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DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS

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Like many individuals, I enjoy reading books on a variety of subjects, but especially ones regarding sales concepts or business ideas. However, this one (originally published in 1984) got by me, and if it also got by you, I strongly urge you to read the book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, written by Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D. Dr. Cialdini received Graduate and Postgraduate training in Social Psychology at the University of North Carolina and Columbia University. He is currently Regents' Professor, Department of Psychology at Arizona State University.

Here is how I stumbled onto this gem: A few years ago, I was reading the CNBC website, and I came across a video/article about Charlie Munger, Warren Buffet's partner at Berkshire Hathaway. This video (from 1995) was his speech, "The Psychology of Human Misjudgment" delivered to Harvard Business School. When I watched the video, Charlie mentioned in his remarks the work of Robert Cialdini and his book, *Influence*. I immediately ordered the book and read it. In his book, Cialdini teaches the psychology behind marketing and sales process. He explains how marketers and salespeople use key influencers to sell their products.

Even though I benefited greatly from reading his book and reviewing all the concepts, I would like to consider one point that I found especially interesting. It has a significant impact on one of the industries that hire my consulting services, and that idea is the concept of "consistent commitment." In his book, Cialdini explains the concept of consistent commitment; he states, "Once we have taken a stand, we will encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment." In other words, once a person decides on a specific option, it is tough to convince the individual to change course, because they are committed to their decision-making. The person is consistent not just with the choice, but also the commitment to the decision that lead the individual to reach that conclusion. The reason why it is necessary to understand consistent commitment is that we can either work along with it to persuade a prospect to buy our product or service or in some cases, we must convince a prospect to break their consistent commitment. In some cases, if we do not effectively persuade the individual to end a long-standing or entrenched commitment, they won't buy from us.

As I thought about this idea, I realized that, as a consumer, I had a consistent commitment that dealt with my cell phone purchases over the years. Way before there even was such a thing as a cell phone, from the 1960s and up through much of the 1980s, most homes used rotary dial phones and then, what do you know – and there it was, a new push-button, touch-tone phone on the scene. Anyone who has ever used a rotary dial phone understands the advantages of a push-button telephone! Now, back to the cell phone. In the late 1980's, I purchased my

first car phone which was installed by the cellular phone company, and it had the push-buttons where I could easily dial a number. As time went on, mobile phone technology improved. Each new phone was smaller, had more functionality and became much improved from the car phone that I first bought. Eventually, I ended up purchasing the BlackBerry. I loved my phone, but soon many of my friends and business associates purchased the iPhone. They would show it to me and remark on how incredible looking it was and then proceed to demonstrate its functionality. But I would say, "Where are the buttons? How can you dial a phone number? I cannot use a phone without...buttons." I never thought I would be able to use those little electronic numbers or letters that appeared on the screen. Even my wife bought the iPhone and was unable to convince me to change my mind, yes, I had a consistent commitment to the button. Eventually, I broke down and bought the iPhone; I like it. There is only has one problem – I wish it had buttons.

Now, as an individual in the sales profession, I am involved on the other side of consistent commitment. As I mentioned, I do a great deal of work as a consultant specifically in the senior housing industry. Therefore, I would like to explain how the issue of consistent commitment affects this industry. In senior housing, the effect of consistent commitment looms large. Interestingly, most people who sell this service are not even consciously aware of the fact that they are fighting this dominant force. I would have to include myself in that group before reading Cialdini's book. Here is why consistent commitment is such a critical issue in senior housing sales: Most aged seniors who own a home have a consistent commitment to living in their house for the rest of their life. I am sure you would agree that is a typical situation. It may even be the case with you. You may also be saying, "That's right. I am not leaving my house ever." But what happens when a person starts to advance in years, and their spouse has unfortunately passed away, and now the elderly senior is home alone. Perhaps the house has three bedrooms upstairs, or the laundry is carried downstairs to the basement. The elderly senior still thinks, "I am staying in my home until I am gone!" Again, the decision to stay in the home for the remainder of their life is their consistent commitment. A person in such a situation probably would be much better off at this late stage in life living in a community with other seniors and sharing in much-needed socialization. So why won't they leave their home? It is because of their consistent commitment. If you are the senior housing salesperson, you have the task of convincing the individual to break this firm commitment.

Consider another option for the senior living in their own home – the home health industry. These companies are selling a service that is in harmony with the individual's consistent commitment. Their business model is to convince elderly seniors that

they should stay home by themselves. Even the names of some of these organization include a description that aligns with the goal to remain in their home, like "Right at Home" or "Home Instead" instead of what? Instead of the senior leaving their house and moving into a community. Seniors even involve their children in their long-term commitment. For instance, when the parents are both still alive they may call the kids over one night and Dad may tell them something like this, "Listen up kids, promise me that when I am gone, you will not move your mother into the old folks' home. I want you to keep mom here in our house for the rest of her life."

Senior housing sales can be tricky, and conversion percentages to the number of sales presentations are low since the salesperson must break one of the strongest consistent commitments of a senior – that of staying in one's home for the rest of their life. It is possible to break this deep-rooted choice, but it requires significant reasoning to persuade someone to change course.

No matter what you are selling, it is vital for you to take some time and investigate this issue as it pertains to your industry. Consider if consistent commitment could be affecting your ability to close business. Are you being called upon to break a prospect's consistent commitment? On the other hand, can you sell in harmony with the prospect's current commitments?

Regardless of the business you are in and the product you sell, I recommend that anyone who has not already read the book, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, by Robert B. Cialdini, Ph.D., get the book and read it. As I mentioned, you will discover many other concepts in addition to consistent commitment. Yes, you will begin to understand the psychology behind sales process and be able to make application of Cialdini's research within your current sales process and be much more successful.



"Why do we always have to go south?!"