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'Are there any nice little books I could buy as a present that wouldn't insult the recipient's intelligence? Yes. Or rather *Yes!*'  
*Guardian*

'All the tips for getting a "yes" are ... inventive and intriguing'  
*Independent*

'The book is a treasure trove of information ... *Yes!* is a fascinating read and offers countless insights into the way consumers behave. The perfect present for any business man or woman' *Business Life*

'Rather a good read ... earnest and honest' *Evening Standard*

'You should read this book. You should read it because you'll enjoy it; because it's perfectly pitched for smart businesspeople; because it's easy to dip into while waiting for a colleague or a plane; and because if you don't someone else is going to get one over you ... Charmingly practical ... the punchy, eager prose keeps things ticking along' Octavius Black, co-author of *The Mind Gym*

'Entertaining, eye-opening – it's all good stuff and very well presented' *Spiked.com*

'Serves up plenty of weird and wonderful case histories'  
*Sunday Express*

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# YES!

60 secrets from the science  
of persuasion

10th Anniversary Edition

Noah J. Goldstein PhD, Steve J. Martin  
and Robert B. Cialdini PhD

**P**

PROFILE BOOKS

*For Jenessa. You're not my better half. You're my best nine-tenths. – NJG*

*For lovely Linds. – SJM*

*For my grandchildren Hailey, Dawson and Leia. – RBC*

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# Contents

Yes! A decade on... 1

Introduction 8

## **60** secrets from the science of persuasion

- 1 How can you increase your persuasiveness by inconveniencing your audience? 17
- 2 What shifts the bandwagon effect into another gear? 22
- 3 What common mistake causes messages to self-destruct? 27
- 4 When persuasion might backfire, how do you avoid the 'magnetic middle'? 32
- 5 When does offering people more make them want less? 35
- 6 How can offering an option to 'do nothing' increase your influence? 39
- 7 When does a bonus become an onus? 42
- 8 How can a new superior product mean more sales of an inferior one? 45
- 9 How can you give your persuasion attempts the X factor? 48
- 10 When does third beat second? 52
- 11 Does fear persuade or does it paralyse? 55
- 12 What can chess teach us about making persuasive moves? 58
- 13 Which office item can make your influence stick? 63
- 14 Why should restaurants ditch their baskets of mints? 66
- 15 How can a favour add flavour to your next business deal? 69
- 16 What's the pull of having no strings attached? 71
- 17 How can you raise the persuasion bar through your CSR? 74
- 18 Do favours behave like bread or like wine? 78
- 19 How can a foot in the door lead to great strides? 81
- 20 How can you become a Jedi master of social influence? 85
- 21 How can a simple question drastically increase support for you and your ideas? 88
- 22 What is the active ingredient in lasting commitments? 91

- 23 What is the key to making multiple goals a reality? 95
- 24 How can you fight consistency with consistency? 98
- 25 What persuasion tip can you borrow from Benjamin Franklin? 101
- 26 Why might it pay to chat on tomorrow's commute? 104
- 27 When can asking for a little go a long way? 108
- 28 Start low or start high? Which will make people buy? 111
- 29 How can you show off without being labelled a show-off? 114
- 30 What's the hidden danger of being the brightest person in the room? 118
- 31 What can be learnt from captainitis? 122
- 32 How can the nature of group meetings lead to unnatural disasters? 125
- 33 Who is the better persuader? Devil's advocate or true dissenter? 128
- 34 When can the right way be the wrong way? 131
- 35 What's the best way to turn a weakness into a strength? 134
- 36 Which faults unlock people's vaults? 137
- 37 When is it right to admit that you were wrong? 140
- 38 When should you be pleased that the server is down? 144
- 39 How can similarities make a difference? 147
- 40 What tip should we take from those who get them? 150
- 41 When can snobbery lead to daylight robbery? 154
- 42 What kind of smile can make the world smile back? 157
- 43 What can be learnt from the hoarding of tea towels? 160
- 44 What can you gain from loss? 165
- 45 Which single word will strengthen your persuasion attempts? 171
- 46 When might asking for all the reasons be a mistake? 175
- 47 Ask or tell? What can make your message sell? 178
- 48 How can the simplicity of a name make it appear more valuable? 182
- 49 How can rhyme make your influence climb? 186
- 50 What can batting practice tell us about persuasion? 190
- 51 How can you gain a head start in the quest for loyalty? 193
- 52 What can a box of crayons teach us about persuasion? 196
- 53 How can you stop your audience getting bored after your initial impact has thawed? 199
- 54 How can you package your message to ensure that it keeps going, and going, and going? 202

- 
- 55** What object can persuade people to reflect on their values? 207
- 56** Does being sad make your negotiations bad? 211
- 57** How can emotion put persuasion in motion? 214
- 58** What can make people believe everything they read? 217
- 59** Are tri-meth labs boosting your influence? 220
- 60** How can you make your ads linger longer? 222
- Influence in the twenty-first century 226
- Ethical influence 249
- Influence in action 253
- INFLUENCE AT WORK 261
- Research notes 262
- Acknowledgements 285
- Index 287

# YES!

A decade on...

**Ten years have passed** since *Yes!* was first published and in that relatively short time a lot has happened.

The words 'Yes we can' persuaded millions of Americans that 'Yes they could', creating a movement that propelled a former community organiser and law school lecturer to the highest office in the land as America's first black president.\*

A revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations swept across the Middle East, as many citizens, dissatisfied and frustrated by the conduct and rule of their governments, pressed for change.

Europe, too, has witnessed its fair share of events, from the redrawing of borders in the east to devastating terror attacks and mass immigration in the west. And, after a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, the Leave Campaign persuaded UK citizens, to the surprise of many, that it was time to go.

For the global economy much of this past decade has been spent in a prolonged and painful period of recession, with financial markets lurching from turbulence to, sometimes,

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\* As we write America is preparing for another transition as a very different kind of President enters office.



freefall. Even those emerging nations who initially bucked the trend are now tightening their belts.

Meanwhile, the global population has increased by nearly a billion. And not only is it increasing in size; it is increasing in connectivity too. The last decade has seen the way we access, consume, process and act on information change beyond all recognition. We Tweet. We SnapChat. We update our status on Facebook. We constantly broadcast to our friends (and an even greater number of strangers) what we are up to in our time-scarce lives. In fact time is *so* precious that we increasingly communicate on the move and in the instant, providing an endless stream of posts via a variety of apps for the benefit of interested others (but mostly advertisers).

Against this backdrop, the study of persuasion science (and the behavioural sciences more generally) has exploded. Researchers all over the world are contributing new insights and understanding into what influences human behaviour, decision-making and conduct. Importantly, many of these scientific advances and insights aren't just theoretical in nature. They have practical and meaningful implications as well. As a result, governments and businesses alike have willingly embraced them. From selling products to persuading people to pay their taxes, from encouraging pro-social activities to generating millions in commercial returns, the applications of persuasion science (and the related fields of social psychology, behavioural economics and neuromarketing) have moved from being interesting fringe activities to being firmly part of the mainstream.

Given the expansion of 'new' advances and insights, coupled with a growing number of books on the subject, readers may be asking themselves why read a book, even in a revised and expanded form, that was first published a decade ago?

Three reasons come to mind.

## A lot has happened, but one thing hasn't changed

Despite the impressive advances that have been documented by behavioural scientists over the past ten years, the fundamental principles of successful influence and persuasion remain the same. While there can be no doubting the significant number of political, societal and technical changes we have witnessed in the last decade, the cognitive hardware we use to process and react to them (our brains, basically) have hardly changed at all. In many ways we share the same processing apparatus as our cousins from previous generations. Sure, we all now own a smartphone (some of us more than one), communicate via multiple platforms and have access to information in an instant, but the fact remains that we are still largely influenced and persuaded in the same ways as citizens from hundreds of years ago.

On Sunday 8 February 1761 London experienced the first of two earthquakes, the second occurring exactly four weeks later. By any modern-day measure the quakes were moderate ones. Both lasted for only a few moments and the damage sustained was largely superficial. Save for a few minor tremors experienced by a small number of people, the earthquakes had little impact on the majority of Londoners.

But for one individual these earthquakes had a major impact.

William Bell was a corporal in the Life Guards Household Cavalry. Bell was convinced that these minor earthquakes were signs of a forthcoming and much larger earthquake that would destroy the city – exactly one month later – and he took it upon himself to be the messenger of this imminent doom. Like a man possessed, he ran from street to street forcefully broadcasting his predictions to anyone who would listen. Despite his efforts, few were swayed. A small number of families began preparations to flee. Most, however, stayed put.

But then something strange happened. As the countdown to the predicted quake neared, a momentum began to develop. Minorities turned into majorities. Those who had originally been on the periphery were now central to the swelling groups of Londoners taking steps to leave the doomed city. Reluctant bystanders, initially paralysed by uncertainty, quickly followed. And then, too, even the sceptics.

The Scottish journalist Charles Mackay would later record their actions in his work *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*:

*As the awful day approached, the excitement became intense, and great numbers of credulous people resorted to all the villages within a circuit of twenty miles, awaiting the doom of London. Islington, Highgate, Hampstead, Harrow, and Blackheath, were crowded with panic-stricken fugitives, who paid exorbitant prices for accommodation to the housekeepers of these secure retreats. [...] As happened during a similar panic in the time of Henry VIII, the fear became contagious, and hundreds who had laughed at the prediction a week before, packed up their goods, when they saw others doing so, and hastened away. The river was thought to be a place of great security, and all the merchant vessels in the port were filled with people, who passed the night between the 4th and 5th on board, expecting every instant to see St Paul's totter, and the towers of Westminster Abbey rock in the wind and fall amid a cloud of dust.*

The day of Bell's predicted third quake, Sunday 5 April 1761, passed without incident and the following day Londoners returned to the city to resume their lives and direct scorn and anger at the soldier who, a short time afterwards, was incarcerated in a London lunatic asylum.

While a case could be made that Bell's actions had some initial influence, the primary reason why so many people were

persuaded to gather up their families and belongings and leave the city had little to do with his insistent messaging. It wasn't until Londoners saw some of their neighbours – people just like them – abandoning their homes that they decided to follow. In an uncertain environment, with few cues indicating the right way to act, the action of someone comparable was all that was needed to persuade others to do the same.

It is easy for a twenty-first-century citizen to deride the eighteenth-century Londoners' failure to recognise that their actions were primarily a result of an unthinking, herd-like instinct, but we would be wise to curb our derision. Despite the plethora of information instantly available at the click of a button or swipe of a screen, today's modern citizens are just as likely to succumb to such rudimentary influences. It may not cause them to flee their homes, but it can persuade them to flee to a restaurant or cinema. They act not on the recommendation of a food or film critic but on the opinion of a neighbour or peer who is like them. Granted these examples pale in comparison to the London earthquakes of two hundred and fifty years ago. But that's not to say they don't happen anymore. If anything they occur more regularly. Since the original publication of *Yes!* in 2007 there have been no fewer than eleven predictions of catastrophic events that have come to prominence by herd-like behaviours, mostly via the internet. These include the Mayan Apocalypse of 2012 and the End of Time Prophecy of 2016. This last example is especially relevant given that it predicted the end of the world would occur not by an earthquake but by a mega quake, no less.

Few doubt the significant advantages that new technologies and instantly accessible information have brought us. At the same time it we would be wise to remember that the cognitive hardware we use to process this data has remained largely the

same. As hard as it might be to admit, we are just as likely to be influenced by the fundamental, but often unrecognised, principles of persuasion as our cousins from 250 years ago.

## For reasons of popularity

There is a second reason why readers might be motivated to read an expanded and revised version of this popular book. And that's because it *is* popular. At the time of writing this new preface, *Yes!* has sold over  $\frac{3}{4}$  million copies, been translated into twenty-seven languages and featured in hundreds of newspaper articles, blogs, media features and broadcasts. Businesses and public sector organisations of all kinds have adopted its insights. An online animation has been viewed over 8 million times (and you can see it too by typing 'science of persuasion' into any search engine). Rather like those eighteenth-century Londoners uncertain how to act, people reading this with an eye to deciding whether to purchase the book may be interested to know that many others like them already have.

## New insights, updated content

The third reason to welcome readers both old and new is that this revised and expanded 10th Anniversary Edition contains updates to some of the original fifty chapters as well as ten additional new chapters, one for each year since the original publication.

## The new old

As different as this new book is, we have endeavoured not to tinker too much with what attracted so many readers to the

original edition. Each of the new chapters, in addition to the original chapters that we have updated, is still presented in a way that can be quickly and easily accessed. That's not to say the chapters lack a basis in fact and evidence. Our commitment to presenting only those insights that have been scientifically validated in published research remains unshakeable. Importantly, though, we move quickly from the *science* of successful persuasion to its *practice*.

In doing so we hope that both our returning readers and our new ones will benefit from being more persuasive in their professional and personal lives too.

Noah J. Goldstein

Steve J. Martin

Robert B. Cialdini

# Introduction

*If all the world's a stage, then small changes in your lines can have dramatic effects.*

**There's an old joke** that the comedian Henny Youngman would tell about his previous night's accommodation: 'What a hotel! The towels were so big and fluffy that I could hardly close my suitcase.'

Over the last few years, however, the moral dilemma facing hotel guests has changed. These days, the question of whether to remove the towels from their room has been replaced by the question of whether or not to reuse the towels during the course of their stay. With the increasing adoption by hotels of environmental programmes, more and more travellers are being asked to reuse their towels, to help conserve resources, save energy and reduce the amount of detergent-related pollutants released into the environment. In most cases, this request comes in the form of a card placed in guests' bathrooms.

These cards can provide some remarkable insights into the often-secret science of persuasion. With a nearly limitless array of angles to play and motivational strings to pull, what words should be put on the card to make the request most persuasive to the hotel guests?

Before providing an answer, which we'll do in the first two chapters, let's first ask how the designers of the messages on these little cards typically encourage guests to participate in these programmes. A survey of the messages conveyed by dozens of request cards from a wide variety of hotels around the globe reveals that these cards most commonly attempt to encourage towel recycling efforts by focusing guests almost exclusively on the importance of environmental protection. Guests are almost invariably informed that reusing their towels will conserve natural resources and help spare the environment from further depletion and disruption. This information is often accompanied by eye-catching environment-related pictures, ranging from rainbows to raindrops to rainforests...to reindeer, even.

This persuasion strategy generally seems to be effective. For example, one of the largest manufacturers of these signs reports that most hotel guests who have the chance to take part in these programmes do reuse their towels at least once during their stay. The level of participation produced by these signs can be seen as impressive.

Social psychologists, however, are often on the lookout for ways to apply their scientific knowledge to make policies and practices even more effective. Much like a roadside billboard that reads 'Place your ad here', these little towel recycling cards speak to us, practically begging us, 'Test your ideas here.' So we did. And, as we'll explain, we showed that by making a small change to the way the request is made, hotel chains can do much, much better.

Of course, how precisely one could go about enhancing the effectiveness of these types of environmental campaigns is but a single



issue. Much more broadly, we're going to claim that everyone's ability to persuade others can be enhanced by learning persuasion strategies that have been scientifically proved to be successful. As this book will reveal, small, easy changes to our messages can make them vastly more persuasive. We will report on dozens of studies, some conducted by us, some by other scientists, that demonstrate this point in many different settings. Along the way, we will discuss the principles behind these findings. Our central purpose is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the psychological processes underlying how we can influence others to move their attitudes or behaviour in a direction that results in positive outcomes for both parties. As well as presenting a variety of effective and ethical persuasion strategies, we discuss the types of things to watch out for to help you resist both subtle and overt influences on your decision-making.

Importantly, rather than relying on pop psychology or the all-too-common 'personal experience', we will discuss the psychology underlying successful social influence strategies in the context of the scientifically rigorous evidence that supports them. We'll do this by pointing towards a number of mystifying occurrences that can be explained by a greater understanding of the psychology of social influence. For example, why, immediately after the news of the passing of one of the most popular popes in modern history, would hordes of people besiege shops some thousand miles away to buy souvenirs that had nothing to do with the pope, the Vatican or the Catholic Church? We'll also provide insights into the single office supply that can make your attempts to persuade others significantly more effective, what Luke Skywalker can teach us about leadership, the mistake communicators often make which causes their message to backfire, how to turn your weaknesses into persuasive strengths and why sometimes seeing yourself – and being seen by others – as

an expert can be so dangerous.

## Persuasion as science, not art

Persuasion has been studied scientifically for over half a century now. Yet the research on persuasion is something of a secret science, often lying dormant in the pages of academic journals. Considering the large body of research that's been done on the subject, it might be useful to take a moment to think about why this research is so often overlooked. It's no surprise that people who are faced with choices about how to influence others will often base their decisions on thinking that's grounded in fields such as economics, political science and public policy. What's puzzling, however, is how frequently decision-makers fail to consider established theories and practices in psychology.

One explanation is that, in contrast to how they regard the fields of economics, political science and public policy, which require learning from outsiders to achieve even a minimal level of competence, people believe they already possess an intuitive understanding of psychological principles simply by virtue of living life and interacting with others. As a consequence, they're less likely to learn and to consult the psychological research when making decisions. This overconfidence leads people to miss golden opportunities to influence people – or worse still, to misuse psychological principles to the detriment of themselves and others.

Besides being overly reliant on their personal experiences, people also rely too much on introspection. For example, why would the marketing practitioners commissioned to design the towel reuse signs focus almost exclusively on the impact of these programmes on the environment? They probably did what any of us would do – they asked themselves, 'What would

motivate *me* to participate in one of these programmes by recycling my towels?’ By examining their own motives, they would realise that a sign that tapped into their values and identity as an environmentally concerned individual would be particularly motivating. But in doing so, they would also fail to realise how they could increase participation just by changing a few words in their request.

Persuasion is a science. It has often been referred to as an art, but this is an error. Although talented artists can certainly be taught skills to harness their natural abilities, the truly remarkable artist depends upon talent and creativity that no instructor can instil in another person. Fortunately, this isn’t the case with persuasion. Even people who consider themselves persuasion lightweights – people who feel they couldn’t coax a child to play with toys – can learn to become persuasion heavyweights by understanding the psychology of persuasion and by using the strategies that have been scientifically proved to be effective.

Whether you’re a manager, a lawyer, a healthcare worker, a policy-maker, a food server, a salesperson, a teacher or something entirely different, this book is designed to help you become a master persuader. We’ll describe certain techniques that are based on what one of us (Robert Cialdini) explored in the book *Influence: Science and Practice* as the six universal principles of social influence: reciprocation (we feel obligated to return favours performed for us), authority (we look to experts to show us the way), commitment/consistency (we want to act consistently with our commitments and values), scarcity (the less available the resource, the more we want it), liking (the more we like people, the more we want to say yes to them) and social proof (we look to what others do to guide our behaviour).

We'll discuss what these principles mean and how they operate in some detail, but we won't limit ourselves to them. Although the six principles underpin the majority of successful social influence strategies, there are many persuasion techniques that are based on other psychological factors, which we'll uncover.

We'll also highlight the way these strategies operate in a number of different contexts, focusing not only on the workplace but also on your personal interactions – for example, as a parent, a neighbour or a friend. The advice we'll provide will be practical, action-oriented, ethical and easy to follow, and will require very little additional effort or cost to pay big dividends.

With apologies to Henny Youngman, we fully expect that by the time you finish this book your persuasion toolbox will be packed with so many scientifically proved social influence strategies that you'll hardly be able to close it.