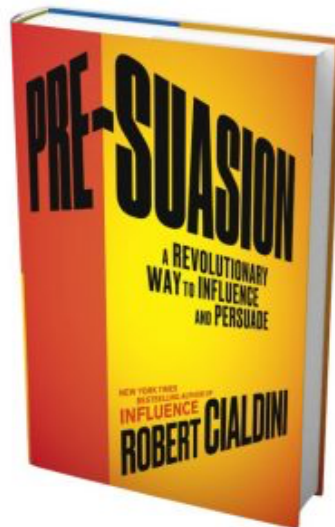




Pre-suasion

A revolutionary way to influence and persuade

By Robert Cialdini



THE BOOK IN A NUTSHELL

The highest achievers spend time crafting what they did and said before making their pitch.

Research has shown that unconscious priming can help 'pre-frame' a person to think in a certain way.

The basic principle of pre-suasion is all about the front-loading of attention. By guiding initial focus it's possible to influence the audience.

The book explores a wide range of ways of 'pre-framing' people.

"The readiness is all" Hamlet Act 5 Scene 2



THE BOOK

Great persuaders spend time upfront creating a positive psychological frame before trying to influence. They recognise that the 'pre-sell' is of equal importance as the sell itself.

The 'pre-sell' can help prime people to think in a certain way that is supportive of your argument.

Cialdini identified six key principles from his first book: Reciprocation, Liking, Social proof, Authority, Scarcity and Consistency. Cialdini proposes that you can magnify the power of these by inferencing them in the set up. For example, if using authority is your key angle of influence, suggesting the idea of authority beforehand (in say a personal story) helps focus attention onto authority.

Priming - A Toronto based consultancy in pitching would say, "As you can tell, I'm not going to be able to charge you a million dollars for this..." helped ensure his \$75,000 fee was acceptable.

Priming - In an experiment, the amount of money a person would be prepared to spend at a restaurant goes up if called Studio 97 as opposed Studio 17.

Focusing attention - the key tenet of pre-suasion is to drive attention in a certain direction that sets a person up to be persuaded. Since we live in a world of hyper-distractions, the more we can influence what the person is focusing on, the greater the chance of persuasion.

"The press might not be successful most of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about" - Bernard Cohen

The book reveals a wide range of techniques to try to gain and keep focus:



Power of questions - Questions direct our attention. Thus, the initial prompt makes the brain travel in that direction. So be aware of the bias in any question.

Questions - Any question forces a focus. In an experiment Canadians were asked either "Are you happy with your social life?" or "Are you unhappy with your social life?". What you ask is what you get. Unhappy focused questioners then seek out experiences in their life that fit with the question. Surprise surprise they find them and so declare themselves to be unhappy. The opposite of course happens to those asked if they are happy with their social life.

Pre-questions - To encourage shoppers to take part in a questionnaire, the sales people pre-suaded with an opening question, "Excuse, do you regard yourself as a helpful person?" Volunteer rates rose from 29% to 77%. Likewise, to get people to try a new product/provide contact details they asked people if they considered themselves to be adventurous (33% -> 77%).

Co-creation – A sub-form of question. The more someone can be involved in the development of a proposal, the more likely they will 'buy' into it, and commit to making it happen.

Asking advice - Likewise, if you ask advice then people are more conducive to being persuaded (than by didactic lecturing). Gaining their input is a key step to influence as we create a 'merging' of ideas.

Saliency - What is salient (i.e. front of mind) becomes important (even if it is not important). Research has shown that it is not necessary the most pertinent issue that influences but that which captures the most attention (cf Kahneman's WYSIATI - What you see is all there is). Thus, it's not always a case of driving behaviour change through shifting beliefs or attitudes but through merely raising saliency.

In the Cyanide/Tylenol infected crisis in 1982, the infected batches were identified to be lots 2880 and 1910. Surprisingly, these numbers then got played on the lottery at unprecedented levels. Not because people have some perverted sense of humour, but because unconsciously these have entered into their focus.

What's focal is what's causal - Thinking is linking. Anything 'in field' can play a role in influence - it's all taken into account.

Leaders are attributed much greater causal responsibility for the success (or failure) of a company - because they are the focal point of an organisation.

In an experiment, people were asked to observe a conversation between a man and women from one of the two people's perspectives. They were then asked who was more influential in the conversation, the respondents always felt it was the person whose face they were looking at.



Blinkered attention - We find it really difficult to focus on more than one thing at a time. Therefore, when you engage the brain with one concept, you reduce its attention onto something else. Like the magician, who makes you focus on one hand (you are then distracted from seeing what he is doing with his other hand).

The American administration, to deflect attention away from 'Weapons of mass destruction', invited journalists to live alongside the combat units. This meant they focused on human interest stories (93% of all stories filed) and tended to forget the bigger issues (2% stories covered WMD).

Disruption - When we change things, we create a disruption from the normal, that shifts attention.

Editors in film put in cuts, music shifts, silence etc. to drive focus.

Milton Erikson, the famous psychotherapist would deliberately lower his voice when he wanted to emphasise something. The patient then has to lean forward, creating greater focus.

Using the different senses – Any of the senses can be used to stimulate attention. For example, auditory. Use of different language can trigger different areas of focus (cf how business often uses the language of war – battle, conquest, target etc.).

If you are trying to encourage people to think rationally, then using words like “What do you think about...?” will help prime that part of the brain versus “How do you feel about...?”.

Likewise, the use of music, or any emotional arousing stimulus (like photos) will start to influence that part of the brain to be more dominant immediately preceding it. Conversely you do not want to use stirring music if your argument is best won logically.

Emotion - The more emotionally charged something is, the greater the attention it creates. We always see a contagion of stories in the press after one event as our attention is drawn towards it.

When we are in a good mood, all things look rosier (and vice versa). Hence why given an unexpected welcomed gift raises tipping levels:

Unexpectedness - Diners were offered a piece of chocolate at the end of a meal. Tips went up by 3%. However, when the waitress invited them to take two chocolates each, tips rose to 14%. However, if the waitress gave one, left the table, then came back and offered them another, such was the unexpectedness tips rose by 21.3%.

Specific emotions have extra high potency such as sex and fear:

Sex - Sex attracts attention and is a well-used ploy in advertising. However, it is only relevant for products about attractiveness as it's about capturing and then focusing attention.



Fear - As a rule, presenting the negative consequences works better than emphasising the positive benefits. However, to maximise its impact, you should offer an easy step to a solution (so as not to leave the audience in a place of stress and hence denial).

When 9/11 tragically took place, people abandoned planes and drove. Sadly, an extra 1,600 Americans died in car accidents as a direct result - six times more than the numbers killed in the only US plane crash in the following year.

Getting past 'System 2' - When tired, the logical brain (what Kahneman called System 2) cannot resist the pressure of the emotional brain (System 1). Likewise, if rushed, overloaded, preoccupied, stressed or indifferent, then critical (logical) thinking goes out the window.

Research found that well rested Soldiers would question orders to fire on hospitals. But when sleep deprived they would meekly obey. Similarly, in Police interrogation, people would confess (often to the wrong things) when sleep deprived. Interviews that have led to false confessions often last more than sixteen hours (vs four).

People had to choose from three cameras. One camera was expert rated best on eight out of twelve criteria, suggesting a clear advantage over the others. When people were given just 2 seconds per criteria, only 17% choose the clear winner. When given 5 seconds, 38% get it right and when unlimited time, it went up to 67%.

Authority/Expertise - Likewise the authority/expertise of someone will cause us to pay more attention to them than to others. The messenger IS the message. *Who* says is what makes *what* they say more powerful. Again our 'laziness' in decision-making means we often blindly believe in the wisdom of experts and authority (and so rarely challenge them). Thus, if you want to influence, you should first 'pre-sell' your audience on your own expertise/authority.

Trustworthiness - If we trust someone we are much more likely to listen to them, believe in what they say and follow their advice (and vice versa if you don't trust them). Trust is a hard-won concept that takes time to acquire. However, the authors suggest one way of quickly generating trust: Reveal a weakness. Rather than trying to suggest everything is perfect in your proposal/offering, it's better to 'come clean' on an aspect that is not perfect. This honesty opens up trust. If there is an issue that you know your audience will pick on, it's worth highlighting it yourself. Ideally when expressing the weakness, you soften its impact with a suggested way of resolving it.

Revealing a weakness - At a restaurant do you trust the waiter who says everything is great on the menu, or the one who says, "Personally, I'd avoid the lamb..."

Trust - A highly successful salesman would say he had accidentally left something in his car, and would it be okay for him to let himself in/out of their house? The insight was that no-one lets a person in/out of their own house unless there is some level of trust.

Countering a flaw - "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman BUT I have the heart of a King, and the King of England too!" - Queen Elizabeth I - Her speech to the troops at Tilbury in 1588 when preparing for the expected invasion from Spain.



Counter-arguments are often more powerful than arguments This is because it not only devalues the argument but also brings into question the trust in the other person

Liking - The more you like a person, the more attention you will give them (and vice versa if you do not like them).

Compliments engender liking. They nourish us emotionally.

"I can live for two months on a good compliment" - Mark Twain.

Chinese students who received a flyer complimenting them ("We are contacting you because you are fashionable and stylish") were more likely to shop at the retailer.

People are more likely to 'accept' your reply if you say "That's a great question!"

Background - The background may appear unimportant but unconsciously it gets noticed and thus can influence. Hence where an ad appears, which shops a product is sold in etc. all become background influences.

Places can also influence. Sometimes a change of venue opens up our thinking. Thus merely 'dressing' a room for a meeting can change the mindset of those who attend

An on-line store selling mattresses received very different sales results depending if they had clouds in the background versus pennies.

Product placements - Including products in familiar shows leads to positive associations. But research has shown that the most obvious ones gets 'discounted' as the viewer recognises the commercial relationship. However, subtle placement influences buyer perception more because they worked their magic unconsciously.

Evaluation - Merely inviting someone to evaluate a brand (without telling them what makes your offering better) will lead to increased persuasion as they will now have directed attention.

In an experiment, managers were asked to evaluate in more detail only one of four different strategic options. Without fail, they recommended the option they had evaluated.

Another way is to deliberately invite comparison with other competitors that helps dramatically bring to focus your point of difference:

In an experiment, a pair of sofas were compared (Dream and Titan). Both were similar except for the cushions (Dream's were softer, Titan's harder). In the tests, people preferred the sturdier cushions of Titan (58% vs 42%). A second group were then shown four sofas. Three of them had the same hard cushions as Titan. So now Dream (the only one with softer cushions) stood out as being different, leading to a shift in persuasion (77% in favour of Dream).



Self-Relevancy - We are automatically drawn to anything to do with us (cf mentioning your name is often enough). Data is allowing us to more closely identify what is specifically relevant to a person, to more personalise the message to them.

Curiosity - Curiosity is a powerful magnet to both capture and hold your attention (watch any 'soap' and you'll see it at work at the end of every episode).

In research, the ad that was recalled was the one that was stopped 5 seconds before it was due to end. This memory recall lasted two weeks later.

One strategy developed by Somerset Maugham (who found it very difficult to write) was to finish his work half-way through a paragraph. Then he found it easier to pick up the next day. Likewise, Cialdini starts his lectures with an enigma (which he would not answer until the end).

Sharpness - The more concrete, vivid and real we can communicate something to someone the greater its ability to capture our attention as well as to influence (as they really 'get it'). Conversely, if you make language too flowery, or too full of technical language, or use a difficult to read typeface/colour, then this diminishes its 'cognitive ease of processing'.

An analysis of 89 randomly selected companies on the NYSE found that in initial trading of stocks, those companies with easier to pronounce names outperformed those with difficult to pronounce names.

Fund raisers were shown one of two pieces of communication about the value of contributing to the cause they would be soliciting for. One group were given it on a simple piece of paper, whilst the other group also had a photo of a person winning a race. The race winners group raised 60% more donations.

Metaphor - We are lazy thinkers and will often drop into metaphors/similes/analogies to help us make sense of things. Thus, suggesting something is like something else can heavily influence our mindset/focus. If you describe crime as a 'spreading virus, infecting the city', it will create more support (as well as drive a specific type of action).

"If you want to change the world, change the metaphor" - Joseph Campbell

Social proof - People are powerful influences - We are unconsciously seduced by other people's behaviour. It's the wisdom of the crowd. The greater the consensus (or risk), the safer/more likely we will follow that decision.

The best way to sell a dish in a restaurant is to describe it as 'Most popular'. This makes dishes between 13-20% ordered more frequently. Likewise, Internet retailers use the power of social proof as well to drive sales ('Other people who bought x also bought y').

Validity - If an energy provider says "You could save £xx" it is less effective than if you say "Others in your road ARE saving" as it is then more real credible.



Contagious behaviour - A Tennessee high school teacher reported a smell of gas. A hundred people went to the hospital that day with symptoms of gas inhalation. However, no gas leak was ever found. Likewise, a lecture on dermatology got all the students scratching.

Stereotypes - Due to our lazy thinking we drop into 'heuristics' - i.e. shortcuts. Stereotypes are one of these. Use of them guide our perception and thinking without any critical intervention.

Behaviour - Getting people to do certain things in advance can help precondition them for the next event.

In an experiment, it was found that people who had played violent video games were more prepared to deliver loud blasts of noise into another person's ear. Likewise, those who had participated in prosocial games were then more prepared to help others afterwards (like cleaning up afterwards).

Reciprocation - If someone has done something for us unconditionally, we feel socially bound to 'repay' them - so will be more open to their influence (Research has shown that children as young as 2 have learned the rules)

Pre-giving - A hotel put a sign in the room that the hotel had made a gift to an environmental charity. This led to a 47% uplift in towels being recycled (versus when the message said the hotel would make a donation).

Reciprocation - Abu Jandal, Osama Bin Laden's chief body guard refused to reveal information. After a while the interrogators noticed he did not eat the cookies. Further investigation revealed he was diabetic. So, they gave him sugar-free biscuits. This act of unexpected generosity partly paved the way for him to start sharing information.

Consistency - We all like to be consistent with our commitments and what we say. Therefore, in the pre-sell stage. If you can get your audience to commit to one small step (in the direction you want), then it dramatically increases your chance of success.

Priming honesty upfront - Insurance companies can reduce policyholder's misreporting by getting people to sign an honesty pledge before they start to fill in the claims form.

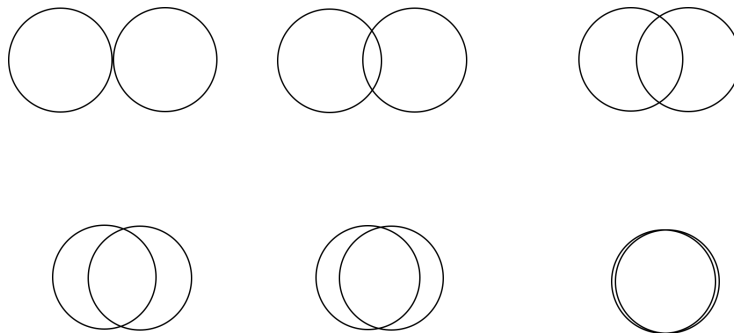
Verbalising commitment - A blood donors service increased participation from 70% to 82.4% by getting people to verbalise their commitment by saying, "So we'll mark you down as coming then?" PAUSE TO CONFIRM.



Unity

Cialdini believed there is now a seventh principle to stack alongside his original six. We listen to and respond better to people who are 'like us' (and less well to people who are 'not like us'). It's about shared identities. Our desire to belong means we seek out and try to 'bond with others like us (as keeps us 'safe' and protected).

Ring the circle that best describes your interconnectedness with your partner



There are a number of ways of driving greater 'unity':

Similarities - Rapport often comes from similarities. People are more prepared to do things for people they share some common feature with - be it nationality, name, birthday, star sign, sports team etc. It creates a closer 'us-ness'. Even using the same words, they use can increase likeness. We even prefer brands that share the same letters in the alphabet as our name.

Kinship - Any way that we can invoke 'we-ness' will help pull people together (and means the opportunity to influence is greater. Thus, words like 'Brothers', 'Sisters', 'Motherland', 'Heritage', and 'Our sovereignty' will all increase the collective 'us-ness'. Likewise, to imply that another presenter is 'not like us' alienates them and reduces their power of influence.

Sameness - In the late 1930's, the Japanese were accepting displaced Jews. In July 1940, 200 Jews queued outside the Japanese Consulate in Lithuania. The Consul General, Chiune Sugihara, signed their transit orders in open defiance of his seniors back in Japan. In the end, he helped save thousands of Jews - something that ultimately cost him his career - because he saw their 'sameness' rather than their difference.

Identification with each other - In 1942, after Japan had allied itself to Germany, there was pressure from the Reichstag to get rid of the Jews. When seniors of the Japanese High command consulted with Jewish leaders they asked, "Why do the Germans hate you so much?" Rabbi Kalisch replied, "Because we are Asians - like you". That one statement cemented their 'us-ness' and Japan protected its Jewish community.



Shared behaviours - In the Soviet controlled Warsaw during the 60's there was a lot of ceremonies, marches, pageants and general flag waving. The people were encouraged to attend and take part. Even though conditions were difficult, there was a shared camaraderie and 'togetherness' - a sense of pride in their nation. Thus songs, rituals, dances etc. all help create a sense of cohesion. Our general desire to belong means we will unconsciously also adopt many of the beliefs and values of that group that we want to belong to. The more you want to belong to that group, the greater the unconscious power to conform (you often find the more extreme zealots are outside on the edge of a group rather than necessarily at the centre - such is their desire to be accepted in).

Behaviour starts to pull people together. Those people who do the same thing are more likely to see themselves as one (versus other who do other things). Thus, the more you can get people to do the same thing then it's more likely they will feel a greater sense of connection. Even very simple acts (like tapping together, singing a song together or walking in the same way) can create temporary togetherness.

Co-operation - In exercises where people have to co-operate (versus exercises where pitted against each other), those working together saw their partner to be more like them.

Arthur and Elaine Aron came up with a questionnaire that helped ensure greater success in building relationships. It involved asking 36 questions, where both have to answer before moving on. The questions start quite shallow (such as "What constitutes a perfect day for you?") before going deeper and deeper (to questions such as "Of all the people in your family, whose death would be the most disturbing?"). This creates a shared exposure and opening up to the other person at a level not normally experienced with many other people. (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/these-36-questions-can-make-you-fall-in-love-with-anyone-a6772366.html>)

The ethics of persuasion

Cialdini admits to having been criticised in the past for providing unscrupulous people with tools to manipulate others.

Certainly, these principles likewise can be misused for the wrong issues. Cialdini counters (weakly) that he raises their awareness so we can protect ourselves against their use. He also rightly stresses It is unrealistic to expect applying pre-suasion is a guaranteed way to influence. The principles discussed here will work primarily at the margins on influence.

In a WikiLeaks, hyper transparent world, we need to do the right thing as we will be found out. Trust is hard won and easily lost (cf VW).



People who work in unethical companies also suffer: Lower performance levels, higher anxiety, greater sick days, higher staff turnover etc., The cost of these quickly mount up (especially if you include cost of litigation, hiring fees, increased wages to attract people etc.).

CRITIQUE

This is essentially another book on Behavioural Economics, focused on the principle of 'priming'.

I found it a bit of a dull book to read (probably as read too many other similar books).

The book is a bit 'flabby' with lots of fill and repetition. It's not a well-structured book (it took me ages to 'edit' it down into a more coherent piece).

As always, we need to take what is said with a degree of skepticism. Just because there is one piece of evidence (an experiment or whatever) that supports the hypothesis, that does not mean it is conclusively proven. There could well be many counter examples/experiments that either refute, or support an alternate hypotheses.

Growth through resilience

We all get knocks in life – but people deal with it differently. Some seem to have the power to brush it off and keep pushing on, whilst others crumble. This workshop provides people with insights and tools to better deal with the pressures in life – to thrive and grow.

