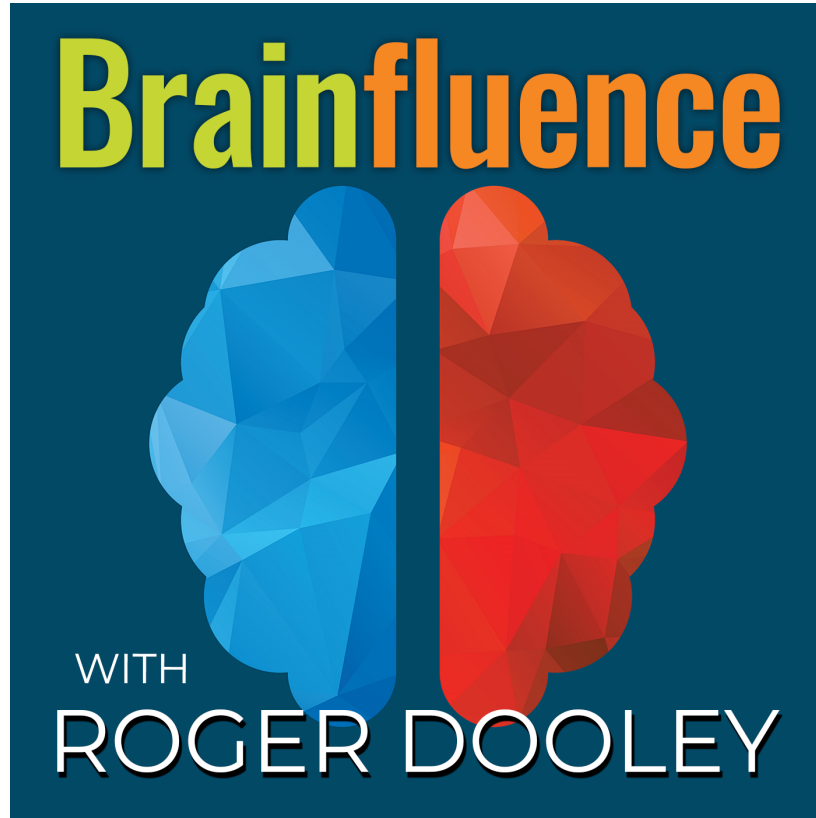


**Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with  
Brian Ahearn**

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host



**Roger Dooley**

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

# Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Roger Dooley: Welcome to a Brainfluence classic, I'm Roger Dooley. Every once in a while, we dig into our Brainfluence archives and bring back an episode that we think is just as relevant today as it was then.

Today, we are re-broadcasting my conversation with my friend, Brian Ahearn, a Cialdini-trained expert who explains how to apply the principles of Robert Cialdini in real-world situations.

We'll be back next week with a new episode of Brainfluence. Enjoy the show.

Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley has weekly conversations with thought leaders and world class experts. Every episode shows you how to improve your business with advice based on science or data.

Roger's new book, *Friction*, is published by McGraw Hill and is now available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and bookstores everywhere. Dr Robert Cialdini described the book as, "Blinding insight," and Nobel winner Dr. Richard Clamer said, "Reading Friction will arm any manager with a mental can of WD40."

To learn more, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction), or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley: I've known today's guest for years. He's a fellow devotee of science-based influence techniques, Brian Ahearn is the chief influence officer at Influence People and an international keynote speaker, trainer, coach, and consultant. He specializes in applying the science of

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

influence and persuasion into everyday situations. He's one of only 20 individuals in the world who currently holds the Cialdini Method Certified Trainer designation. His LinkedIn course, Persuasive Selling, has been viewed over 150000 times. Brian, welcome to the show.

Brian Ahearn: Thank you, Roger. It's a pleasure to be here.

Roger Dooley: Great. So Brian, how long have you been studying science-based influence?

Brian Ahearn: It's been about 15 years now. I stumbled into it when somebody who worked in the sales department at the company that I worked for came down and gave a video of Dr. Cialdini to my boss and I and she said, "I think you would really like this." She saw it at a class when she was studying for her MBA, and when I watched it, a light bulb came on. It was like holy cow, this explains all the sales techniques, the psychology of why they work. I began to use it in some sales training and the rest is history.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I stumbled into it from a little bit different direction. I'd initially been really influenced in the intersection of neuroscience and marketing with a lot of the emphasis on various measurement techniques to gauge people's reactions to ads and such, and from there, sort of edged into the social science aspect. I, too, kind of fell for that and said, "Wow, not only is this really interesting, but it's something that can be applied to practical situations in any size organization," where at least at the time, some of the neuroscience techniques were really only applicable to big brands. That's getting to be less true these days, but using some of these fundamental principles

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

discovered by Cialdini and others is something that any company, no matter how small, can do.

Brian Ahearn: I agree. And when I speak to groups, I always ask the question to start, "How many of you would agree that much of your professional success and personal happiness depends on getting people to say yes to you?" And I get a hundred percent participation there. And Roger, you know when you speak to groups, sometimes there's people who are there because they have to be. And they're not really that interested until you say something like, you know you might be able to get your kid to empty the dishwasher or do their chores a little bit more. And all of the sudden, you've got about a hundred percent buy-in, because people, when they realize they can use this at work and they can use this at home, you hit the whole gambit in terms of relationships.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that's a good point. We're fairly business-focused here in the podcast but the fact that these techniques apply, even to everyday human interactions, not that you wanna be manipulating the people around you, but if you want to illicit cooperation, it's important to keep those things in mind.

Brian Ahearn: Absolutely. My daughter is gonna be 23 soon, and I always weave in stories when I do presentations because again, I know some people are gonna relate to that more than they will the business application, but they clearly see it. They get like "Wow, maybe it would be less friction at home if my spouse or kids more willingly said yes to me and I can make that happen by utilizing these principles."

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Roger Dooley: Right, yeah, getting cooperation rather than ordering cooperation, which doesn't always work very well anyone. So Brian, how has your thinking evolved from your earliest days of trying to apply social science in selling? Now were there some things you tried initially that didn't work as well as you expected?

Brian Ahearn: Well, I would say the biggest evolution that I've had is focused on the principle of liking. People get this one, it's easier to say yes to those they know and like. And what people try to do is take that and utilize it to get people to like them. I was in that same boat early on, too. But came to the realization that what's far more important is that I came to like the people that I worked with, that I was serving customers, et cetera. Because when I took the very same psychology that Cialdini would teach about the principle of liking and apply it in a way where I was saying "I wanna come to like Roger, I wanna come to like Dan, I wanna come to like these people, so I would connect on what we had in common, I'd look for ways to compliment." That was really the ah-ha. Because I wasn't coming across I guess as a used car salesman who will say or do anything to connect with you to get you to buy.

When people could tell that I genuinely liked them, they were totally open to what I might ask. Because I think they implicitly assumed friends do right by friends. So that would be maybe a mistake I made early on was trying to get people to like me rather than using it to like them.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative), that's a great point. I think people pick up on that. If you don't like someone and you're trying to persuade them to do something, it's gonna come

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

across, even at an unconscious level, as kind of phony. But that's great and I think too while we're talking about liking, I think that sometimes people hear the word and say "Oh, so I have to do things to make that person like me." And that may be part of it, but a lot of it is showing things you have in common with the other person, right?

Brian Ahearn: Yeah, they're just the natural things that sometimes people find out and they know, but they don't think about actually weaving them into the conversation or they never say, "Maybe if I talk about this, I will come to like that person more, which will make my relationship with them better. And oh, by the way, if they like me more, that's icing on the cake." So there can be some self interest in that, but with all these principles Roger, everybody gets it when you explain it to them because it's human behavior and they're human beings. Where they really stumble though is the application. There's so many examples where people go, "Oh yeah I get that," and then they go back out and they keep doing what they've always done.

Roger Dooley: Right. Yeah, well changing behavior is hard as I'm sure you've found. But in the old days, they would always tell a salesperson back when there were salespeople actually going physically into people's offices, which still happens occasionally but not quite as often as it used to. So I'll look around the person's office, see if they have pictures of some hobby of theirs or maybe their university diploma, something from their college football team. Find out what things you might have in common because if you study what they have in their office, you will find probably something. "Oh, hey, you went to that school too?" Or "We're from the same state," or "I spent some time in

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Dubuque," or whatever it was that can begin that liking process. Now today, though, with social media, you can discover so much about a person. I think it's probably a lot easier to find out things that you might have in common with somebody.

Brian Ahearn: Absolutely. And then it's incumbent upon you to act on it, to say something like "Oh, Roger, how do you know this person? I know them too," and if we both had good experiences with them we're kind of reliving that, we're feeling good, we're feeling good about each other. But if I don't ask that question and I just keep it in the recesses of my mind, it does me no good, it does you no good.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. So did you have an early success story when you started applying these things that you said "Holy cow this stuff really works."

Brian Ahearn: Probably the one that stood out the most, I used to work in an insurance company and I was in the sales department and one of the things that we were charged with was getting new agents to sign-up with our company. And we tried to be proactive about it, so when somebody in the field would visit an agency, we had a database they'd go in, they'd put in information, and then we would market to them on a quarterly basis. That was usually an email from the vice president of sales. Well, after we learned about the principle of scarcity, that people value things more when they're rare or going away. We incorporated a single paragraph into the typical email that we would send at the end of the third quarter, and that paragraph would simply say this, "Roger, part of the reason I'm contacting you today is to let you know we're

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

only looking to appoint 50 agents in our 28 operating states. As of today, we've appointed 40, we hope you're one of the few remaining that we appoint by year end."

After we did that, the first time, my boss came over to me and he said "I can't believe it," I said "What?" He said, "I have had eight agents contact me within the first hour of sending that email. I have never had any agents contact me within an hour of sending that email." And we knew, the only difference was the application of scarcity, and it was all true. We were looking to appoint a limited number, we let them know how many we had, and that we hope they could be one of the few remaining we appointed by the end of the year, and it triggered a completely different response than the previous marketing emails.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I can point out to our listeners, that little anecdote actually made it into the book *Yes: 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to be Persuasive*, by Cialdini and his co-authors, Goldstein and Martin. I really enjoyed that book. That was one of the earlier books that applied social science that I read. I liked his format a lot, in fact it was in part an inspiration for the way I ended up formatting *Brainfluence*. That sort of bite-size chapter that starts off with science and finishes with business application or a real-life application of that science. To me, it was very readable compared to some of the tones, either neuroscience or social science that try and show you how to do it but are pretty dense for the lay-reader.

Brian Ahearn: Yes. Now, speaking of that book, can I tell you something real quickly here because when that story came out and I got the book, I was anxious and I flipped to the page and I

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>



## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

read my story, and then I turned the page, and I saw another story. It was from a lady named Christy Farnbauch, Hilliard, Ohio, a suburb right next to where I live. I'm thinking oh my gosh, what are the odds of the six people or so chosen to have stories, and she lives in the town next to me? And so I reached out to her and connected, and we became fast friends and we've done things to help each other, and the reason I bring this up is because today, I was having lunch and she came wandering over and she was like "Hey," and we had this nice conversation. But I was able to connect her with somebody who she might be able to help. And it's those kind of interactions that people appreciate, right? I like her, there's some reciprocity, I've done something. I know that when I need help, Christy is gonna be more than willing to do whatever she can to help me because of the connection that we had and my willingness over the years to do whatever I can to help her.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, and we've had Bob Bird, author of *The Go Giver*, which has sold a bazillion copies, amazing book, on this show in the past and I think that is totally in sync with his philosophy that if you help people, and don't look for anything in return, it will be not just repaid back because reciprocation but they will like you and you will probably like them too. So it's a very sort of a symbiotic relationship and that makes total sense, and it's a great anecdote to illustrate that, Brian.

Brian Ahearn: And I'm seeing it, when we had dinner in Austin and I told you that I was leaving the company that I had been with for almost 29 years, by the time this podcast is out, I will have left the company. But as word got out, I have had

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

people proactively reaching to me, connecting me, and asking if I will do business with them. Because all that time I've been applying what I know, and trying to come to like them and truly trying to help them without any expectation of anything in return, and now it's coming back in spades.

Roger Dooley: Can't argue with that. You were talking about scarcity and that has become a really popular technique, and probably no place more so than in the travel industry where now you go to any kind of travel website and there are about ten scarcity and urgency cues on every item practically that wow, there's only two of these seats left and there are four people looking at this right now, and 12 people booked it in the last 24 hours, and by the time you look at all those, it's like oh my God I gotta book right now. On the one hand, it obviously works for them because these companies are very sophisticated testers and if it's on the page for awhile, you can be pretty sure that it helps sales rather than hurting sales, but there has been some question over whether all of these are honest cues. In other words, if they say there's only two rooms left at this price, are there really only two rooms left at that price or tomorrow are there gonna be two more rooms and then the next day two more rooms and so-on?

And I also wonder, do you think that you can do too much? Can you overload it to the point where it's annoying?

Brian Ahearn: Yeah, I think you can. I have a hard time watching infomercials. Now, I'm hypersensitive to these principles because I teach them, but it does come across to me like

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

used cars salespeople. Now, we know that used car salesmen, some of the techniques they do, they work. I mean, that's why they continue to sell cars. I think that the infomercials, obviously they keep testing and retesting, and it must work well enough for them to continue to do it. But they're also not testing necessarily the number of people who don't buy. That's hard to measure but obviously with people who have come kind of addicted to the home shopping network and things like that, yes, they work. But I think that they get a little bit overused and then people can start shutting down to it.

Here would be an example, I mean, it seems like when we have hurricanes coming and every hurricane that we hear about is gonna be the storm of the century, and they usually aren't. Now, there have been some really bad ones but I'm kind of wondering if the weather channel isn't gonna feel like, or people aren't gonna feel like oh, they're crying wolf again. Oh here comes the storm, they said the last one was gonna be storm of the century, it was category two by the time it hit. So you have to be careful, otherwise you can lose credibility.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, there's been a lot of discussion about that lately with the weather disasters because the media are in business to sell ads and get page views or get people to watch their show, and the more dramatic they can make something sound, the more people are gonna tune in. If they say "Hey, there's a chance that this storm is gonna hit. It might be bad but we don't know yet," yeah that's kind of bad news but if they say "Potentially massive storm is on the way heading for you." Suddenly, okay, you gotta tune in, but by the third time you get that and

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

nothing happens then it's like okay, well, this is all click bait.

Brian Ahearn: Yes, and because I teach it I've become desensitized to it. I hear that and it's unfortunate because sometime there will be that storm, but they're doing it so often I think people are going yeah, okay, right.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, it's unfortunate. And I mentioned the overuse of scarcity and there was a question as to all of those cues were fully accurate and transparent. I think that I've met Bob Cialdini several times and heard him speak and I'm sure that you can echo the fact that one thing that he emphasizes every time he speaks is that this stuff needs to be done in an ethical way, in an honest way. That these are not meant to be manipulative techniques, they are meant to be used ethically. So scarcity is great but if you're making up fake numbers for the scarcity, that's not so great.

Brian Ahearn: Yeah, Roger, if it weren't for that one word, manipulation, I guarantee you we never would have met in Austin. We would not be doing this right now because I would not have been teaching people about Ethical Influence for the last 15 years. The reason is that word. When I saw that video from Cialdini and he was presenting at Stanford, he was very clear about non-manipulative ways to get people to do things. Great video, so I sign up for Stanford's marketing material. Got other videos that were very good, and one day their marketing flyer comes and it has his picture. It says "Bestseller" and then right underneath it in bold letters, "Call it influence, persuasion, or even manipulation." And I couldn't believe that they put that in

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

the headline. So something in me, I'd like to think I'm an ethical person. I feel compelled to address it so I emailed Stanford and I said "I don't know anybody who wants to be manipulated, nor do I know anybody who wants to be known as a good manipulator. That one word cannot be helping your sales, but it really could be hurting." Never heard from Stanford, but sometime later my phone rang.

It was a representative from Robert Cialdini's office, and she was calling to personally thank me on behalf of Dr. Cialdini. She said "You sent an email to Stanford and because of that they're changing the whole marketing of our video." I was like wow, that's pretty cool. And as we had a conversation, she said "If your company ever needs a guest speaker, Dr. Cialdini travels the world." And I said, "You know what? I sit next to the lady who books our speakers, would you like to talk to her?" And as fate would have it, summer of 2004, he was out in Columbus, Ohio, a couple of times to address my company and it was during that time that I went out to Arizona and went through the two-day Principles of Persuasion workshop. And then I stayed on my boss for three more years to allow me to go back and get certified, which happened in early 2008. But I think my whole career would be different if it weren't for that single word, manipulation.

And I like to share that story because I really wanna drive it home with your listeners about how important it is to be ethical in utilizing this information. Because you're in a position of power when you understand things that other people don't. When you understand human psychology the way Cialdini does, the way I do, the way you do. And with that comes great responsibility.

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Roger Dooley: And it really I think applies to many broader situations. If you're in a position of authority within a company, you still wanna be ethical and not manipulative. It's something that just really should be part of your ethos and doesn't always happen but that would be nice if it did. Brian, were you surprised when Cialdini added a seventh principle, unity, a couple of years ago after 30 years of just six?

Brian Ahearn: I was. I didn't have any idea that he was pursuing that. I knew that he was pursuing pre-suasion. I didn't think that was gonna be the title because he had mentioned that book back in the video in Stanford. But he had just become so popular and started traveling the world and speaking on this topic that he just didn't seem to have the time to sit down and really focus and finish the book. I think he originally was talking about it as moments of power, but it ultimately morphed into pre-suasion. But yes, I did not see that one coming, even though I see him with some regularity.

Roger Dooley: Right, well he was on the podcast just maybe a year and a half before that. I don't know the exact date, but it was not that long before the book was finished. At that time I had asked him if he had ever in the ensuing years wanted to add another principle and he said "No, I think these six cover it and most other things can be fit into one of those six." And I guess, in certain ways, you could say that unity is an outgrowth of liking. Not exactly, but it has a lot of overlap there I think. Do you agree or disagree with that, Brian?

Brian Ahearn: To explain it to somebody who might have difficulty really getting the nuances, I say it's almost like liking on

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

steroids. But it's deeper than simply finding out that we have some things in common because there is a deep connection, and the best example that I can give is this. My father served in the Marines, he was over in Vietnam in the 60s. When my dad meets another Marine, particularly one who's been in combat, Roger, I would swear he feels closer to them than me, his own flesh and blood, because they share a common identity, a common experience, that very, very few people can really relate to. And it's just incredible to watch him meet this person he never met before but the instant, deep bond, again, to where me, his son, I feel like he's closer to that person. That is the best example of unity that I have seen.

Roger Dooley: And I think maybe to contrast it, you might say maybe two people who were in the Army might not have that, they might have liking because of their shared experience, but it might not be elevated to unity in their case. And it could be. It depends a lot on their personal experience, too, I suppose. But my pet example is the state, I'm in Texas now as you know, people from Texas are really crazy about the state. They see themselves as Texans. Not quite before Americans necessarily, but it's close. And people decorate their homes with Texas motifs and Texas stars and Texas state outlines. You can get just about anything, I mean frying pans and waffle makers, coffee cups, anything in the shape of the state of Texas. And it's really a thing where I, in no other state that I've either lived in or visited, was there anything like that. So to me, I would presented this at a conference when Dr. Cialdini was keynoting and he was in the audience, so I did it with

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

a lot of trepidation. But oh my God, so here I am explaining it to him, this is gonna be interesting.

He was polite enough to agree with me but if you're from Ohio and you meet somebody else that's from Ohio, that's a shared attribute. But if you are a long-time Texan and you meet another one, that is more like unity. It's a shared identity. And that can be used by marketers, too. We've got some companies in Texas that use that extensively to emphasize their own Texas identity to build that. They might not even realize that they're using one or more Cialdini principles but they just know that it works to sell stuff. Just about every car has a Texas edition.

Brian Ahearn: The word identity is the key there, because they share the identity as Texans. In Ohio, it's not as much about the state, it's about Ohio State Buckeyes, and that's why you can go anywhere in the country and yell "Go Bucks!" And people are gonna yell "Go Bucks," and if people ever watch, and I know some people love Ohio State, some people hate them-

Roger Dooley: They could be from Pittsburgh too.

Brian Ahearn: Yeah, my wife's from Pittsburgh and it's the same thing, "Go Steelers, go Steelers."

Roger Dooley: Or she could yell "Go Bucs," it's their-

Brian Ahearn: Oh yeah the baseball team but it's the football team that's really big there.

Roger Dooley: Right, right, I know, obviously. The Steelers are-

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>



## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Brian Ahearn: Ohio States fans, if you tune in to any big game, it is amazing how they travel and they'll be in another team's stadium and probably have more people than that team. I mean, so that's an example of an identity that's big here. It's not so much the state, it's around that university and it's really around the football team.

Roger Dooley: Right, and I spent five years in Tennessee and I would say the same thing is true there. They can turn an entire stadium in another state orange, people don't feel that strongly about the state, it's just a different identity. As long time South bend resident and periodic season ticket holder at Notre Dame, you could see those teams that had that going for them. When Nebraska came, it was like a home crowd for Nebraska because there were so many people wearing red, where other schools of comparable size just didn't seem to have that identity going for them.

I guess two other principles that are sort of on the spectrum, I would say, and again I would like your opinion on this because you've studied this more than I have, social proof and authority are both sort of third party recommendations. Now, sometimes social proof is expressed in numbers like we're got a million listeners to this podcast, which unfortunately we don't, but I wish we did, and sometimes it's more qualitative like I might post some comments on iTunes reviews on the website just to show how random people liked it. But then there's authority, that usually involves experts, celebrities, people who are recognized as having some kind of authority in the field, but then to me there's sort of a middle ground. Somebody who isn't nobody but who isn't really a

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

# Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

qualified authority. So have you seen that sort of a spectrum thing?

Brian Ahearn: Yes, because there are things that we are qualified to really talk about in depth and there are things that we aren't. So I'm qualified obviously to talk about Cialdini's principles, being one of only 20 personally trained by him, but an example of me not being qualified is golf. So, Roger, I've used this example many a time when I'm sharing with groups that there was a time where I came home from a training session, shared with my wife some golf example that I used in some sales training, and I won't go into the details of that but just know that I shared that with her and then several weeks later she was reading a book that I had given her and she said, "Listen to what Corey Pavin says," now for your listeners who don't know who Corey Pavin is, he won the U.S. Open and he had finished in the top five in all of the major golf tournaments back in his heyday, and she reads this to me and I'm thinking "That's exactly what I told you a few weeks ago," so I said that to her and she said "No you didn't." I said sure I did, and I kind of gave her detail, and she insisted that I didn't and then I said "Well I guess if Corey Pavin says it, it's true but when I say it it's not."

But the reality was, he was an authority in that field. And anybody who knows anything about golf will pay more attention to Corey Pavin than Brian Ahearn, even if we both say the same thing.

Roger Dooley: Right. So you offered a random observation where he offered an expert opinion.

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

# Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Brian Ahearn: Yes, but it was just as true coming out of my mouth. So there's an example of spectrum. But what I've always told people, when it comes to the principle of authority is, if you don't have the perceived authority, you can borrow it. So as an example, there are sometimes I'll talk about things and I love reading and learning, and I use lots of quotes. Aristotle, Lincoln, Zig Ziegler, I mean I use lots of quotes because I know when people hear those names and whatever comes next, they believe it more. Now, that does elevate me because I show them I'm well read and I can present that material and so I am elevated in the midst of that, but quite often if somebody doesn't have the expertise, fall back on where you learned that information and make sure you cite that because that will give more weight to what you're talking about and move you further down the spectrum, making you a better persuader.

Roger Dooley: So in your case, people don't recognize your name but if you explain you're one of 20 Cialdini certified people, then that's adding authority to you where it might not have existed. Well you know, one clever use I've seen of implied authority is I forget what, it was some sort of a software site, technology site, and they had few user reviews from people who were not necessarily in really high level positions at their companies. There's like a user-experience consultant or something like that but they were maybe knowledgeable, had a little bit of authority, but what they did was, in addition to naming their title, I think even bigger sized, or without their picture, they put the logo of their company. So this guy was a low-level person at Google, but if you looked at their

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

recommendations, they had positive comments from folks at Google and Facebook and I forget who else.

So there was this sort of implied authority that even though these folks were not stating any sort of official position for their company, just the fact that they were part of that organization lend them more credibility.

Brian Ahearn: Absolutely because there are certain organizations that people will think more highly of. There are certain universities that when people come from, they'll think more highly. Now, nobody ever says "What was your grade point?" Or anything like that, you may have been a really poor student but oh my gosh you graduated from Yale, you must've been really, really smart. There may be somebody who graduated from another university and significantly smarter, but we attribute something to that organization, and so by them not only putting their name and their title, but by putting the logo, you're right. It does give this implied authority because we tend to project those things onto a bigger level. And in much the same way, if you have a bad customer experience with a company, you tend to project that to the whole company. "Oh if this is the way this company treats people," no, it was one person and it was one experience, but you see how we can magnify that, and that's doing the same thing.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, Brian I know that a lot of your focus is on sales as opposed to digital marketing, but I'm pretty sure you have an opinion on how these techniques might be combined with personalized behavior data, because now we've got, well just about every company, certainly Google, Facebook, and others. But other folks that we don't know

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

about plus everybody who has a website or an app, sucking up all kinds of behavior data that could perhaps give clues as to our personalities, as to what kind of appeals might work best. So like right now, if you're on a travel site, you put scarcity cues on every page because by your AP testing showed you that that's what converged the best, but we're getting to the point where now, we could say "Oh hey, here's Brian. He is more susceptible to this kind of appeal so, instead of scarcity we're gonna use maybe an expert recommendation that this hotel is the best one in the city." I don't really see this being done heavily yet but do you think there's a future for this or have you see any application?

Brian Ahearn: I think there absolutely is because what you're really doing is just taking all this information that you or I, 20 years ago, would have had to dig and ask questions and all kinds of things to then be able to have a more personalized persuasive appeal to an individual, and now it's so much easier because we can go online and we can learn a number of things before we ever have an interaction with an individual. And it doesn't take very much connecting on the people that you have in common or anything like that, for that person to like you and be a little bit more open to what you may ask. Well now you step back again and be able to take the massive amount of data and put it into something will make a difference, and I can give you an example.

This isn't so much on the massive behavioral data that you're talking about but when I would reach out to people internally, if I did the typically blind carbon copy and shot something out or worse, if I had everybody on the email,

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

hardly anybody would respond. But when I personalized it to any extent, putting in their individual name, citing something specific about them that I might have had in the database and I could just merge using a mail merge into that email, the response rate was astronomical compared to the old, traditional ways. That's a very rudimentary thing, but now expand that out and think about all the data that's available, and how different the appeal could be to me versus you versus somebody else. And when we see that, it will trigger because most of this decision making is happening at the subconscious. So yeah, I think that there's a huge future for that.

Roger Dooley: If you had to big one of Cialdini's principles that you think is probably underutilized by people but can be in fact very useful, can you pick one?

Brian Ahearn: I would say the principle of consistency is probably the most underutilized and certainly I think it is with salespeople. And the principle of consistency is predicated on the fact that people feel this internal psychological pressure, but also this external social pressure to be consistent in what they say, what they do. The key then is can I get them to commit? And the mistake that most people make is they never do that. What they do is they tell people what to do or they tell people what they want, that may not illicit and response coming back. And when somebody hasn't said yes, it hasn't triggered the principle and therefore they don't feel this internal and external pressure to be consistent in what they say and what they do. An example that I've used many times, with kids, if you're having trouble getting your kids to do something, let's say empty the

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

dishwasher, most of the time it's because you say empty the dishwasher and then you move along. You're thinking oh yeah, well they heard me and therefore they're gonna do it.

Well that's not always the case and they have a lot of outs. "I didn't hear you, I was gonna do it later, I didn't know you wanted me to do it right away." But if you slow down and you look at your kid and you say, "Will you please empty the dishwasher before you leave for school?" They're either gonna say yes or no. I mean you're standing there looking at them pausing. Now if they say no, the smart persuader is there with another alternative, "Okay, will you empty it as soon as you get home from school, before you leave for work?" And you'll almost always get a yes because of the principle of reciprocity and concessions. But the mistake that most people make is I'm the parent, I shouldn't have to ask them, I can tell them.

Okay, keep telling them and keep getting frustrated or start asking them, use a little psychology and you'll be pleasantly surprised that they will do it far more often. Now you step back to the business world, the same habits are taken into the business world where people who are in positions of superiority or salespeople, whatever, they are telling people what to do and they're never engaging this principle. So therefore, I think it's really really underutilized.

Roger Dooley: One clever approach I've seen with that is used by digital marketers who instead of asking somebody for what they want like "I want your email address and I'm gonna send

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

you stuff that you're really gonna find useful," and many people are just gonna resist that because there's not trust or they'll have them complete a short quiz where people just have to click a couple of things like click, click, one thing, go to another screen, check off a box, go to another screen, and then when they get to the end, hey we can give you your analysis or whatever, whatever they want to help you with. Even if there was almost no effort involved, you've already clicked three or four times and now it's like okay, I'll give them my email address.

Brian Ahearn: Yeah, it was. And it's not unlikely, if somebody were to say "Roger you're gonna have to click seven times before you get there," you probably wouldn't even go to the site. If somebody said "Hey, Roger, if you call Ticket Master, you're gonna be on the phone for at least 10 minutes," you probably wouldn't make the call. But if you don't know that and you make the call and it says "Your call is very important, you'll be answered shortly," and you're waiting and now it's five minutes and now you're getting frustrated. By now, you're thinking I'm not hanging up. I am staying on this phone until I get somebody, because that consistency has kicked in. You've already taken so many steps, you're not going to quit, but again, if you knew it was gonna take 10 minutes, you never would've made the call.

So in a sense, that's very effective. Dale Carnegie tapped into that when he said "Get the other person to say yes immediately." He knew back in the mid-30s that once you get someone to make a small commitment and you do that a number of times, the bigger commitment becomes much easier.

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>



## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think one of the key aspects too Brian is in that example of say getting some information from somebody over the web is not to hit them with a big form, but a few short screens work much better. In fact, one time I analyzed the flow for, I think it was a tennis education program. Basically, we gen for some tennis courses and they were very simple questions, "Are you male or female?" And the next one was very simple. There were a couple of them that had multiple choice that were a little bit longer but it was very, very painless to go through that. But then just for the heck of it, I counted all the individual screens and pasted them, mocked up a single form, and the form was so horrendously long looking in appearance that nobody would have completed it.

But just those little short commitments, by the time they got to the end, I know the conversion rate on that was very, very high.

Brian Ahearn: So the challenge is to find the sweet spot. If you make it too easy, they have no skin in the game and therefore they're not committed. You make it too hard, they won't go there. And I know you've heard this before, Dan Ariely talks about the IKEA Effect. That people love their IKEA furniture more than they do more expensive furniture, even if it has a flaw, because they had to put it together. And so I always tell people, you don't ever wanna be hard to do business with, but you don't wanna be so easy to do business with that there's no skin in the game and people don't feel some commitment to you or your process.

Roger Dooley: Good advice, and that's probably a good place to wrap up. Let me remind our listeners that we are speaking with

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

## Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with Brian Ahearn

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

Brian Ahearn, chief influence officer at Influence People and Cialdini certified trainer. Brain, where can people find you and your content online?

Brian Ahearn: Well the website is influencepeople.biz and I'm on social media, like everybody else. So if your listeners want to connect with me on LinkedIn, I'd be happy to do that. They can just look for Brian Ahearn. You had mentioned earlier the LinkedIn learning course, Persuasive Selling. I've got another one that will be coming out on Persuasive Coaching. So if people are LinkedIn Learning members, just go in to LinkedIn Learning, put in Brian Ahearn and you'll find courses. I'm hoping to do a lot more of those. I found those to be really interesting and a wonderful way to connect with people.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well we will link to those places and to any other resources we spoke about on the show on the show notes page, at [RogerDooley.com/podcasts](http://RogerDooley.com/podcasts). And there will be a text version of our conversation there too. Brain, thanks for being on the show.

Brian Ahearn: Thank you very much for having me Roger, it was my pleasure.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's online writing and resources, the best starting point is [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).

And remember, Roger's new book, *Friction*, is now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and book sellers everywhere. Bestselling author Dan Pink calls it, "An important read," and Wharton Professor Dr. Joana Berger said, "You'll understand Friction's power and how to harness it."

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

**Applying Cialdini Principles in the Real World with  
Brian Ahearn**

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/brian-ahearn-cialdini>

For more information or for links to Amazon and other sellers, go to  
[RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction).

**The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley**  
<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>