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The Five Key Principles of Influence¹—Part 2

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No matter what you do, you are in sales in some way. The words “sales” or “selling” bring up negative connotations for many people. It may be helpful to think of it as “influence.” Whether you’re a sales professional, coach, consultant or executive, there are key stakeholders in your world you need to influence.

To persuade successfully and non-manipulatively, it’s important to understand **five key principles of influence**. We covered the first two principles in the November 2015 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.² Let’s look at Principle #3 now.

PRINCIPLE #3 IMMEDIATE PAIN/PLEASURE IS A STRONGER MOTIVATIONAL FORCE THAN FUTURE PAIN/ PLEASURE

This principle is why so many fail at dieting. The delight of having chocolate cake now outweighs the consequences that show

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up on the scale later. Alternatively, the pain of giving up that cake now is a stronger force than the satisfaction of sticking with the diet and dropping unwanted pounds.

The vast majority of smokers stop smoking only after a serious heart attack or cancer diagnosis. Few stop for the promise of better health. Even though the health hazards of smoking are well-documented, the pleasure of taking another drag overrules.

So what does all this mean to you? This principle is important because **the solutions we offer our clients will involve future benefits and require some immediate pain in order to achieve them.**

For example, it may be desirable for your client to engage your product, service or idea. However, even though the future benefits are undoubtedly valuable, the cost (in terms of money, time and resources) to make these changes is *immediately painful*. Any change will involve pain, because it represents movement from the status quo. From the client’s perspective, it’s easier to keep things the way they are, even if they aren’t perfect.

Even the distraction of having to consider your proposal is painful. Your prospect already has too much to do. You’re competing for your prospect’s time and attention. So unless your idea provides instant benefits without having to change (or think) much, the odds of getting buy-in are stacked against you.

HOW DO YOU COUNTERACT THESE OBSTACLES?

One way is to bring the future pain into the present moment.

For example, Roger, a financial planner, lamented about how the lead time to get a client was *more than nine months from the first meeting*. Why did it take so long to get prospects to pull the trigger and start building their retirement assets?

It isn’t because Roger wasn’t excellent at what he did. His investment philosophies and strategies were rock-solid.

It also isn’t because Roger doesn’t have an engaging personality. He has excellent rapport skills, so he comes across as very likable.

LET’S LOOK AT THE PAIN–PLEASURE DYNAMICS

1. Roger was asking clients to part with their dollars. Even though they’re not spending the money, but rather investing it, they are still giving up immediate access to the cash. (*Immediate Pain*)
2. As a result of having less disposable income to spend now, the client can’t make certain purchases that are near and dear to his or her heart—like that 60-inch plasma TV. (*Immediate Pain*)
3. But Roger explains to his client about the accumulated wealth that will result from the compounding interest, dividends and fund growth. As good as it sounds, this wealth won’t be enjoyed for 25 years. (*Future Pleasure*)



answer. I became very present to the pain of how awful it would be if I outlived my savings—what would my wife and I do? I immediately increased my monthly funding level.

Influencers are skilled at helping people get associated with the pain of the status quo. Look at the pain–pleasure dynamics of what you are selling. Is there too much immediate pain and not enough future pleasure? How can you help your clients make better decisions by bringing the future pain of the status quo into the present moment?

In the next issue, we'll explore the fourth principle of influence.

If you want to learn more about strategies, skills and models actuaries can utilize to become more influential, you may want to read *The Influential Actuary* (<http://www.theinfluentialactuary.com>). ■



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4. In addition, for Roger to design and implement the financial plan, his potential client must fill out myriad paperwork consisting of risk profile surveys, applications and agreements. The client must also hunt for mounds of detailed personal and financial information to supply to Roger. You may think, “Shouldn’t they have this at their fingertips?” Maybe—but most do not. (*Immediate Pain*)

So it’s not hard to see why Roger feels he’s swimming upstream. For Roger’s client, the **pain** of implementing a plan was more immediate and, thus, *felt greater* than the pleasure of taking this step.

BRING FUTURE PAIN INTO THE PRESENT

One way to counteract this dynamic is to bring the future pain into the present. The human imagination is a powerful thing. When we imagine something vividly, the associated feelings occur in the present moment (even if the event we are dreaming about occurs far into the future). So as an influencer we need to become skilled at helping people future-pace the status quo. In other words, we need to *get them associated with what will happen in the future if the proposed action is not taken*.

My financial planner, George, applied these techniques with me. Although I was funding my financial plan better than the average person (which I know is not saying much), I was uncertain if it was enough.

George showed me a projection that illustrated the probability of me running out of money before age 90. I didn’t like that

ENDNOTES

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- ² Available online at www.SOA.org/LD.