposition.

What is a Frame?

Looking at the definition given above by Rhoads (1997), we can see three distinct things about frames. First, frames create perspective. Frames provide a lens through which the client looks at the product or service we are proposing. It will direct his attention in such a way as to align his perspective with yours, seeing things the way you want him/her to see them. Second, frames manipulate salience. Frames focus the client's attention on certain benefits and attributes of the product or service deemed to be most important, while ignoring other less attractive or unimportant attributes. Finally, frames set the client up for his subsequent judgment of your product or service. By creating a frame you present to the client a framework within which he will make his judgment. Framing therefore comes before a persuasive attempt.

Rounding off the definition of frames, Watkins, Edwards and Thakrar suggest that the art of framing arguments consists of developing rationales and presenting information in the best possible light to achieve your goals. The messages should communicate the right tone, appeal to your audience’s values, and resonate with their interest. It is essential, however, not to step over the line. Framing is not lying or misleading. Shading the truth is the best way to loose credibility (Watkins, Edwards & Thakrar, 2001, pp. 17-18). In short, the salesperson selling a product or service will frame his/her message to focus attention on what he/she believes are the most pivotal or salient issues. Frames help the client reduce the complexity of issues and makes sense of their environment. When the client, by way of your frame, sees one problem as more urgent or more costly than another, he/she will focus their attention on that problem and gather their resources to reflect that focus.

Why do Frames Work?

Now that we know what framing is the next question is why do they work? Frames work because of two specific reasons. First, most people tend to postpone the inevitable deliberation of what is at stake until they have to make a choice. In our daily lives we are required to make a plethora of decisions. We must choose what books to read, clothes to wear, food to eat, movies to see, courses to take, person to date, routes to drive, and multitude of others. You might think that people weigh their options carefully and make the best decision possible. However, our world is a fast and furious one and seldom do people have the time or desire to think-out in advance their feelings and thoughts about many of the issues confronting them. Therefore, as a rule, people tend to wait until the moment of decision is upon them, and then they will look at the argument, weigh the options and make their decision. Second, a person's or group's decisions are influenced by how options are presented to them and their availability. It is the posing of these options that make up the essence of framing. Every message you give to someone is framed, whether it is intentional or not. Understanding the various frames and their effects on human behavior and decision making will create for you an enormous advantage in influencing your client to make a decision that they will take full responsibility for, and therefore, be fully committed to.

Because the list of possible framing strategies is so long, we will look at but a few of the more common frames that you can use in your everyday interactions to influence and persuade. However, you can develop your own unique frames using the information given throughout the course that will best suit your individual situations and circumstances.

Reframe

This is a very common frame, and you can see it occurring on almost any political debate television show. People attempt to reframe the question that will best facilitate the answer they want to give. You see, when playing the frame game, the question follows the answer. If a question is asked that you don't like, reframe it so that it facilitates the answer or information you want to share. Ever notice that many times politicians will not answer a question, but instead ramble on about something else. This is a person's attempt to either avoid the question so that they can say what they want to say, or a feeble attempt to reframe. Most of the time when this happens the person dancing around the question looks like he/she is avoiding the question and looks bad doing it. A smart communicator will in fact reframe by restating the question in such a way that the response he /she gives will answer the question exactly and concisely.

Another way of looking at reframing is found in this example. John goes into an electronics store to consider purchasing a CD player. His funds are limited as he has just moved into a place of his own, and therefore he isn't sure if he should use his remaining funds to purchase a CD player (frame = buy vs. not buy). As he walks through the store he looks at different models with different accessories. As time goes by he starts to say to himself, "with a CD player I could watch high quality movies instead of the trash that is on television. And besides look at all the movies I can choose from; it is much larger than the selection I get from television. Plus, I will save time because there are no commercials when I watch a movie." With these three reasons, and a new frame (movies vs. television), John walks up to the cashier carrying his new CD player. (Rhoads, 1997)

The reframe is a powerful tool for influence, especially when it is a matter of life and death. Most people remember the O.J. Simpson trial. This court case started out with the frame of *Simpson guilty vs. Simpson innocent*. As the trial progressed, the prosecutors reframed it into *male wife beater vs. female victim*. The defense team then reframed it to *black minority victim vs. racist police department* (Rhoads, 1997). All the attorneys knew that the frame that was strongest would be the frame through which, the jury would receive and evaluate the evidence, and the rest is history.

Attribute Frame

Attribute framing is the act of using different, but logically equivalent, words or phrases (e.g., 90% employment vs. 10% unemployment) to cause individuals to alter their decisions.

Attribute framing effects occur when a key attribute is framed in ***positive*** rather than negative terms resulting in a more favorable evaluation of your product or service. According to Levin and Gaeth (1988), positive labels tend to evoke positive associations while negative labels tend to evoke negative associations (Levin, Gaeth, & Schreiber, 2002) . Examples of this negative verse positive labeling could be % lean vs. % fat, % correct vs. % incorrect, or success rate vs. failure rate.

Which hamburger do you think would be healthier, one that is 25% fat or one that is 75% lean? Consider the following scenario. Kathy and Sam are sitting down for some lunch. The waitress walks up to take their order and Kathy states that while she would love a hamburger, she is trying to eat healthier and watch her weight. The waitress replies, "Well, our hamburgers are 75% lean" Kathy orders the hamburger and says that it was better tasting and more healthy than the high fat burgers you can get elsewhere. What happened here? The waitress used an attribution frame to focused Kathy away from the fact that the hamburger was in fact 25% fat, and instead put her focus on the fact that the burger was 75% lean. Both facts were true, but one frame brought about a hamburger purchase, and left Kathy believing that the hamburger was healthier and better tasting.

Results of studies conducted by researchers consistently indicate that the positive frame results in higher rating of the product than do negative frames. Dononvan and Jalleh (1999) performed a study, part of which looked at the impact of certain terms on perception and the associated impact on preference of purchase. When given a range of possible responses (positive – neutral – negative), participants were asked what their perception was of the terms “fat”, “fat-free”, and, “lean.” Results indicated the following:

TERM	POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
Fat-Free	40%	53%	7%
Lean	44%	53%	2%
Fat	0%	60%	40%

When attaching the terms to meat products by actually showing the labels on packaging indicating either 75% fat-free, 75% lean or 25% fat, their preference for purchase were as follows:

51% preferred to purchase meat labeled as 75% fat-free

44% preferred to purchase meat labeled as 75% lean

0% preferred to purchase meat labeled as 25% fat

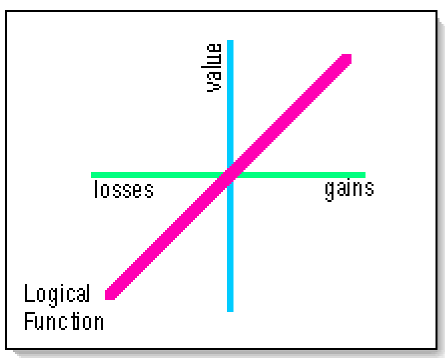
As can be seen by the first chart most people saw the labeling as neutral. This high rating of the neutral perception could be cause by a couple of reasons. First, they simply may not care that much about the fat content and therefore the label didn’t polarize their perceptions. In addition, if you stop and think for a moment, the fat and lean content is the same for all the products. However, even when the participants acknowledge this fact, 50% of them said that even though they knew the fat and lean content was the same they still would not buy the meat labeled as 25% fat.

Using the attribute frame to highlight the positive aspects of your product or service will have a positive effect on your client’s perception. In addition, simply tailoring your presentation to accentuate certain attributes of your product’s strengths may very well be enough to cause the client to focus on those attribute and ignore other, less appealing attributes.

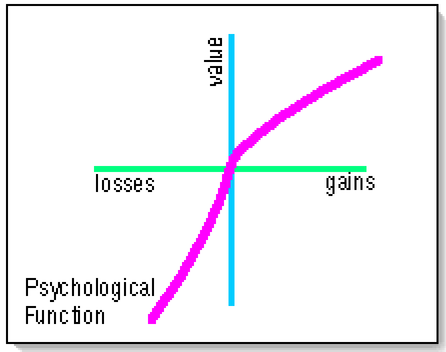
Loss Aversion Frame

The premise of this frame is based of what is known as loss aversion. The idea behind loss aversion is that people are more afraid to lose then they are motivated to win. People tend to over weigh losses, and therefore, view the cost of loosing disproportionately in comparison to winning.

If actual gains and losses were psychologically evaluated and perceived equitably, you'd find that people who found a $100 bill would be ten times as happy as those who found a $10 bill, and 100 times as happy as the person who found a $1 bill. The inverse should also be true for losing money. Someone who lost $100 would be ten times as sad as someone who lost $10 and one hundred times as sad as someone who lost $1. If you were to plot a logical relationship between the value of loss and gains it would look something like the figure below. (Rhodes 1997)



Logically, each degree of good fortune should represent an equal degree of value (pleasure). Each equal degree of misfortune should represent an equal degree loss value (pain). (Rhoads 1997) However, the relationship isn't that logical. Prospect Theory, as presented by Kahneman & Tversky (1979) plotted the psychological relationship that exists between value, gains and losses. Their findings are reflected on the chart below.



As can be seen, equal degrees of loss and gain are perceived differently. Gains bring immediate pleasure but as the degrees of gain continue, the degree of pleasure begins to level off. (Rhodes 1997)

An illustration of this would be if I placed a 1lb weight in one hand and a 2lb weight in the other could you tell which one was the 2lb weight. Sure you could. What about a 10lb and 11lb weight? Perhaps you could tell the difference. However, could you tell the difference between a 25lb and 26lb weight or a 50lb and 51lb weight? The ability to differentiate between the weights decreases as the amount of weight goes up. The same can be said of gains as it relates to the perception of pleasure received from those gains.

On the loss side, we see an entire different story. The loss of value (feeling of pain) is disproportionately greater than the feeling of pleasure created by equal degrees of gain. Humans simply perceive loss as being greater than it really is. We feel the pain of loss much more acutely. Therefore, our exaggerated perception of loss and the apparently greater sensitivity to feelings of loss, explain in part why humans tend to hate losing more than they desire winning.

Based on Kahneman and Tversky's research, it would appear that a human's first priority is not to lose, and gains are secondary to the "no loss" rule. With this being the case, messages that are negatively framed (stressing the negative consequences [loss] of not doing a specific action), should be more persuasive than those framed positively (stressing the positive consequences [gain] of doing a specific action). To illustrate this point let's look at a study conducted for the purpose of testing the loss adverse framing effect.

In 1995, researchers Ganzach and Karshai conducted a field experiment in cooperation with a credit card company using actual customers who had not used their credit card for a three-month period. Each customer received one of two messages extolling the benefits of the card. One message was framed in terms of gain and the other message in terms of loss. In the gain condition customers were told that by using the card they would gain a number of benefits. In the loss condition customers were told that since they are not using the card they lose these benefits. For a two-month period, after receiving the message, their charges on the credit card were monitored for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of each of the framing manipulations. The results indicated that the persuasiveness of the loss-framed message was much stronger than the persuasiveness of the gain-framed message. In fact, the percentage of customers who started to use their cards in the loss- frame group was more than double the percentage of customers from the gain-frame group. In addition, it was found that the charges made by the customers of the loss-framed group were more than twice as much as the charges of the customers of the gain framed group.

While there are moderating variables, some of which we will discuss next, that can affect the degree in which the loss frame effectiveness will be felt, it is fair to say that the way you frame a message in relation to it being loss framed or gain framed, will have a definite effect on the response you get. Just remember that people hate to loose more than the like to win.

Risky Choice Frame

Building on their work of the loss adverse effect mentioned above, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) also suggest that one of the moderating factors involved in negative framed messages having more persuasive effect than positive framed messages is the degree of risk found in the decision's corresponding action. A risky choice is one where there is uncertainty, and the specific outcome is unknown. For example, if you decide to spend money on a lottery, there is an unknown outcome. You may win a lot of money, or you may not. The final outcome is not made by your decision; your decision simply enters you into a chance situation. A safe choice, on the other hand, is one where there is a degree of certainty and the ultimate outcome is decided by the choice. For example, if you decide to invest your money in a bank account and earn interest, you have made a safe choice.

The basic premise therefore, of the risky choice frame is that people are more willing to take risks to avoid loss and more risk adverse in obtaining a gain. Thus if the proposal you are suggesting to your client has elements of risk or is perceived by your client as being risky, presenting your message in a negative frame (avoiding loss) should be more persuasive in moving your client towards more risk taking behavior. However, if your proposal is perceived by your client as not being risky, using positive framed messages (attaining gains) should be more persuasive. To demonstrate the risky choice concept Tversky and Kahneman(1981) (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984) asked two groups of physicians one of the following two questions.

GROUP ONE

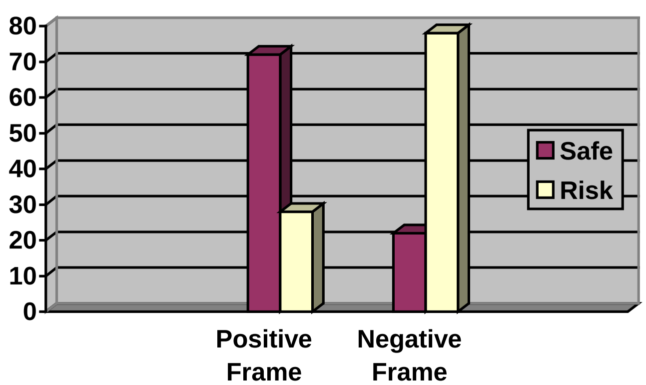
Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as follows: If program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. If program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved. Which of the two programs would you favor?

As can be seen, this scenario was presented using positive (lives saved) frames. After reviewing the two options, 72% of the physicians chose option A, the option of certainty and no risk, while 28% chose option B, the uncertain high-risk option. This result confirms the concept of prospect theory in that when a message is presented using positive (gain) frames, people will tend to be risk adverse in their perception and evaluation of the message and therefore, are more likely to choose a no risk option providing the most certainty.

GROUP TWO

Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as follows: If program C is adopted, 400 people will die. If program D is adopted, there is a one-third probability that nobody will die and a two-thirds probability that 600 people will die. Which of the two programs would you favor?

As can be seen, this scenario was presented using negative (lives lost) frames. After reviewing the two options, 78% of the physicians chose option D, the uncertain high-risk option, while 22% chose option C, the option of certainty. This result confirms the concept of prospect theory in that when a message is presented using negative (loss) frames, people will tend to be risk oriented in their perception and evaluation of the message and therefore, are more likely to choose the option providing the least loss in spite of the higher risk.



Positive Frame = 72% chose safe and certain strategy / 28% chose risky strategy
Negative Frame = 78% chose risky strategy / 22% chose safe and certain strategy

The above study clearly indicates that people will chose the safe certain option when dealing with gains but reject the certain option when dealing with loss. The opposite is true when dealing with risk. People will tend to reject uncertain or risky options when dealing with gains but choose risky options when dealing with loss.

Again, the risky choice frame should be the strategy of choice when the proposal you are suggesting is one that is risky or perceived by your client as being risky. In this case you should implement a negatively framed message, stressing the risk of negative consequences of not taking action, or by presenting the certainty of loss with “option one,” and the potential of not loosing with “option two.” If the proposal is one that has a high level of certainty, implement a positive frame stressing the benefits that will be gained by taking action, or the certainty of gain with “option one,” and the probably of not gaining with “option two.” On the other hand if the proposal is neutral concerning risk, one can frame the message as either negative or positive, depending on the attribute of the client. If he/she has shown themselves to be risk adverse present your proposal in positive (gain) terms (or use the two gain option approach). If however, they have been a risk taker in the past you may want to present your proposal by implementing a negative (loss) frame (or the two loss option approach).

Contrast frame

The contrast frame affects the way we perceive the differences between two things when they are presented one right after the other. If the second item is seen as being at least somewhat different from the first, there will tendency to perceive the second item as being more different than it actually is (Cialdini, 2001). If you were to lift a 5lb weight first and then lift a 30lb weight, there will be a strong tendency to judge the second weight as being heavier than if you had not picked up the 5lb weight first. We might judge a pale of lukewarm water as being warmer than it really is if first our hands had just been in a pale of ice-cold water. The contrast frame is, in part, a form of reframe except that this frame's purpose is more than simply restating a position so that the message will be perceived and evaluated in a certain way. The contrast frame seeks to reestablish the reference or anchor point (again, recall the three pales of water example) in such a way that causes your proposal and position to be viewed as stronger and more desirable. Let's look at a couple of examples of the contrast frame at work.

Let's say that it is a time before computers, software programs, and the Internet ruled the information domain. A young couple with a child is sitting down with an encyclopedia salesman. The salesman, as part of his sales pitch, has gotten the young parents to acknowledge that a quality education is essential to their child's future. As he broaches the topic of price he begins to form his contrast frame as he says, "At first glance the cost of this set of encyclopedias might seem substantial, with our payment plan however, this set of encyclopedias will only cost you 40 cents a day. That is less than a can of soda! *(Here comes the frame)* I think you would agree that your child's education is more valuable than a daily can of soda." (Rhoads 1997)

Two things happened here. First the original frame of *buy vs. not to buy* got reframed to *quality education vs. cost*. Then the contrast frame got implemented by contrasting the value of a quality education to a 40-cent can of soda (the new anchor point). Since the contrast principle states that if the second item is seen as being at least somewhat different from the first item, we will tend to see the second item as being more different than it really is, the cost of a daily soda is going to be perceived as being even less costly than it really is, and therefore the cost of a quality education (encyclopedias) become very affordable. What happens next? Having never looked at the value of a quality education as only costing the equivalent of a can of soda, the checkbook comes out and the couple has encyclopedias and the salesman has a commission.

This next example of the contrast frame is a little more straightforward, and can be approached from different directions. First, if you want the client to see your product or service as being affordable, show them a higher priced item first. They will look at the cost of the first item, and then when shown your item they will see it as being less costly than it really is. Second, you can use the contrast frame in regards to value for the dollar. Cialdini (2001) shared an experience he had when researching influence tactics used by real estate salespersons.

Cialdini (working as an undercover researcher) was working with a salesman he called Phil. Phil's job was to give Cialdini some tips to help him through his break-in-period. One of the things that Cialdini noticed was that when Phil was showing a set of new customers potential properties for the first time, he would always start by showing some very undesirable houses. When Cialdini asked about it, Phil Laughed and explained what was going on. He said that the company had what was called "setup" properties. These run down houses (usually one or two) were kept by the company at inflated prices. There were no real intentions to sell these properties, but only to be shown to the client so that when the agent showed them the houses he really desired to sell the client, these "real" properties would benefit from the comparison. Phil said he liked it when he saw the potential buyers' eyes light up when they saw the "real properties" that Phil wanted to sell them, after they had seen the run down houses. The agent said that his properties looked really good after the client looked at a couple dumps.

Another way the contrast frame can work is a little different. When a client sees what he/she wants, knows what he/she wants, or is looking at a potential purchase you can make the product or service more appealing in the following way. Raise the comparison. An example of this would be when a customer is in a jewelry store looking at a ½ caret ring and the salesperson says, "while you looking at this ½ caret ring, I just wanted you to see this beautiful 1 caret ring." The larger ring becomes the reference or anchor point from which the original item will be judged. Before seeing the larger ring, the customer was judging the cost of the ½ caret ring with an anchor point of zero (not buying the ring). Now the customer has a new anchor or reference point, which is the 1 caret ring. The contrast principle says that the second item will appear to be more different than it really is. Therefore, the cost of the larger ring will appear to be more costly than it really is, and in comparison cause the original ring to seem more affordable (Omega Lab, 2003).

Reason Frame

The reason frame is very simple; give someone a big enough reason for buying and their chances of buying increases. In other words, provide the client, by way of your message, a solid and meaningful reason(s) for saying yes. When a person has a big enough, or weighty enough reason, complying with your request becomes much easier. Therefore, determine, and then include in your message, why the client should say yes to your proposal. Why does it make sense that they should buy? In delivering your message, using the reason frame, use “prompters” repeatedly. Prompters for this frame would be words or phrases such as, “so that,” “In order that,” or simply “because.” While I suggest that you provide solid and compelling reasons for the client to buy, research has found that in many cases, any reason will do.

The reason frame relies in part on the automaticity of human nature. A primary rule or principle of human behavior says that we will be more successful in getting someone to do something for us if we provide a reason. Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978) performed an experiment illustrating this principle.

In this experiment, Langer asked for a small favor from people standing in line waiting to use a library copy machine. The favor was asked in three ways. The first request (request + reason) asked: “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I’m in a rush?” Results showed that 94% of those who were asked to let her cut in line complied with the request. The second request (request only) asked "Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?" Results from this request revealed that only 60% of those asked to let her cut in line complied with the request. At first it appears that if you give a legitimate reason (because I'm in a rush) for making your request people are more likely to comply, however, the third request implies something else. The final request (request+ obvious) asked: "Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make some copies?" results indicated that 93% of the people who were asked to let her cut in line using this request complied. It would appear that upon hearing "because" there was an automatic assumption that there was good reason for the request, regardless of what was said after "because."

Using the reason frame you move from a frame of *request vs. compliance* to *request + reason vs. compliance.* The lesson here is two fold. First, when you use a prompter (because; so that; in order that etc.), people will tend to go into an automatic mode and give legitimacy to your request even when your reason may not be very compelling. Second, by providing solid and weighty reasons, you can heighten your chances for compliance even more.

Disrupt Then Reframe

The concept behind the disruption frame is that when a disruption occurs in your message, it will cause an interruption in any thoughts of counterargument, reduce resistance to your request, and creates an entrancing effect on the message that follows the disruption. The idea here is to create greater salience in regards to a particular aspect of your message (similar to an attribute frame). Davis and Knowles (1999) performed an experiment to test disruption as a way of reducing resistance to compliance. This experiment also exemplifies what is called the "disrupt then frame."

In this experiment, Davis and Knowles had students sell note cards for a local charity. When it came to the cost of the cards, the sales pitch was modified five different ways. 1) “They’re three dollars” 2) “they’re three dollars; it’s a bargain” 3) “they’re three hundred pennies” 4) “they’re a bargain at three hundred pennies” 5) “they’re three hundred pennies; it’s a bargain.” Using the first four messages, they sold and average of 30%-35% of the households they called on. Using the last message, the sold 70% of the households they called on. What is the difference? Let’s take a look.

The first message is a standard reply. The second message contained the standard reply plus the persuasive hook “it’s a bargain.” The third message inserted a verbal disruption by answering with “three hundred pennies.” The fourth message placed the persuasive hook first and then the verbal disruption. However, the fifth message did something that was unique; it placed the verbal disruption first and then followed it up with the persuasive hook. This would indicate that the impact of the distraction frame is only seen when you first disrupt, and then insert the persuasive hook. There is something about a verbal disruption that causes people to focus more intently on what comes next. The effectiveness of distraction frame therefore, relies on the order of words (including the verbal disruption) in the message more than the words themselves. Having a verbal disruption and a persuasive hook in your frame will be meaningless if they are not presented in the correct order.

It is fairly easy to create contexts where people choose certain options. The perceived context or way the choices are "framed" can make a big difference in the decision outcome, even for situations that are otherwise equivalent. Looking at the seven frames presented here, you can see that it is possible to combine frames in order to meet your specific needs. The only caution is to be sure you don’t use conflicting frames, thus nullifying your persuasive attempt.

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