PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Influence
Science and Practice
Robert B. Cialdini
Fifth Edition

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READER'S REPORT 2

From the Creative Director of a Large, International Advertising Agency

In the late 1990s, I asked Fred DeLucca, the founder and CEO of Subway restaurants, why he insisted in putting the prediction "10,000 stores by 2001" on the napkins in every single Subway. It didn't seem to make sense, as I knew he was a long way from his goal, that consumers didn't really care about his plan, and his franchisees were deeply troubled by the competition associated with such a goal. His answer was, "If I put my goals down in writing and make them known to the world, I'm committed to achieving them." Needless to say, he not only has, he's exceeded them.

Author's note: As of January 1, 2008, Subway had over 28,000 restaurants in 86 countries. Written-down and publicly made commitments can be used not only to influence others in desirable ways but to influence ourselves similarly.

The Public Eye

One reason that written testaments are effective in bringing about genuine personal change is that they can so easily be made public. The prisoner experience in Korea showed the Chinese to be quite aware of an important psychological principle: Public commitments tend to be lasting commitments. The Chinese constantly arranged to have the pro-Communist statements of their captives seen by others. They were posted around camp, read by the author to a prisoner discussion group, or even read on the camp radio broadcast. As far as the Chinese were concerned, the more public the better. Why?

Whenever one takes a stand that is visible to others, there arises a drive to maintain that stand in order to *look* like a consistent person (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971; Schlenker et al., 1994). Remember that earlier in this chapter I described how desirable good personal consistency is as a trait; how someone without it may be judged as fickle, uncertain, pliant, scatterbrained, or unstable; how someone with it is viewed as rational, assured, trustworthy, and sound. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that people try to avoid the look of inconsistency. For appearances' sake, then, the more public a stand, the more reluctant we will be to change it.

An illustration of the way public commitments can lead to consistent further action was provided in a famous experiment performed by two prominent social psychologists, Morton Deutsch and Harold Gerard (1955). The basic procedure was to have college students first estimate in their minds the length of lines they were shown. At this point, one sample of the students had to commit themselves publicly to their initial judgments by writing their estimates down, signing their names to them, and turning them in to the experimenter. A second sample of students also committed themselves to their first estimates, but they did so privately by writing them down on a Magic Writing Pad and then erasing them by lifting the Magic Pad's plastic cover before anyone could see what they had written. A third set of students did not commit themselves to their initial estimates at all; they just kept the estimates in mind privately.

In these ways, Deutsch and Gerard had cleverly arranged for some students to commit themselves publicly, some privately, and some not at all, to their initial decisions. What Deutsch and Gerard wanted to find out was which of the three types of students would be most inclined to stick with their first judgments after receiving information that those judgments were incorrect. Therefore, all the students were given new evidence suggesting that their initial estimates were wrong, and they were then given the chance to change their estimates.

The results were quite clear. The students who had never written down their first choices were the least loyal to those choices. When new evidence was presented that questioned the wisdom of decisions that had never left their heads, these students were the most influenced by the new information to change what they had viewed as the "correct" decision. Compared to these uncommitted students, those who had merely written their decisions for a moment on a Magic Pad were significantly less willing to change their minds when given the chance. Even though they had committed themselves under anonymous circumstances, the act of writing down their first judgments caused them to resist the influence of contradictory new data and to remain consistent with their preliminary choices. However, Deutsch and Gerard found that, by far, it was the students who had publicly recorded their initial positions who most resolutely refused to shift from those positions later. Public commitments had hardened them into the most stubborn of all.

This sort of stubbornness can occur even in situations in which accuracy should be more important than consistency. In one study, when 6- or 12-person experimental juries were deciding a close case, hung juries were significantly more frequent if the jurors had to express their opinions with a visible show of hands rather than by secret ballot. Once jurors had stated their initial views publicly, they were reluctant to allow themselves to change publicly. Should you ever find yourself as the foreperson of a jury under these conditions, you could reduce the risk of a hung jury by choosing a secret rather than public balloting technique (Kerr & MacCoun, 1985).

The Deutsch and Gerard finding that we are truest to our decisions if we have bound ourselves to them publicly can be put to good use. Consider the organizations dedicated to helping people rid themselves of bad habits. Many weight-reduction clinics, for instance, understand that often a person's private decision to lose weight will be too weak to withstand the blandishments of bakery windows, wafting cooking scents, and late-night Sara Lee commercials. So they see to it that the decision is buttressed by the pillars of public commitment. They require their clients to write down an immediate weight-loss goal and *show* that goal to as many friends, relatives, and neighbors as possible. Clinic operators report that frequently this simple technique works where all else has failed.

Of course, there's no need to pay a special clinic in order to engage a visible commitment as any ally. One San Diego woman described to me how she employed a public promise to help herself finally stop smoking:

> *I remember it was after I heard about another scientific study showing that smoking causes cancer. Every time one of those things came out, I used to get determined to quit, but I never could. This time, though, I decided I had to do something. I'm a proud person. It matters to me if other people see me in a bad light. So I thought, "Maybe I can use that pride to help me dump this damn habit." So I made a list of all the people who I really wanted to respect me. Then I went out and got some blank business cards and I wrote on the back of each card, "I promise you that I will never smoke another cigarette."*
>
> *Within a week, I had given or sent a signed card to everybody on my list—my dad, my brother back East, my boss, my best girlfriend, my ex-husband, everybody but one—the guy I was dating then. I was just crazy about him, and I really wanted him to value me as a person. Believe me, I thought twice about giving him a card because I knew that if I couldn't keep my promise to him I'd die. But one day at the office—he worked in the same building as I did—I just walked up to him, handed him the card, and walked away without saying anything.*
>
> *Quitting "cold turkey" was the hardest thing I've ever done. There must have been a thousand times when I thought I had to have a smoke. But whenever that happened, I'd just picture how all the people on my list would think less of me if I couldn't stick to my guns. And that's all it took, I've never taken another puff.*[2]

The Effort Extra

The evidence is clear that the more effort that goes into a commitment, the greater is its ability to influence the attitudes of the person who made it. We can find that evidence quite nearby or as far away as the back regions of the primitive world.

Let's begin close to home with the entertainment section of tomorrow's newspaper, where an important piece of information is missing from ads for popular music concerts—the price. Why should it be that concert promoters are increasingly hiding the cost of admission from fans? Perhaps they're afraid that their ever-higher prices will scare ticket buyers away. But, interested fans will find out the price of a seat as soon as they call or visit a ticket outlet, right? True, but promoters have recognized that potential concertgoers are more likely to buy tickets *after* that

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[2] This public commitment tactic may work especially well for individuals with high levels of pride or public self-consciousness (Feingstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). For example, it worked successfully for Charles DeGaulle, whose remarkable achievements for France were said to be matched only by his ego. When asked to explain why announcing to everyone that he would stop his heavy smoking obliged him to quit forever, he is reported to have replied gravely, "DeGaulle cannot go back on his word" (quoted in D. Cook, 1984).

READER'S REPORT 3

From a Canadian University Professor

I just read a newspaper article on how a restaurant owner used public commitments to solve a big problem of customers who didn't show up for their table reservations. I don't know if he read your book or not first, but he did something that fits perfectly with the commitment/consistency principle you talk about. He told his receptionists to stop saying, "Please call us if you change your plans," and to start asking, "Will you please call us if you change your plans?" and to wait for a response. His no-show rate immediately dropped from 30 percent to 10 percent.

Author's note: What was it about this subtle shift that led to such a dramatic difference? For me, it was the receptionist's request for (and pause for) the caller's promise. By spurring patrons to make a public commitment, this approach increased the chance that they would follow through on it. By the way, the canny proprietor was Gordon Sinclair of Gordon's restaurant in Chicago.

call or visit than before. Even phoning to inquire about ticket prices constitutes an initial commitment to the concert. Combine that with the time and effort expended waiting interminably on hold after speed-redialing through jammed phone lines, and the promoters have fans precisely where they want them once the cost is revealed—at the end of an active, public, effortful commitment to the event.

More far-flung illustrations of the power of effortful commitments exist, as well. There is a tribe in southern Africa, the Thonga, that requires each of its boys to go through an elaborate initiation ceremony before he can be counted a man of the tribe. As with boys in many other primitive tribes, a Thonga boy endures a great deal before he is admitted to adult membership in the group. Anthropologists Whiting, Kluckhohn, and Anthony (1958) have described this three-month ordeal in brief but vivid terms:

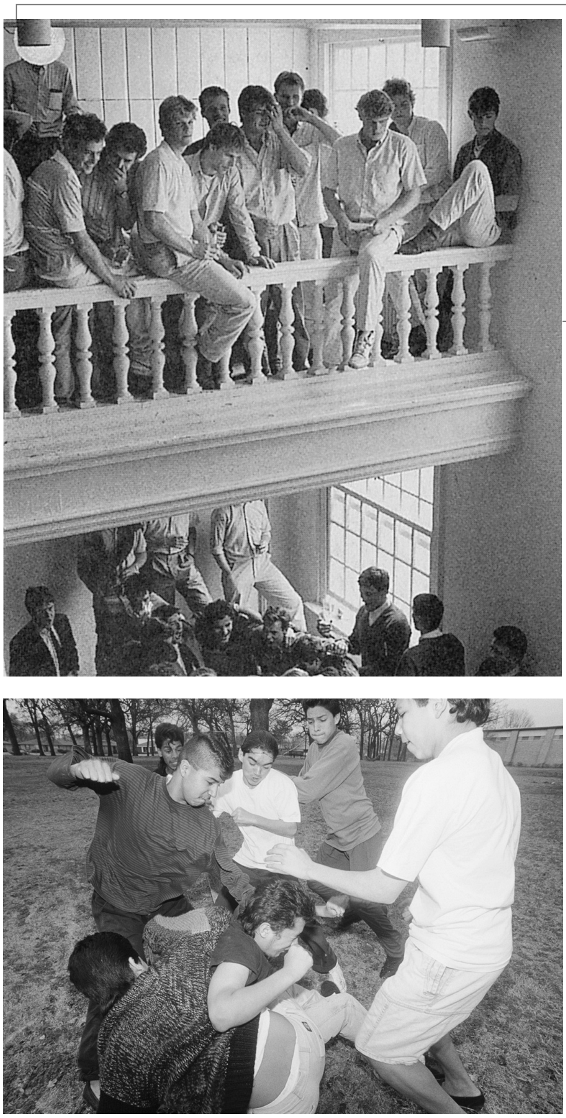
> *When a boy is somewhere between 10 and 16 years of age, he is sent by his parents to "circumcision school," which is held every 4 or 5 years. Here in company with his age-mates he undergoes severe hazing by the adult males of the society. The initiation begins when each boy runs the gauntlet between two rows of men who beat him with clubs. At the end of this experience he is stripped of his clothes and his hair is cut. He is next met by a man covered with lion manes and is seated upon a stone facing this "lion man." Someone then strikes him from behind and when he turns his head to see who has struck him, his foreskin is seized and in two movements cut off by the "lion man." Afterward he is secluded for three months in the "yard of mysteries," where he can be seen only by the initiated.*
>
> *During the course of his initiation, the boy undergoes six major trials: beatings, exposure to cold, thirst, eating of unsavory foods, punishment, and the threat of death. On the slightest pretext, he may be beaten by one of the newly initiated men,*

> *who is assigned to the task by the older men of the tribe. He sleeps without covering and suffers bitterly from the winter cold. He is forbidden to drink a drop of water during the whole three months. Meals are often made nauseating by the half-digested grass from the stomach of an antelope, which is poured over his food. If he is caught breaking any important rule governing the ceremony, he is severely punished. For example, in one of these punishments, sticks are placed between the fingers of the offender, then a strong man closes his hand around that of the novice, practically crushing his fingers. He is frightened into submission by being told that in former times boys who had tried to escape or who had revealed the secrets to women or to the uninitiated were hanged and their bodies burned to ashes. (p. 360)*

On the face of it, these rites seem extraordinary and bizarre. Yet, at the same time, they are remarkably similar in principle and even in detail to the common initiation ceremonies of school fraternities. During the traditional "Hell Week" held yearly on college campuses, fraternity pledges must persevere through a variety of activities designed by the older members to test the limits of physical exertion, psychological strain, and social embarrassment. At week's end, the boys who have persisted through the ordeal are accepted for full group membership. Mostly their tribulations have left them no more than greatly tired and a bit shaky, although sometimes the negative effects are more serious (Denizet-Lewis, 2005).

What is interesting is how closely the particular features of Hell Week tasks match those of tribal initiation rites. Recall that anthropologists identified six major trials to be endured by a Thonga initiate during his stay in the "yard of mysteries." A scan of newspaper reports shows that each trial also has its place in the hazing rituals of Greek-letter societies:

- *Beatings.* Fourteen-year-old Michael Kalogris spent three weeks in a Long Island hospital recovering from internal injuries suffered during a Hell Night initiation ceremony of his high-school fraternity, Omega Gamma Delta. He had been administered the "atomic bomb" by his prospective brothers, who told him to hold his hands over his head and keep them there while they gathered around to slam fists into his stomach and back simultaneously and repeatedly.
- *Exposure to cold.* On a winter night, Frederick Bronner, a California junior college student, was taken 3,000 feet up and 10 miles into the hills of a national forest by his prospective fraternity brothers. Left to find his way home wearing only a thin sweat shirt and slacks, Fat Freddy, as he was called, shivered in a frigid wind until he tumbled down a steep ravine, fracturing bones and hurting his head. Prevented by his injuries from going on, he huddled there against the cold until he died of exposure.
- *Thirst.* Two Ohio State University freshmen found themselves in the "dungeon" of their prospective fraternity house after breaking the rule requiring all pledges to crawl into the dining area prior to Hell Week meals. Once locked in the house storage closet, they were given only salty foods to eat for nearly two days. Nothing was provided for drinking purposes except a pair of plastic cups in which they could catch their own urine.



Hazy Daze

Initiation ceremonies are common to all manner of exclusive groups, although the type of initiation experience can vary widely. A Dutch debating society (left) hazes its initiates by requiring public songs and chants, while a Texas street gang (below) pummels a new member.

- *Eating of unsavory foods.* At Kappa Sigma house on the campus of the University of Southern California, the eyes of eleven pledges bulged when they saw the sickening task before them. Eleven quarter-pound slabs of raw liver lay on a tray. Thick cut and soaked in oil, each was to be swallowed whole, one to a boy. Gagging and choking repeatedly, young Richard Swanson failed three times to down his piece. Determined to succeed, he finally got the oil-