



Which messages spur citizens to protect the environment? The secret impact of social norms. Manifesto Challenge: Moving towards a zero waste society.

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NB

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Matthew Taylor: Just a word of thanks to our lecture team. Robert was only able to confirm he could join us last Friday and around 260 people have registered for this lecture which is a sign of your pulling power Robert but also of our intention here at the RSA to be even more ambitious and dynamic in our lecture programme. Indeed next Thursday will see the launch of a new lunchtime series focusing on topical issues while taking advantage of important figures passing through town and our speaker at our first Thursday will be Ronald Dworkin one of the world's leading political philosophers. So I hope you can join us there but without any further ado let me hand over the Robert Cialdini.

Robert Cialdini: Well thank you Matthew I'm very pleased to be here and looking forward to the chance to interact in a question and answer period after my remarks but to begin I'd like to describe something that I think is a characteristic of modern life and that is that this is the most information-overloaded stimulus-saturated environment that has ever existed on this planet and, as a consequence, on average individuals no longer have the capacity or the time or the resources to fully process and consider all of the various decisions they have to make in their decision-overloaded day. Instead they need shortcuts. They need "decisional heuristics" is the term that we use in the Social Sciences to make those decisions in an efficient and most of the time accurate way. My research has tried to focus on what those decisional shortcuts might be that spring people into assent when they encounter one or another of these factors in a communication or an informational array. What are the things that jump up and pull them toward assent.

As the slide on your screen shows you I want to talk about the science of this and I don't use the term science lightly. I will only conclude from the results of empirically conducted studies and rigorously-controlled research into the science of compliance. How it's possible to move people to comply with a request. Let me just suggest that this undertaking has more than a 50 year history

now of scientists of various sorts studying the persuasion process, studying the factors that move people toward 'Yes'. My own involvement I think notably in my career in this regard, involved a three-year study in which sought to try to learn from the inside of as many influencing professions as I could get access to what were the people whose business it is to get us to say yes systematically doing and what were they doing in parallel with one another? That is what were car sales people doing to get us to say yes? What were marketers doing to get us to say yes? What were advertising copywriters doing? What were fund-raisers doing? What were recruiters doing? What were lobbyists doing? And so on and across it all I looked for commonalities which were the principles of influence that were being employed in parallel across all of the range of professions dedicated to moving us toward yes and as I say I looked for the commonalities. What I was surprised to learn was that there were only six universal principles that I could find across this wide range of influence professions and practitioners. There were hundreds of individual tactics and practices but I thought the great majority of them could be categorised in terms of just six principles that motivate people into action. So the remainder of my remarks will have to do with each of those six principles and how they might be bent to the task of producing socially beneficial behaviour within our society.

So let's talk about what those principles are. There they are:

- Reciprocity
- Scarcity
- Authority
- Commitment & Consistency
- Consensus & Liking

Let's talk about the first one Reciprocation. People are more likely to take an action if it is in return for a previous gift, favour, service or concession that they have

received. In other words people say 'Yes' to those they owe. Because of a sense of obligation that has been installed in them from childhood by all of the agents of socialisation in our society. We are trained from childhood. You must not take without giving in return. You are obligated to give back to those who have given to you the form of behaviour that they have given to you. And this is not just true in our culture. It turns out if you read closely what the anthropologists and sociologists have said on the matter there is not a single human culture that does not subscribe to this rule. That's important for those of us who want to be able to influence a range of individuals sometimes across cultural boundaries, sometimes within our own national boundaries there are clearly sub-groups of individuals and it turns out that this rule for reciprocation will be effective across all of them.

Let's take an example or what the rule aligns itself in a genuine sense is the Golden Rule that says "Give unto others as you would have them give to you." Notice that the rule doesn't say "Give unto others as they have given to you." No. The rule admonishes to go first to take the first step. That's what produces the obligation to return what we have provided, acting first. Also notice that when we receive not only are we obliged to return. We dislike anyone who fails to play by those rules. We have very nasty names don't we for people who don't play by this rule. People who take without giving in return. In English we call them spongers or takers or ingrates or teenagers. No one would want to be labelled like that so we will go to great lengths to give back what we have received. Let me give you some evidence that this is the case from a study that was done on physicians who were asked to complete a rather burdensome survey by a pharmaceutical company. The company for one half of the physicians sent a promise of the £20 cheque saying "If you will fill out this survey we will send you £20" and let me show you what happened in terms of compliance, 66% of the physicians complied. However for another group of physicians the cheque was included in

the envelope. "Take this money we would appreciate if you filled out the survey." Now 78% of people replied. Now it's interesting that the rule works in this way such that there were 22% of the physicians who didn't fill out the survey but received the cheque. They didn't cash the cheque. They didn't cash the cheque. It wasn't an equal exchange. So what we have available to us in this regard is a very powerful rule that says if we act first to give people something of value to invest in them there will be a social obligation to give back to us and that's an important step to take.

The next principle that I want to talk about is the principle of Scarcity. People are likely to seize an opportunity to the extent that it is scarce, rare or dwindling in availability. A few years ago I was trying to travel from Heathrow to Manchester to give a lecture and I was caught in an enormous traffic jam that prevented me from making my appointment on time. It was a traffic jam that was entirely unexpected when 300,000 more drivers got on the M4 and started circling Heathrow one afternoon. Does anybody know what could have happened that afternoon at Heathrow that would cause this? Anybody have a suggestion? Exactly right it was the last landing of the Concorde. Something that had happened twice a day for many, many years and it wasn't of interest until it was the last one, until it was a scarce, dwindling opportunity and then it acquired value. What's the implication? Well the implication is if we have ideas or proposals or programmes that have unique or uncommon features we would be fools of the influence process if we did not raise those uncommon and unique features to the consciousness of our audience who want to seize those things that otherwise they can't have before we try to influence in our direction. Let me give you an example of one implication of this that has to do with the ultimate form of scarcity. It's loss. When we've lost something it is entirely gone. It is the ultimately form of scarcity and as a consequence it becomes possible to phrase our messages not just in terms of what our audience would stand to gain if they

moved in the direction we were recommending but as well what they stand to lose if they fail to move in the direction that we are suggesting. Research has suggested in fact that the idea of loss mobilises individuals into action to a greater extent than the idea of gaining the same thing. I'll give you an example from a study that was done at the University of California in the United States. Researchers went door to door offering home-owners an energy audit which would be to give the home-owner an assessment of all of the energy leaks and the places where weather-stripping and insulation could be installed to reduce the costs of energy in their home. At the end of the audit they were given a figure, let's say it was 50 cents and they were told "If you will insulate your home fully you will save, you will gain 50 cents a day every day." That was for half of the home-owners. The other half were told, "If you fail to insulate your home fully you will lose 50 cents a day, every day," and 150% more people insulated their home under a loss language than a gain language. It was the same 50 cents. It was the same 50 cents. The merits of what was being offered economically were the same but not psychologically because loss is more impactful psychologically than gain.

Well what are the implications then? When we genuinely have unique or uncommon features about the ideas that we are presenting or the resources in the environment that are limited we are entitled, it seems to me, to honestly describe to people what stands to be lost if certain steps are not taken. That is a piece of information that will be powerful and, it seems to me, will be in the best interests of all concerned.

The next principle for us to consider is the principle of Authority. It says that people will be more likely to follow our recommendation if it comes from a legitimately constituted expert. There's a particular kind of authority communicator that researchers have identified around the world as the most powerful authority communicator that has ever been uncovered and that is the credible authority. The credible authority has two components. On the one hand there is

knowledge, expertise. On the other hand there is trustworthiness and unless both of those are in place the persuasion is not optimal.

So let's talk about each in turn in terms of a study. The first has to do with a healthcare survey study that was undertaken by one of my colleagues, who consults with a healthcare organisation in the United States, that wanted its members to fill out a rather burdensome form in which they were to indicate a number of things about their health status and behavioural traits and so on and he looked at the information including the cover letter which was signed as follows - From Your Healthcare Team. He had them change one thing. He had the cover letter signed by the Medical Director of the facility and he's rolled this comparison out several times now and he's found there has never been less than a 17% increase in return of the survey when the Medical Director was the author of the cover letter. Sometimes it's been as much as 36% increase. So here was an instance of something that was similar to an event that has occurred to me. I do some consulting some pro bono work for a local hospital where they have a problem with stroke patients doing their home exercise regimens. After they've left the hospital they are given a series of exercises to do at home and they weren't doing them. The hospital administrators asked us to come and help and enquire why weren't these individuals doing these exercises? They knew they were good for them. We asked them and they said "Well you know we know about the credentials and the expertise and the levels of authority of our physicians. We know about medical school. We know about internships and residencies. They have these diplomas on the wall with all of their credentials and so on but the individuals who were asking us to do the exercise programme were the physical therapy staff and we didn't have any sense of their expertise." Well it turned out that they were a highly credentialed team of professionals and we just asked them to put all of their diplomas, all of their awards, all of their certifications on the walls of the

exercise lab and exercise compliance, adherence increased by 33% immediately.

Now what's interesting to me is not that we've provided another demonstration of how expertise moves people. It's that that expertise was there all along. It was submerged. The mistake was failing to bring it to the consciousness of the individuals who could profit from that particular shortcut for making a decision, to follow the lead of a legitimately constituted expert. So what we need to do is to be sure that we in our messages honestly and fully credentialise the people who are making the appeal before we can expect optimal influence in return. So that's the expertise component.

What about the second of these components Trustworthiness? This is a little more tricky. The perception of trustworthiness is the view of one's audience that this expert information they are receiving from the authority communicator is offered in a straightforward, honest, unbiased way. The source of the information is not trying to serve his or her own interests but is trying to accurately depict reality for the recipient of the information. How do you generate that in an audience? Well here's what we're typically told. You work with people and if you are altogether honest and forthright eventually what evolves, in the eyes of your audience, is a perception of you as a credible source of information and I think that's absolutely true. But what if you don't have time to do that? What if you're interacting with someone for the first time? Someone who doesn't have a history with you doesn't know that you have this inherent trustworthiness. Is there anything you can do under those circumstances to raise this honest perception of trustworthiness to consciousness?

It turns out there is one strategy that works very well. It is to mention a weakness or a drawback in the case that you are making before delivering the strongest element of the case that you are making. In mentioning a real downside you establish yourself as a credible source of information. Not only are you knowledgeable about the matters at hand. You

know about the favourable and the unfavourable features. You are perceived as trustworthy in delivering that information and what happens is that at that moment people listen differently to the next thing you say. They open their ears and they open their minds to the next thing you say.

So I'm writing a book right now that's called Moments of Power. The thesis of this book is that in the course of social interaction there are particular moments, particular windows of opportunity when if you make a request you provide a proposal, a recommendation, an appeal for change in that moment you will be more successful than if you let the moment pass or you jump too soon. Here's what I will claim. We are afforded a moment of power, of persuasive power immediately after we have admitted a weakness. That's the moment for our strongest argument right there. Now I want to be careful here to assure you that I'm not suggesting that if you want to change someone's opinion you walk into that person's office and say "Before we begin let me tell you all the things that are wrong with me and my ideas and my organisation." No that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying there is a propitious moment for your strongest argument. It is the moment after you admit a weakness right there, right there.

Now let me provide some evidence that this might be the case from a study that was done to investigate the effect of letters of recommendation for candidates for managerial jobs at a large-scale corporations. A researcher decided to send to Fortune 500 around the United States letters to support an application from a candidate for a managerial position. In one half of the cases he sent letters that were uniformly positive, only favourable, just singing the praises of this individual. In the other half of the letters he mentioned a weakness in the candidate and then launched into a crescendo of praise. The letters with the flaw produced significantly more requests for an interview than the letters that had no flaw assigned to the candidate. Now that can't be true if it were

the case that these corporations wanted a manager who had a flaw. No. The only way it could have occurred was if the flaw caused the source of the information, the source of the positive information, to be more deeply processed and believed. So for us every recommendation, every proposal, every programme has strengths and weaknesses. The human thing, very understandable, the human thing is to front-load our messaging with all of the positive especially the strongest features to get people leaning in our direction. Then in order to be honest of course we have to tell them about the drawbacks. That's a very human response and it turns out to be wrongheaded. We think that we will create credibility in the eyes of our audience by the dint of our argument and that's naïve. Our audience doesn't necessarily believe the strongest arguments that we make until we have demonstrated that we are credible sources of information and that those arguments are coming from someone who is indeed expert and trustworthy. So I think this is one strategy that we should not fumble away as an opportunity to honestly inform people of our trustworthiness before we present our strongest argument.

Okay the next principle for us to consider is the principle of Consistency. People will be more willing to undertake an activity if they see it as congruent with what they have already said or done. What they've already said or done is what we can call a commitment and what's interesting is how small those initial commitments that people make can be to still reach into the future and hold them congruent hold them consistent with what they have already committed to.

Let me give you a couple of examples. One has to do with the study of a problem that faces restaurateurs, which is no-shows, people who call book a table and then don't appear to honour their reservation and don't call to cancel - big problem for a lot of restaurant owners. There's a particular restaurant owner in Chicago named Gordon Sinclair who has figured out a way to significantly reduce the percentage of no-shows

at his restaurant by having his receptionist change two words in what she says when someone calls to book a table. Previously she said "Please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation." You've heard that kind of thing many times. Now she said, "Will you please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation?" and she is instructed to pause. What if I said to you "Will you please call if you have to change or cancel your reservation?" What would you say in the moment after that pause. How would you fill that moment? "Yes of course glad to," and that's the commitment and no-show at that restaurant have dropped from 30% to 10% as a consequence of those two words. That's what I like about the persuasion process. We can move people in powerful ways costlessly by changing two words in a presentation that resonate with powerful psychological tendencies inside those individuals they are likely to respond without having to incentivize them or bribe them or provide financial or various kinds of coercive reasons for them to move in a particular direction. This also applies to voter turnout. You know voter apathy is a big problem. There was a study done in which researchers called registered voters on the week before an upcoming election and asked them "Do you intend to vote next week?" To a one they said "Yes I do." Then the researchers assessed the percentage of registered voters who did actually appear at the polls to vote who had received that call versus had not received that call and those who had received the call were at the polls significantly more often than those who hadn't. So simply saying something as minor as "Yes this is something I want to do" strikes me as a way to create a commitment that will lead to long-term change.

I'm going to go on to the next principle which is the Liking principle and the evidence that people prefer to say "Yes" to those they like. I don't think there is anybody here who needs to have that evidence to believe that statement but let's take a look at the factors that do generate liking. Liking flows from positive connections, similarities.

We like the people who are like us. Compliments - we like the people who do like us and say so and co-operative effort. We like the people who, like us, have common goals who have similar goals and purposes and are co-operating together. There is a study here in the UK of negotiators and it was found that those negotiators who were nominated by their peers as the most effective negotiators in the discipline, spent 400% more time identifying common interests with their negotiation partner with their negotiation rival before launching into the negotiation. This is something we can do too. We can spend that time. Identify the interests that we share with the people we are trying to move in that direction identify those commonalities of purpose and then bring them in our direction as a consequence.

The final principle that I'd like to consider is the principle of Consensus sometimes called the Descriptive Social Norm of the situation the behaviour that defines what is typically done in a situation what is normal. People are likely to follow the lead of multiple comparable others so they want to follow the lead of many others. They want to follow the lead of similar others.

Here's some evidence that that's the case from an account, a true account that occurred here in London quite a few years ago in 1761. There was something mysterious happened that year. First of all there were a pair of moderate level earthquakes that occurred exactly one month apart February and March of 1761 that caused a soldier named Bell to begin predicting that one month later on April 5th there would be a massive earthquake that would level the city. He went around trying to convince various individuals of this alarmist prediction and mostly he was laughed at. No one took much heed of his prediction although a few people did and to take the proper precautions they packed up their families and possessions and left the city, which caused a few of their neighbours to do the same, which caused a few of their neighbours to do the same and within a week this exodus had produced a cascading wave of

panic and a mass exodus from the city so that people were streaming into the countryside paying exorbitant prices for any accommodation. When that designated day came and passed and there wasn't even a tremor the Londoners came back furious at Bell for having led them astray. Now here's the point I want to make about that story. I want to make two points. The first is the power of those around us to sweep us away. The second is that these individuals missed the cause of their action. It was not the crackpot Bell who was most influential in sending them away. It was the Londoners each to the other. It was their neighbours. It was many others like them that sent this populace into the countryside.

This is something that is true in general about this principle that I want to talk about the principle of Consensus the idea of the descriptive norm. People underestimate the power of social norms and it's true in two kinds of settings. First of all when, as observers, these people decide how to interpret the causes of their own actions and secondly, which I'll get to in a minute when, as tacticians, they decide how to influence the actions of others.

Let's take the first of these that people have a very poor understanding of the power of social norms over their behaviour, the actions of similar and multiple others. I was a participant in this study in California. We interviewed 800 Californians as to their beliefs regarding the reasons for the motivations for saving energy in the home and we gave them four different alternatives to rate because they would do it for reasons of environmental protection or reasons to benefit the society or to save money and finally one reason we gave them was because their neighbours might be doing. Is that a reason you would consider important and what you can see is that by far they rated environmental protection as the best and then the descriptive norm what their neighbours were doing as the least important in their decision. However when we then measured their actual energy saving

behaviour and correlated with the importance of each of these possible motives we found exactly the reverse pattern. It was the perception of how many of their neighbours were saving energy and to what extent that was most correlated with their actual behaviour. So you can see people do not understand or recognise completely the extent to which this principle works powerfully on them.

Now let's talk about the second way in which people underestimate the power of social norms and that is when, as tacticians, they decide how to influence the actions of others. It's a big mistake that public service communicators frequently make and that is to mobilise corrective action against a social problem that is growing larger. They often decry that problem as regrettably frequent - drinking and driving, teen suicide, tax fraud, teenage pregnancy, voter apathy and so on and I will claim, in so doing, normalise that behaviour in the eyes of the audience. It becomes more legitimate if a lot of people are doing it, so claims that teenage pregnancy is rampant or spiralling out of control, that drinking and driving is growing as a problem. On the one hand it's completely understandable why this claim would be made. The communicator wants to alert the populace to the severity of this problem and claim that we have to do something. At the same time within the statement "Look at all the people who are doing this undesirable thing" lurks the undercutting normative message "Look at all the people who are doing this thing this undesirable thing."

So let's see if there is some evidence in this regard. I live in the state of Arizona in the United States which houses the Petrified Forest National Park and the problem, the environmental problem, associated with the park is the theft of petrified wood and crystals from the forest floor by visitors who come to the park and pocket one or another of these artefacts. In fact when they approach the gate of the park they confront this message "Your heritage is being vandalised every day by theft losses of petrified wood at the rate of 14 tons

a year mostly a small piece at a time." I came on to this research area by the way because one of my graduate students who had come to work with me was driving from California and decided to visit the petrified forest with his fiancée who he describes, by the way, as the single most honest person he had ever met in his life. She had never borrowed a paperclip or a rubber band that she hadn't returned. He reports standing in front of this sign with his fiancée and before he had finished reading it he felt her elbow in his ribs and she whispered "We'd better get ours now." What could cause this otherwise entirely honest individual young woman to want to commit a crime, an environmental crime, that looted a national resource in the bargain? I'm going to claim that there was something very powerful in this message that would spur that kind of behaviour and it was the social norm that was activated that "Everyone is doing this."

Alright well that's a good speculation. What's the evidence for this? We did a study. We went to several paths, three paths that wound through the petrified forest and we placed signs in front of those paths that on the one hand simulated the kind of sign that we saw at the entrance. It admonished people against stealing the wood and it showed a depiction of three individuals who were stealing the wood with a red circle and bar across them. Now we salted the path with marked pieces of petrified wood so we knew what the consequences of passing that sign and winding through the park would be in terms of theft. Compare that to those same paths when there was no sign at the mouth of the path. Let me show you what happened in the first place when there was no sign there about 3% or 2.96% of visitors stole a piece of wood. When the sign that depicted three individuals doing so with the warning - "Don't do this because it undermines the integrity of the forest" - the sign tripled theft. So the sign didn't produce crime reduction it generated crime production by spurring people into action. Now at the same time we included another type of sign. This one was designed not to

normalise the undesirable behaviour but to marginalise it. To show a lone thief despoiling the environment with the claim that if even one person steals it undermines the integrity of the forest. It halved theft.

Okay by the way this is not unique to this data set in the United States for example that when the Internal Revenue Service, the Tax Office announced very publicly that because so many taxpayers were cheating on their taxes that the penalties for tax fraud were going to be increased substantially, tax cheating went up the next year. The message is "This is what your neighbours are doing." We need to be sure that we avoid this kind of error. Now if this principle works as powerfully as we've seen it work in spurring people in the wrong direction can we arrange to get it to work in our favour? The answer I think is definitely yes. In those situations where the majority of people are practicing pro-social behaviour where they are taking care of the environment, where they are behaving in socially desirable ways, we need to make that available to audiences so that that behaviour will be seen as the desirable one. Let me give you an example of how we tested that in a study not long ago. As I suggested I live in the Phoenix Arizona area. It's a place with a lot of hotels because it has a very warm climate. We get a lot of visitors. We have a lot of conventions and conferences. So we decided to do a study in the hotels of Phoenix regarding a certain behaviour that is requested of visitors in these hotels and a large percentage of the cases if you've travelled recently you have been asked to perform this behaviour because somewhere in the room where you are staying there is a small card that asks you to reuse your towels and linens. Now here's the question. I'm a persuasion researcher. Here's the question. What should we say optimally on that card to spur people to take that desired step? What could we say? We have a very limited opportunity. If we get a flicker of attention for a few lines of information that's all we have. What could we say that would lead people to take the correct step from our perspective? Well I tell you what the hotel managers typically do, they make one

of two kinds of appeal. One appeal is to environmental protection. Do this to preserve natural resources. Do this to protect the environment, that kind of appeal that's almost universal in these signs. The second is something that's growing these days it's environmental co-operation. Co-operate with us toward this common goal and, in keeping with something that's called Social Cause Marketing. Visitors, guests are sometimes told that if you will recycle your towels we will send a portion of the savings at the end of the year to an environmentally relevant cause. We did a study. We took signage of this sort. Put it randomly in various hotel rooms and we were in league with the room attendant so we knew whether people actually hung up their towel on the rack, as the sign requested. Now the sign this is the typical sign you can see what it looks like there "Help Save the Environment." On the back of the sign was information about how much would be saved in terms of water and oil and detergent and so on all the environmentally positive consequences. That was for one kind of sign. It said this "Help Save the Environment. It deserves our respect. You can show that respect for nature by helping to save the environment in this way." The other sign was focused on the rule for Reciprocation that we were talking about. Partner with us and if you will do this we will give you this benefit. We will give you this incentive. Join us in this process. We will send a portion of the savings to an environmentally relevant cause.

Let me show you what happened. Environmental focus about 38% of the people did recycle their towels and by the way I should say that we only looked at the recycling of the towels on the first day rather than the whole time that the individual was there and we only looked at individuals who were alone. We didn't want to have more than one person in a room because somebody might read the sign and then somebody else might put up the towels. So it had to be people alone so what we're getting is a lower percentage of towels than is typically the case. Typically more people than

this will recycle but we had some limitations. None the less let's take a look at what happened in the reciprocation focus condition. This is the one where people are told "If you will do this we will give a proportion of the savings to an environmental cause." No influence at all. No successful change at all and that's a notable aspect of the data and I would ask why. Why do you think that would be the case that this kind of appeal would have no significant impact? Any ideas that people might want to venture? Yes.

Unidentified Speaker: Because they don't trust them.

Robert Cialdini: Because they don't trust them to do it. That may be one. Yes.

Unidentified Speaker: The appeal's the wrong way round.

Robert Cialdini: The appeal is the wrong way around and I think that is precisely what we suggested. There is no sense of social obligation to co-operate with someone who offers you something provided you perform that favour first. That's a commercial exchange, that's not the spirit for the rule for reciprocation which says "You must act first. You must go first to create a social obligation." There is such an obligation embodied however in the rule for reciprocation so we in fact did have a third kind of sign one that did embody the rule by saying "We have already donated a proportion of the projected savings to an environmentally relevant cause. Can you join us in this endeavour. Can we count on you. If you would like to help us in covering the expense while also conserving natural resources please re-use your towels during your stay." Now this was the essence of the rule for reciprocation and indeed we produced a significantly greater percentage. Okay.

Now one more thing to consider and that is this rule for Consensus the descriptive norm. I've just suggested to you that we should be able to harness it by honestly telling people that the majority of individuals who stay at this hotel do indeed recycle and what we have found is that the evidence is about 75% of people will recycle their towels some time

during their stay. So we included that kind of sign that said "Join your fellow guests in helping to save the environment. Almost 75% participate." Join - not join us - join your fellow guests and again we get a significantly enhanced effect.

Now one more thing to say about this study could there be an even more impactful message we could send to guests, knowing what we know about the Consensus principle about the descriptive norm that says that we follow the lead not just of many others all the other people who've stayed at this hotel but similar others. So we changed one word in the sign that I just described to you the one that said that the majority of guests who have stayed in this hotel have decided to recycle. In order to make the situation more similar to the audience member we were trying to influence. Any idea how we could do that with one word? In this room. The majority of guests who have stayed in this room have recycled and by the way we said on the basis of a study that was completed last year we know that the majority of guests. So it wasn't that we were watching them right. A study that was completed last year the majority of guests who stayed in this room recycled their towels and now we get the most similarity, similarity, similarity. I think it's worth taking the lesson from our marketing colleagues who tell us we have to segment our audiences in order to have communications that will be most likely to resonate with them.

The same applies to public service. Not all groups are going to be the same. Not all individuals will have the same set of norms so we have to have a spokesperson who is most comparable to, most similar to the individual we want to influence in sending that message. That's the one that will be most successful the one whose circumstances are most similar to the individual that we want to move in our direction.

Two other notable aspects of these data; on the one hand the condition that was most successful, that last one, was one we have never, ever seen employed by any hotel

management and we've looked at these signs. We've got signs from Istanbul. We've got signs from Bogota. We've got signs from Helsinki. We've got signs from London. We've got signs from San Francisco. We've got signs from Disneyworld. No one has ever used this message even though it was by far the one that outstripped the typical message.

Secondly it was entirely costless to use that message. This tells me something about the importance of employing science and the evidence from rigorously conducted scientific research in determining how we develop our programmes and our communications surrounding those programmes.

Best practices, well let's take this by way of conclusion, often decision-makers focus too much on financial and economic factors when trying to motivate others. They'd be well advised as well to consider what is known about social psychological factors such as those that are reviewed here and best practices only uncover what is known inside an organisation or an industry. The critical thing is to be able to go outside of that context in which we are working to see what insights can be learned from traditions and knowledge bases that are more diverse than the ones in which we are currently working.

Now I think that's probably all the time I have for my prepared remarks but I'd be glad to answer questions in a few minutes, that you may want me to address regarding this. Yes there's a hand.

Jim Kennedy: I think you've already answered my question under your third persuasion principle 3.b I think it was Trustworthiness with relation to climate change but I'd appreciate your specifying and I may not have it right. As one knows within the scientific community there are some who have expressed doubt about the very existence of reality of climate change how would you propose to strengthen your argument, presumably in favour of climate change, in the face of such deniers?

Robert Cialdini: Yes and I would use that let me say it this way the strongest

argument that we have in favour of climate change is that the great majority of scientists do perceive that this is a real and palpable problem. What I would do is to say "Of course there are a few individuals who don't subscribe to this view but the great majority of respected and renowned scientists believe precisely that it is the case." So you give that weakness. You pivot on the word but and then you deliver your strong argument. I have a friend who is a psycho-linguist who said "Do you know what the word but signifies in the English language? It tells people take the information I have just given you put it away and focus on the next thing I'm about to say. That means that our strongest argument has to go immediately after the word but, not before." Let me just give you an example and then I would like to hear from Matthew but there is a man in the United States right now a very famous man William Ford, a former CEO of the Ford Motor Company and the Ford Motor Company is in big trouble with the financial community. Its stock price is dropping. Its bond ratings are dropping and they have delegated Mr Ford to go around and convince the financial community of the viability of Ford's new plan called The Way Forward to re-establish their financial strength and I heard him speaking on a conference call to a variety of members of the financial press and the financial community and this is what he said "I feel very good about our plan but we have a long way to go." Bill, Bill, who's your speechwriter? What should he have said Jim? The reverse exactly. "We have a long way to go but I feel very good about our plan." Can you feel the difference? And he didn't and this is William Ford. So these are things that people make mistakes in employing all the time. We don't have to do that. I'm not even asking you to change the words now. I'm just asking you to change the sequence of the words to produce this kind of impact. So I think I'll be glad to address other questions in a minute.

Matthew Taylor: By the way, I should say that when Robert spoke to a group of politicians in Number 10 the one

thing he said that they found hardest to cope with was the idea of apologising first. And Robert I want you to tell me whether this works because I've been working very hard this week. We have some time for questions. I want to speak but I'm volunteering to go last. Time is scarce so I know your questions will be to the point because that's what most people do and because I'm telling you because I'm the Chief Executive and I'm nice and I like you. Will you keep your questions brief? Was that okay?

Robert Cialdini: I'm entirely compelled.

Brian Muir (Fellow): Just a very quick one on a problem that we've got at the moment which is obesity in children and schools. My child goes to the Jamie Oliver school in Greenwich. Now since they've introduced the healthy food and I am a psychologist and I quickly did some tests on their perception of health foods once he'd been in and they absolutely hate them now. What would you do to change those type of interferences from the government in schools in terms of making children like healthy food rather than forcing it upon them?

Amelia Congrey (ECL): The Environment Movement in Britain has realised it's not getting very far urging people to turn off their kettles or their lights saying they'll save a whole nuclear power station by doing so, and one of the ways it's thinking of moving on in Britain is trying to appeal more to people's feelings, so looking at the positive lifestyle benefits of adopting environmentally positive behaviour. But listening to your presentation one of the things you mentioned that did seem quite a motivating fact was about loss perhaps more negative aspects and given that would urging positive lifestyle choices --- how would that actually be effective that being green is cool or trendy or fun?

Rupert Harrison: There's a debate in this country about using taxes to influence people's activity particularly on the environment. Does your work suggest that there's a difference between sticks and

carrots? Is there an asymmetry or do people respond differently even if the monetary implications are the same?

Robert Cialdini: Yes well let's take the questions in order. First to do with government interventions and attempts to institutionalise certain kinds of behaviours that are likely to be beneficial that can then backfire as a consequence. I think your question was how can we get government to back away from this kind of strategy?

Brian Muir: No the outcome in the terms of the children's perception was very dangerously that they disliked the label of 'healthy' once it had been foisted upon them. I was just wondering what strategy you would actually use?

Matthew Taylor: Robert I'll give you a bit of context there. What happened was there was a big campaign and a big television programme about school food being terrible and as a consequence schools introduced better, healthier food following this big public discussion. And what has now been found is that kids are not eating this healthy food that's being given to them despite this huge haroosh (sic) that went along with the campaign and this is what I think the question is about.

Robert Cialdini: Then I think the initial campaign should have come not from authority figures but from kids who were on board with the idea of healthy food who enjoyed it and saw the positive effects. So the initial programme should have been endorsed by those individuals who were most similar to the target group rather than a group of physicians or nutritionists or government officials to provide that information.

The second question had to do with positive lifestyle changes and how do we fit in the evidence of what stands to be lost when indeed what we want to stress to people is that there are some very positive features of pro-social activity and I don't think that those are incompatible. It would be possible to say that these positive aspects stand to be lost if we fail to undertake the behaviour. I'm not

suggesting that we speak in harsh or coercive terms in terms of loss that we try to scare people into it. We simply say that these positive features it's not enough to say that they will be obtained they will be secured. It's just as important and in some cases more impactful to say that those positive features will be lost to us and that has considerable evidence to suggest will be even more impactful but I wouldn't suggest that you use only the negative what stands to be lost, we should also describe what stands to be gained but not to forget to use what stands to be lost. This is the thing that we are often told "Only be positive. Just give the positive side." That's the mistake to fail to include the power of loss language as well as what stands to be gained.

Matthew Taylor: Carrots or sticks?

Robert Cialdini: Carrots or sticks and I'm going to come down on the side of carrots for reasons having to do with something that I didn't talk about at this point but has a good history in the literature of social science and that is that people resent being forced or pressed or coerced into something and sticks are more coercive than carrots. So what we get is a backfire, a backlash effect as a consequence of these kinds of techniques that focus on penalties more than inducements.

Unidentified Speaker: Just to pick up on what you said about loss, if people perceive losses more than they perceive gains then surely you would be more in favour of sticks than carrots?

Robert Cialdini: No I think the key to what I'm suggesting is that we can present the carrot and say this is the positive side of what will occur however if you don't choose to participate in the programme that will be lost to you.

Jan Olden (pro-social Charitable Organisation): First of all I want to thank you for being here. I'm so inspired to listen to you speak I really want to thank you for just coming to talk to us and my question is what I remember most from your book is that when you talked about social proof you talked about

the influence of the newspapers and the media in terms of when suicide was reported and there was a direct correlation between that and then the suicide rate in that community and it stuck with me because it illustrated the power and responsibility of people who are the editors of our newspapers and my question is how can we cause the editors of the newspapers, that everybody reads, to talk about things that would encourage positive action rather than giving the impression that what everybody's doing in society is the negative things?

Robert Cialdini: Okay I'd love to answer that immediately and it has to do I think with some evidence that when television programmes focus on the alarming rate of teen suicide and the contagious nature of it and the extent to which teens will follow one another in these self-destructive ways, they present a disproportionate sample of the population of teens who actually do this and this unfortunately creates the mis-impression that this is more normative than it actually is. So my recommendation now we're not going to get the media to back away from important issues like suicide those are newsworthy issues and I wouldn't ask them to censor themselves but what I would say is that in such a programme it would be responsible to present, not just the instances in which someone does choose to commit suicide, but to interview a lot of teens in addition who have decided that that is not what they want to do. That this is something that doesn't make sense for them. That it's not an appropriate thing and now we've presented the evidence at the level at which it is likely to occur, the instances in which it's likely to occur, that would be it seems to me a balanced perspective on this and if Matthew doesn't mind let me suggest that I will show you something that tries to make this very point in some public service announcements that we have developed to try to get people to recycle. Would you mind if we did that?

There is in the United States a public service announcement that is renowned in

the environmental community as the one that is most credited with bringing the issue of environmental protection to the consciousness of the American public and this was a public service announcement that was developed back in the 70s and was played in the 80s and 90s with great frequency and it has to do with a particular scene in which a stately buckskin-clad American Indian responds to the extent to which the environment around him is littered. Let me show you this.

(video plays)

Robert Cialdini: Alright “the Indian that cried”. A very touching piece of public service advertising. We have evidence however from our own littering studies to suggest that there are elements of this depiction that are not only less than optimal they are actually counterproductive. If you notice the depiction is that somebody litters into an already littered environment. In our research we found that that is the single set of circumstances that produces the most littering in observers because we are enhancing the norm. What we suggested and in fact it’s not even true. The great, great majority of Americans do not litter. The great, great majority of people do care about the environment. This ad miscommunicates the relative percentages. We developed a public service announcement ad ourselves that tries to reverse this by honestly depicting the extent to which, in this case recycling, is widely performed in the communities in which were presenting this ad and is widely approved and once again that there is one individual a marginalised individual who doesn’t recycle and is widely disapproved for it. So let me show you that ad which we think is going to be more successful than the other.

(video plays)

Robert Cialdini: I can tell you that we did an experiment where we played this ad and two very much like it in several Arizona communities and compared it against recycling in several control communities that did not get the ad and this ad produced a 25.4% increase in recycling tonnage in those communities and I

don’t know if you know anything about public services announcements but that’s unheard of. That’s unheard of. The most successful public service announcement gets 1 - 2% deflection in behaviour and this got 25% and it certainly isn’t because of the production values that we had, it’s because it was based on science. It was based on evidence rather than production values. So the point I think in response is that we can create messages that accurately depict the proportion of people who are behaving in pro-social ways without decrying the extent to which those who do it are causing the problems. What we can do is to say "If even one person litters the environment it spoils the character of the environment. If even one person fails to vote it undermines the participatory character of our society. If even one person drinks and drives it puts all of us at risk." This doesn’t reduce the severity of the problem but it reduces the perception that it’s widespread and therefore legitimate and normative.

Matthew Taylor: I’m incredibly sorry but I did promise that we would finish at 8 and I promised myself that I’d say something at the end so I’m really going to deliver on that promise to myself. What I’m going to say briefly is very early thinking but we think it could be quite important. We want to do a project here at the RSA around this whole area of pro-social behaviour and pro-social norms and the reason we want to do this is because the RSA’s an enlightenment organisation. We’re committed to progress and we’re committed to removing the barriers to progress and I think the conclusion we’ve come to is that a failure to attend to how to shape social norms is now a growing barrier to progress and our reasoning follows in this way. Firstly if we’re going to achieve the social objectives which we share - environmental sustainability, better use of public services, enjoying living together in diverse communities, democratic participation, then citizens will have to step up to the plate. Secondly, that there are three proximate causes of behaviour. There’s compulsion and hard incentives tax and rules. There’s individual goodness, which is

randomly distributed and in the middle there are the social norms which lead us to behave in a particular way without thinking about it because we have internalised it. And it is that area of social norms which we think least about even though its power may be greater in many cases than the other two. The third part of the argument, which is why it's been so fantastic to have Robert here tonight, is to explain to people that you can shape social norms. They don't just land from the sky. They are a shape. They can be observed. They can be measured in the specific and very concrete ways that Robert has described but also at a macro-social level. Think of the way in which in the last 20 years our attitude to gay and lesbian people has changed. I remember in 1983 it was enough to say that a candidate in the Bermondsey bi-election could be gay for him to lose. Just think how massive that benign shift has been. Now we need to understand what's driven that. Conversely, think of the way in which the relationship between adults and older children and teenagers in terms of adults' feeling of confidence about talking to and intervening when they believe older children are behaving badly. So those two macro-social trends one very positive, one very negative, that have taken place and we haven't really thought about why they have happened. What we can learn from the first and how we can change the second. And then the fourth part of why we think this is important, and this I guess goes back to the fact that I have spent the last three years in government, is that we think that policy makers need to attend to social norms for some very important reasons. The first is this, Mark Twain said, famously, that to a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail and the problem about government is that government has taxes and it has laws and it has regulations and so everything looks like something you should hit with a tax or a law or regulation. If politicians understood more the power of social norms they'd be less tempted to use laws, regulations and taxes when they're not appropriate and they don't work. Secondly those sorts of hard incentives like taxes and laws work much better if they go with the grain of social norms. That's what

you've seen with drink driving and seatbelts and we haven't seen with dangerous dogs. So if politicians were better able to wrap their hard incentives around social norms they'd be much more likely to succeed. Thirdly, and slightly more specifically in a British context, we face an ever tighter fiscal framework for public services and it's absolutely obvious that if we're going to get better value from public services without spending a great deal more on them, we're going to have to develop the role of parents as partners, patients as partners, neighbourhoods in fighting crime. Some public servants are very good at that, some are desperately bad at it, and we need to shape new behaviours that will promote citizens as co-producers. Finally and perhaps the most grand point here is that we want to look at this project because overall we think what we need to do desperately in this country when we're talking about social change is to move from what I would call a government-centric conversation which says "What should the government do about it?" to a citizen-centric conversation which starts with "What do we want and what are we willing to do with it?" We've talked about teenagers tonight and I was saying at an event I was with Robert at this afternoon that citizens' attitude to government is rather like teenagers' attitude towards their parents. It's a bizarre combination of omnipotence and incompetence. My 13 year old thinks that I can do everything but that I'm useless at everything. So I'm responsible for everything that goes wrong in his life but he thinks I'm rubbish and that's how citizens feel about government and that's partly as a consequence of this government-centric conversation and the missing out of the way in which social norms can help governments do the right thing.

So we think in summary and this is a small claim that it is time for a revolution - a social behaviour revolution and we want to undertake a big project at the RSA over the next few years looking at that everywhere from having brilliant speakers, like Robert, right through to going into particular

neighbourhoods and working with particular groups of citizens and talking to them about what sort of things they'd be willing to do and how we might shape those norms. Now I'll be making a speech here on the morning of February 7th when I'll be speaking at slightly greater length about this idea. So I hope you'll be able to join me then but when I do make that speech I'll be making lots of references to the brilliant work of Robert Cialdini and we're absolutely delighted that you have come here tonight. And I said to you at the beginning of the evening that you would rush out of here and that you wouldn't be able to wait to be able to tell your friends and other people about what you've heard tonight. Is that true?

Audience: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: Okay, Robert. Thank you.