



## Six Principles Influencing Human Behavior: Winning Friends and Influencing People

*“You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” - Dale Carnegie*

*“Invest in relationships” – ORC Fundamental #4*

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I recently met an engineering friend for a meal, and we discussed the challenges of initiating relationships in business development. We agreed that the initial introduction can be hard, but he shared with me a personal anecdote I found to be revealing.

He attended a conference, dressed in his favorite suit, went with plenty of business cards, and knew who would be there and with whom he wanted to meet. On his lapel, however, was a “Star Wars” pin his son gave him for his recent birthday. He soon realized while mingling with other attendees, that the Star Wars lapel pin subtly attracted attention and opened opportunities for conversation and commonality. He happily shared that, of the many attendees who commented on his pin, he was confident many would develop into viable business opportunities.

In business communications, and the business development process, we all seek that commonality or subtle signal that says we are “open for business.” Here are six scientifically evaluated and psychologically established principles to help us win friends and influence people.

**Reciprocation** – Humans are wired to give and take, or, more importantly, to take than give. Namely, if someone does us a favor, most of us will feel obligated to return the favor.

One practice that I, and many ORC project managers, regularly engage in is to share RFPs; particularly those that do not include a right of way component – with our engineering partners. When I come across an engineering-oriented RFP, I often forward it to my engineering friends and write a note saying, “Hey, I came across this RFP, and I thought of you. There is no right of way component, but the scope looks to be in your wheelhouse, so I thought I would pass it along.” An offer of goodwill may not translate into an opportunity to do business right away, but it sets into motion the reciprocal dynamic. Hopefully, my engineering friends will remember this gesture and do the same for ORC. Or, better yet, they will come

to ORC when they are pursuing a project with a land acquisition scope.

Even the simplest offering of goodwill, especially to a fellow “business developer,” will initiate this impulse for reciprocation and begin the reciprocal relationship.

**Scarcity** – We regard opportunities as more valuable when availability is limited. We tend to act more quickly/decisively when 1) value is established and 2) we have limited time to act.

- Communicated value and/or “sense of urgency” will elicit more prompt and favorable responses.

The right of way discipline is very specialized, and ORC is one of the largest, most knowledgeable, and most heavily resourced providers in the nation. In this respect, the services we offer our clients are extremely scarce. How do we communicate this scarcity to our clients? How can we ensure our clients best understand the resources we offer them? To best communicate what ORC truly represents to a prospective client may require at least a yeoman’s understanding of the resources in our catalog:

- Learn about our QA/QC process and the benefits it delivers to our clients.
- ORC has one of the most sophisticated GIS platforms and support teams in the industry. Understand how we can use it on projects that directly benefit a client.
- ORC Parcel Suite is a fantastic project management resource, especially on larger projects with complex scopes and aggressive schedules. Might it be the solution to a prospective client’s project management concerns?

**Authority** – People respect images of authority – or “uniforms.”

Most of us have plenty of clothing and accessories with the ORC logo. The company gives generous annual allowances for new branded gear. While ORC does not require employees to wear logo clothing as a uniform, the prevalence of “ORC blue” in our offices and at company events makes it seem as though we have adopted it as one.

Of course, it is always a great idea to coordinate our ORC “blues” (harkening back to my US Navy days) for formal events – conferences, business development outings, social events, presentations to clients, meetings with landowners and engineering partners. But how else might we apply an “ORC blue” uniform to our communications to effectively project this same air of “authority?”

From the communications perspective, well-written messages project more authority. Namely, how we craft and format our business communications becomes our “uniform” and reflects our “authority” as representatives of ORC to our clients, business partners, and colleagues in general.

- Use prescribed branding standards and templates for letters, proposals, and e-mail communications. Doing this will help maintain established standards, promote “consistency,” and, again, project the “authority” that comes with the ORC brand.
- As communicators, one of the challenges we face is becoming too engrossed in the composition of our messages. Oftentimes, we become so absorbed in them that it is difficult to read them clearly and/or impartially. To help overcome this challenge, be sure to have someone else review your business communications before you send them to your recipients (clients, engineering partners, colleagues). That “second set of eyes” will ensure your message is clear, well-written, organized, and “tone” appropriate. Fortunately, at ORC, this resource is readily available and easily accessed, thanks in part to our QA/QC department.

**Consistency/Commitment** – We want to believe in the correctness of a difficult choice once we have made it or we want to keep our thoughts and beliefs consistent with what we have already decided.

- When you want someone to do something for you, take a long-term approach; ask for a small commitment first to establish a precedent. Once this level of commitment is reached in the person's mind, they are more likely to agree to future/larger commitments.

Like the Reciprocation principle, the Consistency/Commitment principle can be developed with an initial gesture of goodwill; the sharing of a topical news article on LinkedIn, or the preemptive provision of necessary qualifications material when sharing an RFP with an engineering partner. How else might we establish the Consistency/Commitment principle, though? Consider some of ORC's Fundamentals, provided in The ORC Way:

- **Do the right thing, always** – Though this idea may seem commonsensical to most, it is still recognizable to most of us, when someone “does the right thing,” especially when we benefit from the “right” act. Doing the right thing will establish a sense of commitment to us from the parties who benefit from our choices/actions.
- **Create win-win solutions** – This concept not only allows both parties to “win,” it also establishes the “consistency” effect for those sitting across the table from us. When they accept a proposed solution from which they benefit, they adopt a decision-making approach that will compel them to accept future proposed solutions. Or, when prospective partners elect to work with us once, they are predisposed to agree to work with us in the future.
- **Show meaningful appreciation** – When we openly appreciate the contributions others make to help us achieve our goals, we ensure they are more likely to help us meet future goals. Namely, when someone naturally accepts our demonstration of appreciation, they again psychologically hardwire their inclination to help us achieve future goals.

Liking – We prefer working with someone we like or perceive as like us. This could be a subtle commonality like a shared hobby or a carefully crafted approach to a project, acknowledging local culture and priorities.

The story about the Star Wars lapel pin clearly illustrates this principle. The pin provided a subtle signal about the person's interests and personality. It revealed a possibility for common ground and sparked a conversation with new people. However, there are other subtle ways to identify shared interests and values. A little online research about someone can uncover potential opportunities to connect.

Social Proof/Consensus – People shape decisions based on others' opinions. Acknowledging popular decisions or emphasizing positive communal choices can build consensus.

If you have collaborated with me on proposals, you have seen me incorporate references and/or commendations within our proposed qualifications. We can offer this evidence of “consensus” – that other similar clients/partners have come to us for help – because we have accomplished two things:

- We have identified our best clients and confirmed their willingness to provide positive references for us.
- We have asked for (or otherwise secured) letters of reference that we can use to promote our qualifications with other clients.

So, there we have it, six scientifically evaluated, psychologically established, and super simple principles we can incorporate into our business communications and relationship-building/business development practices that will help us win friends and influence people – and grow our company, to boot.

**Concepts derived from the book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion (1984)* by Robert B. Cialdini Ph.D.**

