In public relations, persuasion is a vital component of everything we do.

Think about it. Building relationships, creating compelling content, managing crises and reputations, media and blogger outreach, public speaking, sharing and connecting in social media, getting our colleagues, clients and bosses to support our strategies—all use liberal doses of persuasion.

Some consider persuasion an art form. Others refer to it as a science. We all know people who seem born to influence others, for whom persuading is as natural as breathing. Then there are the rest of us who could use a little help in this area.

Enter [Robert Cialdini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cialdini)and his book, [*Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*](http://www.amazon.com/Influence-Psychology-Persuasion-Revised-Edition/dp/006124189X)*,*which*, s*ince its publication in 1984, has become accepted as one of the foundations of marketing strategy.

In this book, Cialdini, Regents’ Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University, identified six psychological principles as integral pieces of the influencing process.

Take a look at how these now familiar “Six Principles of Influences” are being applied in public relations.

1. The Principle of Liking

If you want to influence people, win friends. How? Uncover real similarities and offer praise.

[According to Cialdini,](http://lookstein.org/leadership/case-study/harnessing.pdf) two factors stand out as especially compelling methods of winning friends: finding similarities and offering praise. Similarities draw people together. Praise disarms them.

Building relationships starts with identifying similar interests, experience or objectives. Praise breaks down barriers and shows interest and concern for the other person. We tend to like the people we feel like us and we are all susceptible to a genuine compliment or commendation. Also? Be likable. Be charming, considerate and engaging.

Use the Principle of Liking in media and blogger relations, in building online communities or working to organize event participation. Ask your social media communities open ended questions, and monitor their answers. Highlight the similarities you note and offer genuine praise, where merited.

Caution: be authentic and consistent, however, insincerity can backfire and cause real damage.

2. The Principle of Reciprocity

“Give what you want to receive. Whether it’s a sense of trust, a spirit of cooperation or a pleasant demeanor, leader should model the behavior they want to see from others.” — Cialdini

As human beings we’re wired to reciprocate. We tend not to want to owe anyone. Modeling reciprocity builds good will and trust, essential in the development of strong business relationships—online and offline.

Reciprocity in public relations is demonstrated by word of mouth referrals, favors, coverage, sharing and re-sharing of other people’s content and by building networks and online and offline communities of people who know they can count on each other.

[***Want to change minds? Don’t go it alone. Get the free “How to Succeed With Influencer Relations” white paper!***](http://go.vocus.com/influencer-marketing?cid=70180000001DrXy&source=Blog&utm_source=blog&utm_medium=blog&utm_campaign=influencermarketing)

3. The Principle of Social Proof

“Use peer power whenever it’s available. Social creatures that they are, human beings rely heavily on the people around them for cues on how to think, feel and act.” — Cialdini

The Principle of Social Proof is a constant in PR as people try to assess the value and importance (to them) of your experience, accomplishments, publications and professional connections. With the growth of social media, people also look for social proof in markers such as numbers of friends and followers, numbers of retweets, mentions in online search engines and content shared by people they know and respect.

In PR today, we demonstrate social proof by developing and sharing content that has genuine value to our audiences, and by acknowledging those who communicate with us directly and share our content with their networks. Content can include all electronic forms of communication as well as traditional vehicles such as books, articles, white papers, public speaking, etc.

4. The Principle of Consistency

Cialdini recommends making commitments active, public and voluntary. “There’s strong empirical evidence to show that a choice made actively—one that’s spoken out loud or written down or otherwise made explicit—is considerably more likely to direct someone’s future conduct than the same choice left unspoken,” he states.

We put the Principle of Consistency to use in public relations in several ways. As integral parts of our communications strategies we remind readers to sign in to receive newsletters or to be able to comment on blog posts; we ask them to donate or make public commitments of support to our cause or client or organization. For ourselves, we demonstrate the Principle of Consistency by showing up regularly, communicating clearly and using a wide range of tools to share our message.

5. The Principle of Authority

“Expose your expertise; don’t assume it’s self-evident. Surprisingly often, people mistakenly assume that others recognize and appreciate their experience.” — Cialdini

Everyone looks to experts for direction at times, especially in areas where we feel we know less than we should. In today’s marketplace, people constantly search for expert advice online. PR professionals demonstrate expertise in order to win buy-in for strategies and campaigns and to be taken seriously as part of high-level planning.

We use both offline and online platforms to showcase and highlight expertise, and author articles, books and white papers that answer important questions, or demonstrate in-depth knowledge. We use social media, where our expertise commands high value and attention and can be used to persuade others to purchase products, share content and make referrals to their own personal networks.

6. The Principle of Scarcity

Cialdini suggests highlighting unique benefits and exclusive information. “Study after study shows that items and opportunities become more valuable as they become less available,” he says.

We use the Principle of Scarcity to generate a sense of urgency to take action. We create special offers for products or services or admission to events with availability limited by time or quantity. However, scarcity can also be experienced as exclusivity, and in PR, people are often strongly motivated to be included in groups, committees and online communities they perceive to be exclusive.

Scarcity and exclusivity are effective in persuading people to purchase, download and participate—for fear of losing out.

Caution: do not make deceptive offers. If the deception is discovered it can backfire wildly—especially in social media networks, where negative situations can go viral in minutes.

Putting the Principles to Work

While the Six Principles of Influence can be reviewed and practiced separately, using them in combination increases their effectiveness. As a PR professional these six principles will help you build your reputation as a leader and an expert in your industry, something all of us aspire to.

However, Cialdini cautions us to remember that ethics apply in their use as in all other areas of life. “Dishonest or high-pressure tactics work only in the short run—if at all,” says Cialdini. As a public relations professional, this message is entirely congruent with our training and our commitment to embrace ethical behavior in our daily work.

So, if you feel like your persuasive abilities could use a little tune-up, go back and re-read each of the Six Principles of Influence and start applying them to the specifics of your job and your life. You will be pleasantly surprised at the rewards you’ll receive.

For further information, take the time to read Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*,*which is also offered in Kindle format if you simply have to have it the same day.