

# How Easily Can You Be Sold?

MINDing theMIND™

By Michael Wiederman, PhD

[www.mindingthemind.com](http://www.mindingthemind.com)

Have you experienced this sales tactic? You receive mail containing address labels, or some other small gift. After reading the enclosed letter you learn that the charitable organization who sent you the unordered gift is also asking for a donation. Surprise!

Psychologists refer to this as taking advantage of the “reciprocity norm.” If you do something for me, I should feel obliged to do something for you. By giving you a gift, the hope is that you’ll feel more obliged to contribute.

Another sales classic is the “foot-in-the-door technique.” Here the object is to get you to agree to a small request, or series of them. This makes it more likely you’ll agree to a larger request.

“Honey, since you’re going into the kitchen, could you bring me back a beer?” You reply, “Sure, Sweetie.” Then your significant other adds, “And could you make me a sandwich too?” You’re more likely to agree to making the sandwich now than had Sweetie started with that request.

The flip side is the “face-in-the-door technique.” You’re asked for something

large (you’ll probably say no), and then asked for something smaller.

“Honey, would you whip up a batch of lasagna? No? Well, how about a sandwich then?” By comparison, the smaller request doesn’t seem as bad.

How about social modeling? We’re more likely to comply with a request if we see that others have. We model their behavior.

You know those tip jars on bars and deli counters? Savvy servers know to put dollar bills in the bottom of the jar at the start of the shift. This way, when the first customers come upon the jar, the bills inside imply that others have tipped, and these customers should too.

Let’s see how several of these sales techniques are typically combined. You hear a knock at the door. It’s a clean-cut young man who hands you a pamphlet. By taking it, you’ve said “yes” to his initial request (foot-in-the-door technique).

He asks whether you support environmental conservation. Who doesn’t? So, when you respond, “Sure,” he asks if you’d be willing to sign a petition for greater governmental

support of environmental conservation. You agree and sign the form (again the foot-in-the-door technique).

You hand back the clipboard and he says, “As you can see from the list of signatures, many of your neighbors support this cause and they have contributed financially to save our great national resources” (social modeling). “Would you be able to contribute \$50 to our conservation fund?”

He expects you to decline, so the young man follows with, “Well would you at least be able to contribute \$10 today?” By comparison, the request for \$10 doesn’t sound so bad (door-in-the-face technique).

Plus, you might be feeling a bit obliged given that supposedly your neighbors have contributed (social modeling) and you did receive something first (reciprocity norm)—even if it was just a pamphlet.

These sales tactics may seem subtle, and they are. They won’t make everyone into a contributor or a customer. But they do have an effect.

Now you can watch for these techniques as others try to persuade you. Or, better yet, practice them yourself.