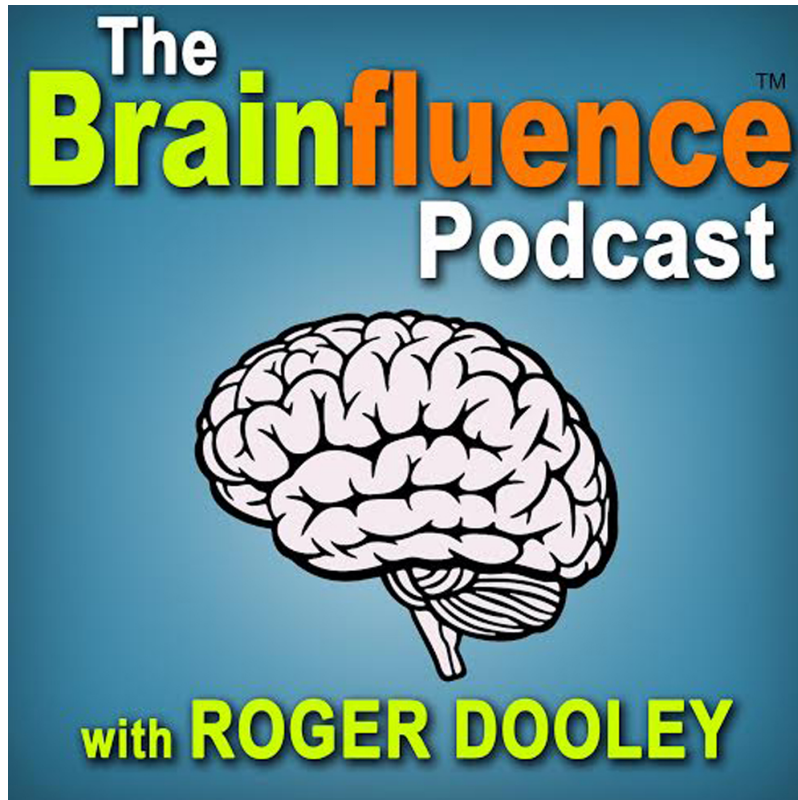


How to Ask for a Favor... and Get It!



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host



Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. I'm Roger Dooley. It's just me today. I'm going to be talking about science-based ways to get other people to do things for you. Asking for favors from others is something we all have to do at times, and from what I've seen, many of us go about it the wrong way. I first wrote about these ideas in a post in my neuromarketing blog. That post was inspired by an email I received.

Like many of us, just about every day, I get emails from people I barely know or don't know at all, and they're asking me for favors. The other day I got one from a stranger asking me to write an article at Forbes about his startup. And, how did he try and persuade me to do this? The only reason he gave was, "We're looking to announce our A round, or spread the word about what we're doing." Now, that doesn't seem very persuasive. And in particular, it isn't at all persuasive because in no way did the email even explain what their company was doing. I had no idea. Maybe it was a ride sharing app for jets. Some kind of internet of things enabled underwear. Who knows? I would have had to open an attachment just to find out what this company was doing, which needless to say, I did not open the attachment.

So, I naturally, like many of us would, deleted the email and forgot about it. But, a couple days later, the same guy sent me an email and said only, "Just making sure you saw this." And that inspired me. The good news for the

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sender is that his email did cause me to write a blog post. The bad news is that I did not publish any information about his company at either my blog or Forbes or Entrepreneur, as he no doubt wanted me to. Sorry about that. But it occurred to me that there are so many people who make requests like this that have such a high failure rate, we should look a little bit at the science behind asking for favors and how to increase the chances we're actually going to get somebody to do things for us.

Now from a very practical standpoint, the most obvious thing that this gentleman could have done to improve his chance of getting some coverage would be to have included just a little bit of information about why readers would be interested in his startup, because every journalist or blogger or content creator wants good stories. They want interesting news. And for this company, I presume there was some kind of unique and compelling story that brought investors in. Presumably they didn't get millions of dollars and venture financing without some kind of a good story, but that was in no way communicated in this email.

And then, the follow up email could have taken a different approach, too. If that first hook didn't work, that second email could have tried a totally different hook. But, that's just sort of practical logical advice and how to get coverage of any kind of news item that you're promoting. But, let's look a little bit at the scientific ways that we can all use to make requests with a higher likelihood that they'll be granted.

Now, in no particular order, the first one is to invoke reciprocation. That's one of Robert Cialdini's Seven Principles of Influence. And his research and that of many

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Other scientists show that if you do someone a favor first, they're more likely to reciprocate. And the favors don't have to be equivalent in size. Research shows that even a very small favor can cause that reciprocation effect. So, say you hold the door open for somebody, and chances are they might be more willing than to spend a few minutes giving you detailed instructions on how to get some place. And it's important there not be a quid pro expectation. In other words, if you say, "I will do this for you if you will do this for me", that's not necessarily a bad approach but it's not reciprocation. That's merely bartering or an exchange of favors. So, before you make your request, do something for your target first. Trying to get a favor from a thought leader or influencer or journalist? Share her content on social media. Write a review of his latest book. Refer a potential client, or perhaps a speaking opportunity.

And the timing of the favor is important. In Cialdini's newest book, *Pre-suasion*, he points out that the moment immediately after a favor is granted is the most effective time to ask for one. He's got some great examples of how even he was persuaded by being offered a favor, being offered something of value and then, immediately being asked for a favor in return. So, ask you for your favor while the favor that you did for the other person is still fresh in their mind.

Now, there is another approach though, to keep it from seeming a little bit less like a quid pro quo, you can also leave a time gap between the two. Might not be as effective as Cialdini describes in *Pre-suasion*, but it can still work. There's a chance that if you hit someone with a statement like, "Hey, I just posted a five star review of your book on Amazon", and then immediately ask them

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for something, it may come across as a little bit self serving. But it probably still has a better chance of success than simply asking for the favor. But there is one caution. One study showed that high status individuals felt that lower status individuals who did them favors were insincere and probably trying to cur a favor.

The second way to try and have more success getting favors is to invoke another Cialdini principle, liking. When you highlight things you have in common with your persuasion target, your request is more likely to be granted. And fortunately, today's social media environment gives you plenty of opportunity to find those common elements. A little stalking on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, for example, will almost certainly turn up something that you have in common. Maybe you attended the same school or lived in the same city. Maybe you're both dog owners. Maybe you're photography buffs. Pointing out those commonalities before bringing up the favor you need will boost your chances of getting it.

And one step up from liking is Cialdini's newest principle that he introduced in Pre-Suasion, and that is unity. Liking and unity are fairly similar except that unity goes a step beyond. It's a shared identity. It's more than say a simple commonality. You both happen to be wearing the same kind of shirt. Unity is more tribal in nature. It might involve a family tie. It might involve a very strong shared identity. Maybe you both were in the Marines. Maybe you both went to the University of Notre Dame. The more these things are part of your identity, the more powerful the effect will be. So, when the sommelier compliments you on your great taste and knowledge of wines when he's trying to sell you a very expensive bottle, you probably

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suspect his motives. Nevertheless, that's still going to have a positive impression on you, and perhaps make it a little bit more likely that he will close that sell.

It seems like a lot of people know about this because the use of flattery, particularly in outreach emails, has become really commonplace. Many, if not most of the emails I get wanting me to write about something or do something for somebody start with how much that person likes my work, likes my book, or whatever, and often though it has the feel of something that's very generic where they haven't actually looked through my stuff but rather it's just been either built in such general terms, it could apply to anybody, or there's been something plugged into a form in a personalization email process. So, perhaps the title of an article is pulled from my blog and the comment will say, "Hey, loved your article XYZ", when in fact it's not really clear from the content that they're even really familiar with that article is about. And then credibility can be damaged even more because whatever is being pitched really is off target. So, whatever good effects this flattery might have had end up being wasted because it just doesn't make any sense.

So, if you wanna stand out from others, use flattery wisely. Pay the recipients a compliment that shows you really are familiar with who they are, what they do, and so on. And whatever you do, don't use flattery in a way that sounds like a mail merch gone awry. And one other thing you can do is to save the flattery for the end of your pitch, rather than doing it at the beginning. That works better according to author Simon Sinek, and that too will help you stand out from the rest.

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Another way to increase your chances of favor granting success is to ask in person. Now, that may not always be possible for you to do that but if you can, it will work better. A 2016 study show that there was a higher in person success rate than from email, which perhaps isn't too surprising, and there were three highlights of this study. The first was that people tend to underestimate compliance when making requests of strangers in person. In other words, they think they won't be as successful as they are and interestingly enough, they overestimate their success when they're making requests by email. And then finally, people tended not to realize how untrustworthy their emails would seem to others. And a few of the examples that I just described highlight that. When you have something that really shows you aren't familiar with the person, if you make a request that's off target in some way, all this really goes to reduce your credibility. In person you can interact in real time. You can adjust your pitch depending on the reactions that you are seeing from your target. And of course, it is a little bit harder to say no to a person's face than to simply either delete their email or say no to it.

A very classic method of getting favors is to ask for a small favor first before you get to your real favor. And there's a lot of research showing that this works. If you want a big favor from somebody, say I'm reading the draft of your new book or screenplay, ask them for a small favor first. For example, ask them a simple question they can answer, or perhaps ask them to like a post of yours. This seems counterintuitive. Wouldn't asking for two favors be more annoying than one? But in fact that's not the case. It invokes another Cialdini principle, commitment and consistency. When someone does a small favor for you, it would be inconsistent for them to

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refuse the bigger favor. In other words, it creates a little bit of cognitive dissonance if they do something for you and then they say, "No, I can't do that other thing for you." Now, that doesn't mean you're gonna get compliance 100% of the time but it does mean that it's a little bit more likely. In fact, this effect has been known for centuries. It's called the Ben Franklin Effect. Ben Franklin said, "He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he who you yourself has obliged."

In other words, Franklin is saying that this principle might be a little bit more powerful than reciprocation, and he used the strategy himself when he needed to get a favor from a political rival. This is a person that had never gotten along with him. He was unfriendly and antagonistic. And so, what Franklin did was ask to borrow a rare book from this person's library. Franklin knew this was one of the only copies of the book that was at hand, and so he asked this person to let him use a copy. And, perhaps surprisingly, this other fellow granted the request. And after that, there was a thaw between them. It would have been inconsistent for this person to continue to be unfriendly to Franklin having granted him this favor even though in the grand scheme of things it wasn't a big favor compared to, say, resolving political differences and so on. But, they were after that, friendly with each other and cooperated, hence the name, the Ben Franklin Effect, or doing somebody a small favor and then asking for a bigger favor.

One other surprising approach to getting favors is to give somebody a reason that doesn't even have to make sense. Now, this seems a little bit counterintuitive too. But, there is research showing that even irrelevant reasons can increase compliance with requests. We'll go

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back to Bob Cialdini again, and a classic experience that he ran, which involved a copy machine. In an office where there was a queue, a line of people waiting to use the copy machine, an experimenter would attempt to cut in line when there was no reason given. The experimenter had about a 59% success rate. In other words, people let him cut in the line with no particular reason about 59% of the time. But, when there was a nonsense reason offered, like because I have to make copies, which of course you have to make copies, that's why you're jumping the line, the compliance rate went up to 93%. So, a huge increase from basically using the word because followed by a phrase that really didn't mean anything.

So, I would say this approach would work best for very small quick favors, not for something that's gonna require reflection or effort on the part of the favor granter. And while we're on the topic of counterintuitive ways to get a favor, another way is to give the person an out. Now, we think of high pressure sales techniques, we think of how can we make it more compelling that this person will do a favor for us? But in fact, the opposite may be true. There has been a huge amount of research on persuasion that shows that if you give the person an out they are more likely to do what you ask, than if you try and explain why complying with your request is the only course of action, or by far, the best course of action. The phrase that researchers commonly use is you are free. In other words, closing with please do this for me but you are free to choose.

In fact, this strategy has become so widespread and so widely tested in laboratories around the world, that it actually is an acronym, BYAF. So, if you want a little bit better chance of getting somebody to do something, don't

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try and pressure them at the end. Release a little bit of that pressure by giving them the offer to not comply, and you'll actually have a greater chance that they will comply.

Now, the final strategy that I wanna talk about is how to set yourself up for a future favor. Sometimes you might do something for somebody and not need an immediate favor from them in return, but to increase the chance that they'll cooperate in some future point in time, you can use this clever strategy. It came from Bob Cialdini in a conversation with another friend, Guy Kawasaki. And that is when the person thanks you for what you did for them, your response might normally be, "Oh you're welcome" or "It was nothing", or something similar. But instead, consider saying, "I know you'd do the same for me." That amps up the reciprocation effect. It's the favor that you did first that invokes it but the phrase is a reminder that creates sort of the tacit commitment from the other person. As I've noted before when I've discussed this, you wanna do this in a friendly casual way that doesn't sound like you're creating a debt that needs to be repaid.

Now I'll close by suggesting that you not try and cooperate all of these techniques into any single favor request. But, if you can smoothly combine a couple of them perhaps into the request, I think that that will greatly increase your chances for success. And of course, if you're doing something say by email or direct mail, you want to use personalization wisely. A lot of this can backfire if somehow your request comes across as generic or insincere. What I'll do in the show notes is link to the original blog post that has interned links to the research if you wanna dig deeper into any of this stuff. And you can find that on the show notes page at

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rogerdooley.com/podcast. And you can also find a text version of this podcast there in handy PDF format.

If you found any favor getting techniques that have worked well for you, feel free to link them in the comment on the show notes page, and of course, as always a review of this podcast at iTunes or the player of your choice would be greatly appreciated. And we'll see you next week.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.