

INFLUENCE — Discussion Worksheet 1

By Robert B. Cialdini | *Overview & Principles of Reciprocity, Commitment, and Social Proof*

Book Overview

In *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Dr. Robert Cialdini identifies six universal principles that explain why people say "yes." Drawing on years of research and undercover fieldwork inside sales, marketing, and fundraising organizations, Cialdini reveals the mental shortcuts that guide human behavior — and shows how they can be used both ethically and exploitatively.

Key Takeaways — Principles 1–3

Reciprocity

We feel obligated to return favors. Marketers give free samples; negotiators make concessions first. The urge to repay is so powerful it can override our own preferences.

Commitment & Consistency

Once we commit to a position — especially in writing or publicly — we feel psychological pressure to behave consistently with that commitment, even if our initial choice was trivial.

Social Proof

We look to others to determine correct behavior, especially in uncertain situations. The more people doing something, the more valid it seems. Reviews, testimonials, and crowd behavior all leverage this principle.

Discussion Questions

Q1

Think of a time you felt compelled to return a favor — even when you didn't want to. How did the principle of Reciprocity play a role? Were you aware of it in the moment?

Q2

Cialdini describes how small initial commitments can escalate into large ones (the 'foot-in-the-door' technique). Can you identify an example from your personal or professional life?

Q3

Social Proof is everywhere — star ratings, 'best seller' labels, audience laughter in sitcoms. What recent example of Social Proof influenced a decision you made? Was it a good influence?

Q4

Are these three principles inherently manipulative, or can they be used ethically? How should leaders and marketers think about the line between persuasion and manipulation?

Q5

Which of the three principles — Reciprocity, Commitment, or Social Proof — do you think is the most powerful in today's digital world, and why?