Shane: Before we dive in to the seven factors that make us more persuasive, can you explain the difference between influence and manipulation?

Robert: Yeah, and I think it has to do with those seven factors. Those are the things that lend themselves to ascent because they normally counsel people correctly to move in a particular direction. So for example, one of them is authority. If the experts are saying that something is a good idea, then we’re probably well advised to follow the authority influence. If a lot of people like us are moving in that direction, there’s a trend for it, that probably also lets us know that that’s a shortcut to making a good decision.

So there are these seven such principles and for me, influence involves pointing to them where they naturally exist, that is informing people into ascent by simply raising the profile of that principle in one way or another in your communication. Manipulation involves the fabrication or manufacture of those principles, the counterfeiting of them in a situation where somebody lies with statistics in order to get you to believe that a lot of people are doing this or believing this thing that you want them to, or presenting someone as an authority on the topic who’s not truly an authority, is a celebrity or something like that.

That’s not an authority, that’s something else. And so it’s when you recognize that those particular levers of influence are effective and coop them to your behalf rather than simply uncovering them for the audience member, which I think is not just ethical, I think it’s commendable to provide that kind of information to people, that kind of education to people.

Shane: That’s a great opening to the conversation. Let’s dive into the principles and start with reciprocation.

Robert: The first principle I talk about is very an early one in the socialization process. In all human societies, we are trained to live by a particular rule, the rule of reciprocation that says we are obligated to give back to others who have first given to us.
That’s the way that the society best functions and allows people the freedom to give first with the knowledge that they’re not giving something away.

I mean, for the first time in evolutionary history, all the species besides us never had the concept of future obligation to return what has been provided to them. But when we have that rule in place, it allows us the freedom to give resources, attention, care, and so on to others with the recognition we’re not losing it, that person is obligated to give back to us when we need something. It’s a fair exchange. It’s a great system. So we give first.

And I love a new study that was done, not even published yet, was done in McDonald’s actually in the countries of Colombia and Brazil, where researchers in fact, my colleague Steve Martin who runs our office in UK and was commissioned to do this study in South America, did a study where for a week every family that came into the McDonald’s locations, the children got a balloon from the McDonald’s management. Half of them got the balloon as the family was leaving as a nice thank you for coming into McDonald’s and purchasing food. The other half each kid got the balloon as they entered.

Those families bought 25% more food because they had been given something first. First is the key. First means it’s not the usual behavioral model that we use in business which says, if you buy my product, if you sign my contract, I promise I will give to you the very best service or merits of the offer that I can provide. That means the customer has to go first. This is saying something else, we have to go first. We give value in some way.

Easily the way to do it that’s least costly is to give information to people about things that will improve their outcomes in any given situation, white papers, tips about the top three things to do to improve their outcomes and something, not based on our product or service. If it’s designed to tell them how to buy us or why they should, then it’s seen as a device, not a gift. If we do that, people are now readied to give back to us. So the rule for reciprocation, that’s the first.

Shane: I have a friend who summarizes this as go positive, go first.

Robert: Go positive, go first. That’s right.

Shane: So why is it we don’t do more of that?
Robert: I think people are afraid. They don’t recognize the power of this rule. And they’re afraid that by going first and giving resources, giving time, giving attention, giving samples, and so on, they might just be losing that. They’re not cognizant of the fact that there’s such a strong rule in every human culture that says you must not take without giving in return. They really don’t register the power of that rule, but it is formidable.

Shane: And there’s different types of things that we can give, gifts come to mind, maybe concessions in a negotiation. What are the other types that we can think of when reciprocation is at play?

Robert: So for example, you’re right about concessions. There’s research that show if we walk up to people and say, “Listen, would you be a long term blood donor and give a unit of blood every six weeks for the next two years?” A very large request, right, of starting off. Everybody said, “No, I don’t even know where I’ll be in two years. I can’t make that.” And we said, “Oh, well then would you give one unit tomorrow during the local blood drive in your neighborhood?”

We go from 33% of people who agree to give the next day, right, if that’s the only thing we ask them to 55% if we retreat to that, we make a concession, “Oh, so you can’t do the two year thing that we would most like, but would you do this one thing?” So now we go from 33% to 55% compliance. And by the way, we staff... the blood services organization, we have observers there, they show up. It’s not just that they say, “Oh yeah, sure, I’ll do that,” because they want to get us away. No, they show up.

Shane: Well, that goes to commitment and consistency, which we’ll talk about a bit later. But is there a contrast at play there too because now you’ve taken it from a large commitment to a much smaller commitment?

Robert: Yes.

Shane: Which feels more manageable.

Robert: That’s a very perceptive point. There’s not only is there the effect of making concession that needs to be reciprocated, “Oh, you made a concession to me, I’ll make a concession in return.”
It’s that you’ve made a contrast between the larger favor, two years every six weeks to just once. And this one now seems smaller. So we tested for that in the study and we found that if we include the contrast in our presentation, you can go anywhere from giving every six weeks for two years or you could just give tomorrow. That doesn’t produce the effect to the same degree. You have to get them to say no so you can retreat and then spur a retreat and return.

Shane: Sure. Look, if somebody gives you a gift or maybe does you a favor, is there a balance in the sense of obligation that we feel we need to repay? Or is there almost an interest, a mental interest that we ascribe to returning that favor so we have to do more?

Robert: No. We are obligated to give back at the same level. But if the only thing we can do is to give back at a higher level, we will to avoid the burden of feeling like a cheater, like a free rider, like a taker, an ingrate. So if somebody buys us lunch, so well, we say, “Okay, next time it’s on me.” Right? But between that time, if this person says, “I’m in a bind, can you drive over to where I am and jump my battery for me?” Right? We have to say yes because this person just did us a favor. While we’re in that state of obligation, we will go even higher although most of the time we can cancel the obligation simply by giving what they gave us, a nice lunch.

Shane: Is there a time span associated with this? Like after a couple weeks, does it wear off or is it more potent at the start or how do we think about that?

Robert: There is a timeframe associated with this. People are more willing to say yes to a request for something in return the closer to the favor we’ve provided. However, when they have given us very large favors, those things stay in our consciousness, and years later, we will be willing to give back to them. Those big memorable favors stay solid, but the smaller ones, they tend to fade away over time.

Shane: Are there ideal operating conditions when this works even better?

Robert: That’s one of them certainly proximate to the cause. But also when what we have given to them is tailored to their needs, their preferences, their current challenges, under those circumstances, we now have a more muscular version of the sense of obligation. I’ll give you an example again, we can do it at a fast food restaurant, right?
Researchers did a study. People came in and one third of them just went to the counter and ordered their food.

Another third of them came in and were given a very attractive key ring with a beautiful medallion on it by the management, “Oh, thank you for coming to McDonald’s. Here’s a gift for you,” right? They then bought 12% more food. There was a third group, they came in and they were given a small cup of yogurt as a thank you, right, for coming in. Now, any economist would say they were fools to do that because now people don’t need to buy as much food, right? They bought 24% more food because why do you go to a restaurant? Because you’re hungry. If you give people something they need that’s high in their goal hierarchy, they’re going to be most willing to give back to you at a higher level.

Shane: Sure, that makes a lot of sense. One of the examples from your book that I really liked, maybe you can illuminate this for us, was the Cuban missile crisis. Can you tell us about that?

Robert: You weren’t alive, Shane, during the Cuban middle crisis. It occurred in the early 1960s when the president of the United States was then John Kennedy and the leader of the Soviet Union was Khrushchev. It was determined by US intelligence that Russian ships had brought to Cuba ICBM missiles. Nuclear head missiles that were installed and pointed at the United States 90 miles away. What Kennedy did was to demand that Khrushchev remove those missiles.

And there were Russian ships steaming for Cuba at the time that were carrying more and Kennedy said, “We’re going to blockade those ships.” And Khrushchev said, “That’s an act of war. If you do that, you’re going to set off a war.” Not any war, a nuclear war between the two greatest nuclear powers at the time that was estimated to kill a third of humanity. And during that time, the two leaders were locked in this stare off contest and both of them were adamant about their positions.

And finally because Kennedy was so adamant and strong-willed and resolute in this, Khrushchev blinked and he removed his missiles, right? That was the story that we all heard in the history books and that I learned about when I was alive at the time. It turns out it wasn’t true.
It turns out that there was a secret deal that was made between Kennedy and Khrushchev, it was a reciprocal concessions deal.

Kennedy said, “If you will remove your missiles from Cuba, we’ll remove ours from Turkey that are pointed at you. But don’t tell anybody about it because politically, if I was seen as compromising with yielding in any way to our natural enemy at that time, our global enemy at that time, it would ruin my political aspirations for reelection, right?” So Khrushchev promised, “Yes. Okay, I won’t say anything.”

It wasn’t until recently that this information was revealed at the Kennedy Library after it was embargoed for all those years, it finally came up. And scholars have said, “No, it wasn’t this hard line that won the day. The hard line was the thing that risked the world. The thing that saved the world was reciprocal concession and it got buried.” It’s regrettable because the image that a lot of world leaders got from this, never compromise, never give in, just be strong and if you are strong enough, you will win. It was exactly the wrong thing. That’s not what happened at all. It was the rule for reciprocation that won the day.

Shane: I love that example. And the power of this particular effect is undeniable. Not everybody has great intent. How do we defend ourselves against this?

Robert: Yes. I think what we have to do is recognize that we can’t just in a blanket kind of way, reject the gifts and favors and services that may be very well intentioned for us, right, by people who would like to increase our outcomes in a particular situation. What we have to do is recognize that when those people do that and then use that as a lever to get something much larger from us, we have to reframe what they gave us as no longer a gift to be reciprocated, but a trick, a device, an artifice designed to get our compliance with a much larger request where they will come out much far ahead in the bargain. We have to make that little change.

And then here’s where the rule for reciprocity comes in because I studied a group that would get people to make appointments with them to check out their fire safety issues at home, right? And somebody would come in and give them a home fire extinguisher and then would give them a bunch of reasons to buy a particular kind, a very expensive heat activated fire alarm system that they were representing, right?
So they weren’t really there to give us the information about fire safety, they were there to sell this outrageously overpriced system. And what I say to people in this situation is look, as soon as you see that the game was, don’t treat the fire alarms, the fire extinguisher that you got as a gift, treat it as a trick. And if that’s the case, show them the door and keep the fire extinguisher because by the rule of reciprocation, exploiters should be exploited.

Shane: It works both ways, right? The second principle in your book is liking, which is we to say yes to people that we like. What are the main variables that carry a lot of the weight to whether we like somebody or not?

Robert: There are really two major variables that we can influence. One is similarity. We like people who are like us. So one thing we can do is to point to commonalities that genuinely exist. If we point to a genuine comparability that exists between us and the other individual, that person feels a greater rapport with us. Oh, you’re a runner? I’m a runner. You’re an only child? I’m an only child. Okay, now there’s a bond between us. And those people will feel more rapport with us and want to do business with us if those are genuinely there.

So for example, there was one study that was done between negotiators who were bargaining over email. And email is the most bloodless communication device we have ever devised. And as a result, they were stymied in their negotiations, deadlocked so that in 30% of the instances, both sides walked away with the nothing. The other half were told before you begin the negotiation by email, send some information about yourself to the other negotiator, your negotiating partner, what your hobbies are, what your interests are, where you grew up, where you went to school, what your major was in college, these kinds of things.

In that case, stymied negotiations went from 30% to 6%. When the researchers analyzed the data, it wasn’t the amount of personalizing information that had been sent across, it was how many commonalities were in those accounts. If there were a lot of commonalities, similarities, they got the most concessions, right? The key was the parallels. The implication is clear for us. We now have a tool that we never had before, the internet, that allows us to know some things about the people that we are going to interact with and hoping to influence in our direction.
It’s not proprietary information, people give us that information on social media and LinkedIn and so on. We can find that and where we find genuine commonalities, we can just raise those to the surface before we begin.

Shane: I have the same question for all of them, but are there ideal operating conditions or set of circumstances when this works even better for liking principle?

Robert: It does. When we have had some kind of situation in which we’ve been excluded from an interaction, or we felt our feelings were hurt by somebody, a friend or something, then we’re really looking for, people are really looking for that connection, that friendship association, that can be the case as well.

Shane: I want to again, talk about how to offend against that. But before we get there, my favorite example from the book, I think was Joe Girard. Can you tell us about him and how he used this?

Robert: Yeah. Joe Girard, he was the world’s greatest salesperson according to the Guinness Book of Records for 12 years in a row. He sold automobiles, Chevrolets from a dealership in Detroit, in the Detroit area. He sold an average of six cars and trucks a day every day that he worked. How did he do it? Well, one of the things that he says that he did that was so important is for everybody who ever bought a car from him every month, they would receive a greeting card for him depending on the holiday that month, happy new year, whatever it was, the 4th of July, whatever the month was.

And then you opened it up and it said one thing inside card, “I like you. -Joe Girard.” Now that man used the liking principle. We like people who like us. The second thing that we can use besides similarity is genuine compliments that people give us, praise, right? That we give to others, right? And if we do that, honestly, and Joe was a people person. He liked everybody so he wasn’t lying by saying, “I like you.” Just having that message, you would think 12 times a year, every year automatically, this thing comes. No. For Joe Girard, he said, “That was important to let people know that I liked them.” So it’s not just that we like people who are like us, we like people who do like us and say so.

Shane: How do we defend against this? How do we go about neutralizing the effect of liking somebody?
Robert: Suppose you’re in a car showroom, not Joe Girard’s, but you’re going to buy a new car. Here’s what the most effective salespeople have been taught to do. Before they ever show you the car, they’re going to give you something. They’re going to give you a bottle of mineral water, they’re going to give you a cup of coffee or tea or a soft drink. They’re going to compliment you on your decision to come in at this time of the month, maybe even compliment you on your choices of colors, schemes and accessories associated with the car.

They’re going to tell you, “Here we are in Minnesota, and were you born in Minnesota?” Well, yes, I was. Me too. Well, I’m born in Minnesota, but my wife is from Texas. My wife is from Texas. They’ll claim these similarities, right? And you will find yourself liking that salesperson more than is warranted by an interaction with somebody for 30 minutes. You find yourself liking somebody inordinately, step back from the situation and say, “Wait a minute, what has that person been doing that would cause me to like him or her? Oh yeah, they gave me that Coke. They complimented me. They told me that they’re from the same area as me. They’re similar to me.” Right? And then you have to separate the salesperson from the car. Because you have to recognize I’m going to be driving that Toyota off the lot, not the salesperson. It doesn’t matter how much I like the salesperson, I’d be driving the car. So you have to make your choice based on the favorable features of the deal, not of the person who’s offering you the deal.

Shane: I like that. Moving on to social proof, which is the third principle in the book, why is popularity so effective?

Robert: I saw a quote about popularity and how people are using popularity on internet and in various ways. And this particular humor said popularity is all the rage these days. Here’s the point. Popularity that is a version of social proof, which says one way we can reduce our uncertainty of what we should do in a situation. When we’re uncertain, we don’t look inside ourselves for the answer. All we see is the lack of confidence so we look outside. And one place we look is to what the people around us like us have been doing or are currently doing in a particular situation.
Are we getting a lot of people going to this new restaurant, buying this new piece of software? If so, that is a shortcut I can use to reduce my uncertainty about the fact that that will probably be a good choice for me. If a lot of people are doing it and are rating it positively with those star ratings and so on, that’s a way I can reduce my uncertainty because they’ve already beta tested this thing for me. That’s why it’s so popular to choose popularity as an indicator of a good choice.

There was a study done in Beijing, China that I love, it shows you the cross-cultural reach of this. So in Beijing, researchers arranged with the managers of a string of restaurants to put a little asterisk on certain items of the menu that people got when they were to order. Those items that got the asterisk then became purchased 13 to 20% more frequently. So what did the asterisk represent? It wasn’t what we normally see when there are little asterisks next to items on the menu like this is a specialty of the house, or this is what our chef recommends for this evening.

The asterisk said, if you go down and read what it stood for, this is one of our most popular items and each one became 13 to 20% more popular for its popularity. Now you have to read the footnotes on this study that was published on this research to see one more little feature of all of this that helps explain or answer your question, why is popularity so valuable for us, right?

And it is, if you look at the various demographic groups that came into the restaurant, males, females, young people, older people, business people, neighborhood patrons, and so on, they all were influenced by the asterisk. But there was one group that was far more influenced than anyone else, first time visitors, the ones who were most uncertain. They could look to the choices of others in that restaurant to reduce their uncertainty about what to buy.

Shane: Sure. I think that’s a really good point, right? So uncertainty makes us more vulnerable to it. I think there’s a couple other nuances to this that I find really interesting, one is feasibility, right? So if we see other people doing something, we feel like we can do it too, especially I would imagine if we identify as part of that tribe or that person is similar to us.
Robert: In fact, I once worked for a company as the chief scientist that sent messages to the customers of local power companies about how much energy they were using relative to their comparable neighbors, neighbors who had similar sized homes, similar air conditioning and heating units, and so on. That information caused those people who were using more energy than their neighbors to dramatically reduce their energy. And I think one reason is what you said, it’s that, well, if my neighbors like me can do it, that means I can do it. It means it’s feasible.

And I can tell you something that is remarkable about this company. It was called Opower, it’s since been purchased by Oracle. As a result of this, Opower is responsible for 30 billion pounds of carbon dioxide that have not been released into the environment because people have reduced their energy conservation by just knowing what their comparable neighbors are doing and saying, “Well, then I can do that.”

Shane: It can be a very effective tool for good. It can also be used against us. How do we defend against social proof?

Robert: So what we have to do, let’s take online reviews, right? We have to check out the character of those reviews. It turns out there’s particular things that allow us to know when a review is phony. Do they use a lot of personal stories? That means they’re not giving you evidence of the features of the product or service because they don’t really know it, they’ve just been hired to...

Do they use a lot of verbs rather than nouns? For the same reason, they’re telling us what they were doing and how they were operating and how they were feeling about it rather than what the product really was, right? So we can look to that. But also there was a great study that looked at which star rating on a product review was most likely to produce a conversion from a prospect to a customer. It wasn’t a five point rating, it was a range between 4.2 and 4.7.

People were onto the tricksters who were loading their evaluations with all of these positive things. So if it was below 4.2, people will say, “Well, maybe this isn’t such a great product.” If it was above 4.7, they got suspicious.
So what we have actually is a constant struggle between the product review sites who have algorithms to try to weed out the phony reviews and the tricksters who are trying to outflank the various ways to prevent them. And it’s an ongoing battle.

But there are a couple of things we can do and here’s the thing that I keep recommending in the response to your question, what can we do about this? So for example, there are instances in which news accounts tell us of companies that were caught providing phony information about their products, I mean their popular or about their market share or about their ratings and so on. Whenever we see one of those, we need to go on their site and go on every site of our social media and say so.

Look, these people were cheaters, don’t go back to them. Look, they’ve been caught cheating, don’t do business with them. We have to penalize those people who do the manipulation that you were asking about earlier. We can’t just say, “Well, I’m not going to do business with them.” We have to really penalize them at their bottom line level in order to reduce this tendency to manipulate.

**Shane:** Let’s talk about authority. Is there a difference between being an authority and being in authority?

**Robert:** There is. And we can have of a lot of evidence of somebody who’s in charge directing those who are working or operating beneath them to do something, coerce them, or threaten them with some kind of form of penalty if they don’t move in a particular direction because I’m the boss. Playing the I’m the boss card, that has costs. People don’t like being pushed. They don’t like being pressured even by somebody who’s in authority over them. Very often what they do is they find a way to finesse the system and get around the directive. Because what that’s about for me is not influence as much as it is power. That’s about power.

Yes, and we can wield power, but there are costs of it. That’s from being in authority. What we are recommending as a way to be influential is being an authority. Somebody who knows a lot about the topic, someone who’s a true expert on the matter to the extent that we can harness that principle by having testimonials from legitimately highly knowledgeable experts that speak to our idea or our product or service, that’s going to work.
I know that when Bose acoustics, we were working with them, when they added to an ad for a product that they had called the Bose Wave Music System, a line of testifiers right at the start of the ad all over to the left just as you read the ad and up at the top, they saw all these testifiers, it increased purchases by 15% of that product.

Shane: Oh, wow.

Robert: We know that it was that ad that did it because the increase occurred only to the phone number that was in the ad. It didn’t occur in the shops, people walking in and buying, no, it was to that phone number.

Shane: And were those testimonials by authority figures or were those testimonials just average people?

Robert: They were testimonials by authorities, legitimate experts on audition and electronic components, the audio components, and so on. Now here’s the thing that we did help them with. Originally when the marketing department structured that ad, those testimonials were at the bottom, and look at all of the people who agree with what we’ve just said here about this. By moving them to the top, the authority aura that they provide is infused into every word of that ad as people are experiencing it.

Why would you throw that honest lever of influence away at the top? So what I always recommend to people who are using testimonials, and this can include, by the way, as you inferred, they can also include testimonials from similar others. Because remember we want to follow the lead of people like us, right? So you’ve got peers or you have experts. In either case, they need to go at the top so that you have been informed ahead of time that others, experts or peers have reduced your uncertainty of whether to believe the information that’s going to come next.

Shane: How do we defend ourselves against this?

Robert: To ask ourselves two questions. When we see an authority testimonial, one is, is this person truly an expert in this matter? What does Matthew McConaughey really know about Chryslers? He’s driving and he’s telling us how a great Chrysler is... He’s just an actor, right? What’s that? Right?
There was a great set of TV commercials that began with an actor who played a doctor on TV who began by saying, “I’m not a doctor, but I play a doctor on TV,” right? That ad sold all kinds of cough syrup.

If we had thought about it and said, “Wait a minute, before I believe this person, let me ask, is this person an expert on this topic? No. So that should unhook the expert influence from my mind on this.” That’s the first thing. But sometimes we will have people who are genuine experts recommending something. Then we have to ask a second question, is there a reason for this person to be recommending this product or service other than its merits? Is this person hired?

Does this person get products for doing this? That’s what a lot of influencers get. They get products and income from those products that they advocate on air. So we have to, once again, unhook their perceived authority here. If they truly are, they are makeup consultants and so on, they all do this and they say, “We love this particular kind of...” All right. They might have authority, but whether they’re acting in the unbiased, independent way is another question we should ask ourselves. And if we see that they’re not, unhook the perception that this person should be followed because of that expertise.

Shane: Let’s talk about the scarcity principle.

Robert: Sure. People want more of those things they can have less of. We find that those items that are rare, scarce, dwindling in availability are more attractive to us. We want more of those things we can have less of. And we all know that there’s an acronym called FOMO, fear of missing out that we’ve all heard about. That’s a big reason why scarcity works. The idea that if something is rare or scarce or dwindling in availability, it means we might not get it. We might miss it. Fear of missing out. We might miss out on this thing, right? And we hate that idea.

There’s a concept called loss aversion that Daniel Kahneman who won the Nobel Prize in economics a few years ago demonstrated that the idea of losing something of a particular value is twice as powerful on human psychology as the idea of gaining that very same thing.
When we present an idea to people that has all kinds of benefits and advantages that we can genuinely point to, we should not just couch it in terms of this is what you’ll be able to gain by choosing our product. We should also honestly be able to say, and this is something you don’t want to lose.

You don’t want to forego those benefits. That will resonate powerfully. Remember, we were talking about that Bose ad that I mentioned that if you put-

Shane: Is that the one where you did the hear what you’re missing or...

Robert: Yes. So we also, before we even did that with Bose on that same project, the first generation of that ad was very unsuccessful for Bose. At the top of the ad was the word new. And then after that, there was all kinds of information about new features, new elegance, new simplicity and it wasn’t being very well received by the Bose purchasers. So we asked them, we said, “Look, don’t change the whole ad, change what you say at the top of the ad.”

The word new says uncertain. It says there isn’t any evidence about this yet. There isn’t any feedback that I can see from my neighbors or friends at the office who’ve tried it. It’s brand new, I’m going to wait. What we did was to change the word new to hear what you’ve been missing. The idea of missing out says no time for waiting. No, no, I have to get this. I don’t want to miss it. I don’t want to miss out on this great thing, right? That change produced a 45% increase in sales. Then if the Bose marketing department added testimonials, they produced a 15% greater increase to 60% increase from the initial generation of that ad. But the idea of loss is what people really want to avoid.

Now, I don’t know how many of your followers are online operators, most of us have a lot of online profile. But there was a study of 6,700 e-commerce sites and AB tests that were done for various components inside those sites. Does the site have free delivery? Does the site have a search function? Does every appeal end with a call to action? They had 29 of those. The top six were all principles of social influence, and the top one was scarcity of supply. We only have a certain number of these with this feature or at this price. It was the top AB test that produced conversion from prospect to customer.
Second was social proof. Look at all the people who’ve already done this. We’ve gotten this kind of message, and by the way, there’s a new research that shows that there’s a particularly powerful form of social proof. There isn’t just a large number of people have done this, but there’s a trend to that number. It used to be that last year we had 30% market share, six months ago, it was 35, now it’s 40%, right? That’s more powerful than just saying 40% because people project the function of the trend into the future.

So social proof was number two with evidence like that of a large market share or popularity or trends. And number three was scarcity of time, that is limited time offers. This offer is only good for this week. Those three were the most powerful approaches. So scarcity was two of the top three. Now I’m going to suggest there’s something else that we can do that empowers the scarcity principle, right? And it doesn’t require scarcity of supply or time limits, and that is uniqueness of what we offer.

If we have something, a feature that none of our rivals can match, that’s where we go because people will want it if they can’t get it anywhere else. Now, a lot of times, because of the homogenization of the way things are manufactured and offered these days, a lot of times it isn’t one thing that separates you from anybody else in the market, but it could be a suite of things, a particular combination of features that only you provide, go there. That’s what people don’t want to lose by going somewhere else.

Shane: Let’s talk about commitment and consistency principle.

Robert: This is the one that says people want to be consistent with what they have already said or done especially in public. As a consequence if we can ask people to take a small step in our direction voluntarily, could you do this, take a small step, they will now be significantly more likely to take a larger step that is congruent with what they have already done because people want to be consistent within their behavior and they want to be seen as consistent.

So here’s a good study in that regard, it was a study done in Chicago with a restaurant owner named Gordon Sinclair. It’s a famous restaurant called Gordon’s there in Chicago. And he’s since retired, but while he was operating, he had a problem, no shows.
People who would call, they’d make a reservation and then they just wouldn’t show up and they wouldn’t call ahead to cancel. He had 30% no shows. So he walked around and saw what his receptionist would say to people when she took a booking.

She would say, “Thank you for calling Gordon’s. Please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation.” He asked her to change two words, “Will you please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation?” And then he asked her to pause and have people fill that moment, and they all said, “Of course, sure, glad to.” And that was their commitment. And no shows dropped by 67% immediately and never went up because he had gotten them to make an active, public voluntary commitment to something and now they were going to live up to it to a greater degree.

So here’s an implication, I think. For anybody like a manager, anytime you’re running a meeting and you’ve given members of your team tasks to perform and complete before the next meeting, don’t let anybody out of that room until you ask the question, will you be able to complete this by our next meeting, and pause. If the answer is no, that’s actually good for a manager to know. That means, “Okay, then I have to give this person more time or more resources or maybe even some help with it.” But if answer is, yes, you have now significantly increased the likelihood that that person will come with a properly completed task to the meeting because you’ve asked them and they have made an active public voluntary commitment to doing so.

Shane: One of the interesting things for me about commitment and consistency is we hide inside the walls of our own thinking. How do we defend against this not only when other people are using it, but how do we defend ourselves from just constantly escalating and being held to opinions that may be no longer valid?

Robert: Man, this is a good question and I’m going to answer it by first saying how we do this with people who we would like to change in our direction, who have already made a commitment to something else, to another product or a service or an idea. Right now, we’ve got a lot of people who are resisting health information about... well, right? How do we change that? We can’t say, “Well, when you made that decision, it was the wrong choice. You were just making a wrong choice. You’re not a good decision maker.”
People don’t want to hear that, that’s going to get their back up and they say, “I still stand by this decision.” What you have to say is at the time that you made that choice in the information environment, that may have well been a good choice for you. But here’s a new piece of information that we didn’t have back then. As a good decision maker, people take into account all the information so you’re a good decision maker. And we can get people unmoored from that commitment that they had made by saying, “Okay, now let’s reevaluate because there’s a new piece of information I can give you on this topic.”

And this is what I think I’m going to ask us to do ourselves, that when we encounter a new piece of information relative to a decision or a choice that we’ve made and that we get a chance to change, we need to say, “If I knew this when I first made my choice, if that was part of this decision, would I have made the same choice or would this have had enough weight to move me?” My guess is a lot of times that would allow us to say, “I want to take into account all of the information including the information that I didn’t have back then.”

Shane: There’s so many other questions I want to ask. And we have to cover unity and then I have a whole host of other questions. So let’s talk about unity, which is the new one that you’ve added to the book, the seventh principle, what is it? How does it work?

Robert: It works for a communicator in the following way. If that communicator can arrange for us to see him or her as one of us, as someone who shares an identity with them in some kind of important way, right?

Shane: Like a tribal identity?

Robert: Yes, tribal identity, but it can be something... I’ll give you an example of a study that was done on a college campus. Researchers asked a young woman, college aged woman to stand on a heavily trafficked part of campus and ask people to donate to a good cause, I think it was the United Way. And she was getting some contributions. If she said before she made the request, one thing, which was, “I’m a student here too, would you give the United Way?” Donations went up 400%.

Shane: I’m one of you, I’m like you.
Robert: I’m one of you, I’m of you. I’m not just like you in style or preferences or... I’m of you, then people will say, yes. I used this a while ago in my own life when it turned out I was writing a grant application to get funding for a long three year program of research. And it was due the next day. It had to be sent in to the funding office the next day. I’m reading over it, making sure everything is right and I came to a paragraph that made a particular claim and I realized I really didn’t have convincing evidence for that claim.

But I knew that a colleague of mine in the psychology department where I was working that time had done a study the year before and had collected the data that were relevant to this and he had it in his archives. I sent him an email, and let’s call him Tim, that’s not his real name. Tim, I’m in this bind. I have this grant due tomorrow and I don’t really have the evidence, but I know you have the evidence for this one point that’s crucial.

I’m going to call you to talk about how I could get that from you in the form that I need to put it into this grant application. Well, Tim is known as an irascible, sour, negative kind of guy in my department. So when I called him, he said, “Hello, Bob, I know why you’re calling and the answer is no. I can’t be responsible for your poor time management skills, Bob. You’re a busy man, I’m a busy man. I have things to do today that also have time constraints. So the answer is no.”

Before I read this research on how people say yes to those inside their we groups, what I call we groups, the groups that they would label as we, I would’ve said, “Come on Tim, I really need this. I’ve got this deadline tomorrow and it’s a grant...” He’d already said no to that. So here’s what I said, “Tim, we’ve been in the same psychology department now for 12 years, I really need this.” And Shane, I had the information that afternoon. I just located us, honestly, pointing to a common membership in something that was a shared identity for us.

Shane: That’s very powerful. Let’s switch gears here a little bit. What makes Warren Buffett so successful at influencing?

Robert: Warren Buffett makes us believe in what he asks us to do with regard to his company, Berkshire Hathaway, hold onto our shares, not sell them or buy more of them.
I mean, that’s... And he does that in every letter to shareholders that he writes every... I happen to be a shareholder. 20 years ago, I got a letter in the mail, maybe 25 years ago from his partner, Charlie Munger. I opened this envelope to find a share, an A share of Berkshire stock, which at the time was worth about $75,000.

And he said, “Your book has made us so much money that by the principle of reciprocation, that’s your very first... you are owed something in return.” So I have a share of stock. I think today on the New York Stock Exchange, it’s worth $412,000 for that share. How did Warren Buffett continue to get me to hold onto this even though I’ve more than quadrupled my profits is this, it’s because in every letter he sends to shareholders, he begins with a credibility enhancing strategy of describing something that went wrong that year, a mistake that they had made.

And he says, “And I promise you, we’ve learned from this. This won’t happen again because we’ve recognized that this was a mistake, we made an error.” And then he says, “But here’s what’s gone right.” Shane, I am so ready to believe everything he says that’s gone well and is likely to continue to go well in the future after he’s demonstrated his honesty and trustworthiness by describing something that didn’t go well. It’s remarkable. He’s brilliant about demonstrating that he can be trusted to be a brilliant investor into the future because he’s not hiding anything from us.

Shane: He’s master at this. You’ve told a story before about how we can influence the interview process. I’m wondering if you can tell us that story.

Robert: Yeah. This is a story that comes from acquaintance of mine who was having trouble getting new jobs based on his resume. And he said, “I would always use the strategy that I was taught. I would go into an interview, a job interview. Usually there was an evaluator, sometimes a team of evaluators and I would say, “I’m happy to answer any questions that you have about my resume, please go ahead and do that.”” And he wasn’t being very successful.

But then he started asking a question before he invited them to ask him question. He said, “I’m very happy to be here today and I just wonder, I wonder if you could answer a question before we begin, why did you invite me here today? What was it about my resume that spurred you to make me a candidate?”
And he said what you would hear is these people highlighting all the strengths of his resume that they thought were compatible with what they wanted and making an active public commitment to him and also informing him about the things that they really wanted so that he could elaborate on those things.

And he said when there was sometimes three people, they would each have something different. And sometimes they would argue with one, “No, no, it’s his experience. No, no, it’s his education. No, no, it’s the extent to which his traits fit with our job.” And they’re now making his strengths prominent the outside of his... He said he’s gotten three better jobs in a row using that strategy.

Shane: That is such a brilliant and simple and effective way to apply these principles. Another way that I’ve heard you say before is after we do a favor for a friend, there’s a way that we can word something, and can you tell us that?

Robert: Yes. This has to do with the rule for reciprocation. Sometimes we do a favor for somebody, a big favor. We go out of our way. We go beyond the call of duty and people say, “Thank you so much, this was...” And we say, “Ah, don’t think anything of it, no big deal. I would’ve done it for anybody.” Wrong. That’s a situation governed by the rule for reciprocation. Say this, “Of course, I was glad to help. It’s what friends do for one another.”

Or if it’s a business relationship, “It’s what long term partners do for one another, never forget the addendum for one another.” Yes, you put it on the map. You don’t say, “Hey, and you owe me one now buster.” No, it’s what we do for one another. That person will be ready to give back to you. Now, if you don’t have a long term relationship, here’s what I recommend that you say, “Oh, of course. I know if the situation were ever reversed, you’d do the same for me.”

You put it on the map, you don’t diminish it and say, “In the future.” Don’t say, “If the situation had been reversed, you would’ve done the same.” That’s in the past, that’s never going to happen. You say, “If the situation were ever reversed, I know you’d do the same for me,” right? Once again, you’ve significantly increased the likelihood of yes to a request you make later.
**Shane:** I found that incredibly nuanced in terms of not mentioning the past and keeping it in the future. One of the other examples that stands out to me was your friend, Sally who’s a mediator and how she used a slight wording change to get more couples to agree on their separation agreement. Can you tell us that story?

**Robert:** Yeah. My friend who’s a divorce attorney, but she also does mediation, she had a problem, which is she would get the two sides, usually the couple and their people, an attorney or auditor with them, right? In different rooms because they couldn’t be in the same room, they would quickly devolve into some chaos. They’re in separate rooms and she transmits the offers across the hallway from the two rooms to one another. And she said, “Very often, we’d be almost done. We can escape having to go to divorce court by this mediation, except there’s one last factor that nobody will give in on, who gets the custody of the Saint Bernard or who gets the time share in Cabo and they won’t give up on this.”

And I said, “So, Sandy, what do you say? What do you say to people when you bring that last offer?” She says, “I tell them if you will agree to this offer, their last offer, we will have a deal and we’ll be done, that hasn’t worked.” So I said, “Try this Sandy. Go in and say, “We have a deal, all you have to do is agree to this offer.’” And she said, “Why?” Because if you have a deal, now you have loss aversion going for you. It means if you don’t say yes, you lose the deal as opposed to merely gaining the deal.

And we know from Daniel Kahneman, you’re twice as likely to jump at an opportunity because you don’t want to lose it. I saw her about five or six months later at a party. She came up to me, she put her hand on my arm, she said, “Bob, this works every time.” I said, “Come on, Sandy, nothing works every time. This is behavioral science, it’s not magic.” She said, “Every time.” Now, I still don’t believe it’s every time, but it works. This idea of loss aversion definitely moves people off the fence and get them into the game where they belong, where they need to be.

**Shane:** Are there any other powerful examples like that where slight wording changes have increased compliance that didn’t make it into the book that come to mind for you?

**Robert:** There’s one that has to do with commitment and consistency.
Suppose you’re in charge of a team and you’ve got a goal and they’ve moved toward the goal, they’re halfway there already, right? And they’re on track. And what we’re supposed to say to our team as a leader is congratulations. And very often we say, “Congratulations on your progress toward the goal.” That’s a mistake. Don’t use the word progress because you’ve just asked them to turn round and look behind them at the progress that they’ve made, how much they’ve moved. And they tend to feel, “Whew, I can take some time off now, look at all the progress that we’ve made. Look at this. Maybe it’s time for some me time on Facebook or whatever.”

Shane: Yes.

Robert: Right? Instead, at that point, you say, “Congratulations on your commitment to the goal.” Now you’ve asked them to look forward to where the goal is and the fact that they made a commitment to goal. And the research shows if you use the word commitment instead of progress, you get continued accelerated movement toward the goal. You’re more likely to get a timely achievement of it. That one word.

Shane: Oh, that is so powerful. Switching gears a little bit, how do you protect yourself against cognitive biases?

Robert: Part of it is to know what they are. It’s one of the reasons I wrote the book, is to tell people the way you can protect yourself against these principles, these levers of influence when they are used against you in undue or unwelcome way, you have to know what they are. We have to get the message out there, and then you can decide whether they were used in a legitimate way or in illegitimate way. So one of the things I do is I actually keep a little card in my wallet that has the principles of influence on it.

And when I have to make a choice in a decision, I’ll take out the card and see what those principles are and the extent to which they’ve been part of this and whether I want to follow the authority without asking, “Wait a minute, is this person really an expert? Has this person given me something that’s designed to make me give them something better or bigger?” I get to ask myself those questions by reviewing what the principles are.
Shane: I think that’s a really effective technique. I mean, for me, cognitive biases have always been a way in hindsight to explain why we made a mistake or why we ended up in this automatic behavior that somebody hijacked in us maybe unintentionally and maybe intentionally. And I’ve struggled to put it into action for preventing myself from entering into those situations.

Robert: Right, right.

Shane: Who uses online sales tactics the most effective in your mind? When you’re browsing the internet, where are you like, “Oh, man, that’s really good.”

Robert: The online hotel and flight reservation sites. Let’s take a hotels. There’s a Dutch company called booking.com. Biggest in the world. What they will do is if you are on their site and let’s say you’re looking at a particular room at a hotel where you’re interested in staying, they will tell you how many rooms at that price are left and then they will tell you how many other people are looking at this hotel right now.

When they started using that strategy, which in includes social proof plus scarcity, right? I mean, competition. Their sales service people called the technology office and said, “There’s a problem with the website because we’re getting so many people purchasing our rooms that there must be a mistake. It just outstrips anything we’ve ever seen before.” No, it wasn’t a glitch in the technology, it was the power of scarcity, competition for a scarce resource and social proof working together that produced that massive change in their success.

Shane: It’s so powerful. Are there other examples that come to mind that you can think of?

Robert: There’s one other example that I like, which is those organizations that ask us to become unitized with them through co-creation to be one of them, to be of them. So they will ask us to help them design the next generation of products or services or to tell them which features of what they already have, could be removed or embellished or whatever and they ask us to co-create with them this new product. And that’s been very successful in terms not only of loyalty and long term purchases, but satisfaction and advocacy to others. If you are a co-creator with them, you really are one of them.
And now here’s the one thing that the newest research shows. When they ask us to give them input on this new generation or the shape of their new products and so on, we are typically asked for our opinion on this, can you give us your opinion on? That’s a mistake. When you ask for an opinion, you get a critic. If instead of asking for someone’s opinion where you want their buy-in with you on some idea or outline or blueprint you’ve got for a new initiative, if you ask for their advice on it, you get a partner.

And the research shows instead of asking for opinion or feedback or your expectations about this new product or service, you ask for your advice, ask people for their advice on it. Not only are they more favorable to your idea, they give you better input, more constructive because they’re of you. They want you to be a success, they’re your partner in this. There’s this saying that when we ask for advice, we’re usually looking for an accomplice.

**Shane:** Oh, I’ve never heard that before, that is so powerful. I’ve never thought of that. I mean, we ask people for feedback all the time on things and I’ve never thought of it as asking for advice on how to make it better instead of feedback.

**Robert:** And what the research shows, if you get that advice from them, you get that accomplice, they now feel unitized.

**Shane:** So brilliant. We run a weekly newsletter that we send out to I think it’s 375,000 people now every week and people sign up for that email newsletter. What can I say in the email that we welcome them after they sign up to signal trust?

**Robert:** Well, that’s interesting because you know that I told you about that study of 6,700 e-commerce sites?

**Shane:** Yeah.

**Robert:** Another thing with the liking principle that was in the top six.

**Shane:** Right.

**Robert:** Was a welcoming letter where you welcome them into your site the way you would someone who comes to your door.

**Shane:** Right.
Robert: How would you treat a friend who came to your door? You would welcome them, express how glad you are that they’re there with you and how happy you are to work together with them toward better outcomes. I don’t know of any sites that I’ve encountered that have a welcoming letter. But in this study of 6,700, those that did, got significantly more conversions.

Shane: That’s really interesting, so like welcome to the tribe. One of the things when you were saying that that I remembered is you sent me a copy of your book which you had inscribed at the beginning, and you said, “I hope this can make you more influential instead of just influential.” And I thought that was a key word, the word more because it assumed that I already was influential.

Robert: Yes, and it was true. I know you are influential. I know you are. So this was a way to provide something honest as a compliment.

Shane: I appreciated that. I love trying to integrate these into what we’re doing to make small changes that have a big result. I’m curious as to what you think we should call this episode in order to get the most people to listen to it.

Robert: I like what you just said. It’s the title of a book I once wrote in coordination with two other people who were actually first and second authors, I was third author called The Small Big. What are the smallest things you can do to change your approach to influence that will produce the largest impact on your success? If you want to call this episode explorations of the small bigs, the smallest things you can do that will produce the biggest impact on your persuasive success, something like that, and something wordsmith, better than what I just said, that would cause a lot of people to buy in.

Because what that means is that you’re going to get a lot of return on investment from this. There’s very small things that you have to put into the situation that will produce the biggest return on your investment. Not a financial investment, an investment of time or energy. You change that one word from feedback to advice or from progress to commitment and you get these effects, or you say, “I’m sure you would have done the same for me.” It’s costless, but you just have to know how to do it and then you get big rewards.
Or you change it and you say, “We’ve got a deal,” instead of, “all you have to do is this and then you’ll get a deal.” You’re just changing... One more breath is costless

**Shane:** And last question. I always ask this because I’m so curious how people think about this. What do you want to be remembered for after you’re gone?

**Robert:** I think important to me is that I’ve made a contribution in informing people about the influence process that is working on them all the time that they need to be cognizant of in order to optimize their outcomes, both as someone who’s receiving those influence attempts, but also as someone who is harnessing that process and those principles, and the key would be my insistence that we do that ethically. That’s what I’d like to be remembered for. It’s not just somebody who has figured out the technology of social influence, but there’s an ethical component to it that I insist on and I give reasons for why that’s the case, self-interested reasons actually besides just the moral reasons, that combination of things, ethical and effective.

**Shane:** That’s beautiful. And you’ve already influenced millions and millions of people so I thank you so much for your work.

**Robert:** Well, thank you for saying so, I appreciate hearing that.
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