



## Activity 1a) Authority

### Weapon 1: Authority

The first tool which can be used to persuade people is authority. We naturally feel compelled to listen and follow orders from those in a position of power. There are many reasons for this – for example, not listening to your teacher can get you a detention, so we might do what others tell us to do, because they have the power to punish us if we don't. You might not necessarily change your mind about something, but you might do what someone is asking you to, to avoid the consequences.

But, you might also do something a person in authority is asking you to do, because they have the expertise to tell you what you should do. For example, you might start to reduce the amount of electricity you use, because you heard an expert give a talk about global warming. You have no way of testing whether or not climate change is real, but you believe scientists who say that it is. Because authority has such a strong influence on us, advertisers try to exploit it, for example by getting actors to play dentists to sell toothpastes and toothbrushes. When we hear a 'doctor' give a recommendation, we are inclined to feel more positive towards the idea of buying the product – after all, a doctor knows best, right?



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### Task

1. Apart from dental-care products, which other sectors might benefit from using the principle of authority to try and persuade people to buy their products?
2. Why do you think people are so willing to follow orders from those in authority and to trust their judgement?

## Activity 1b) Commitment

### Weapon 2: Commitment

If today you say that you like salt and vinegar crisps, would it be safe to assume you'll say you like that flavour tomorrow as well? Probably. If you say you're a charitable person, is it safe to assume you will be making a donation to a charity soon? You bet. The next persuasion 'weapon' is related to commitment and consistency of people's ideas and behaviours. People like to behave in a consistent way and they don't like to contradict themselves – the world would be a very confusing place if everyone's ideas, likes and behaviours changed every week.

The foot-in-the-door technique exploits this idea, by asking people to agree to small things first (e.g. will you sign this petition for me?) in order to get them to agree to larger things later on (e.g. will you now make a donation?). If you care enough about something to sign a petition, it would be inconsistent of you to then refuse to make a small donation. A similar technique is called 'labelling' which is when the seller attributes a quality to the buyer (e.g. you recognise quality when you see it), and then when the buyer agrees, the seller encourages them to be consistent with this value (look at this hand-made bracelet, you can tell it is of a good quality – buy it!)

Another strategy is to get people to make a step towards buying an expensive item, and then getting them to increase the amount they are willing to spend, in order to remain consistent with their intention to buy it. This is called 'low ball'. Someone might offer to sell you a car for £1000, which you think is quite a good deal. You agree, but then you are told that the tyres will cost an extra £300. You already decided you would buy the car, so what's £300 more? The seller might then be very cheeky and might try to get you to spend even more (e.g. this car also comes with AC, but it will cost another £300).

You might also experience 'bait and switch' which is when you are offered a good deal on something (e.g. a camera for £50), but then it turns out the item is not available anymore. Since you already invested time and resources to research the camera, and to come to the shop to buy it, you might be willing to buy a slightly more expensive product (e.g. this camera is very similar to what you wanted to buy, and it's only £30 more!). However, this technique is not very popular anymore. Firstly, it makes people angry (as they were tricked into thinking they would be able to get a good deal) and in the age of the internet, they will probably find the same item elsewhere.

### Task

1. Imagine you wanted to ask your parents to get a dog. How could you use the consistency and commitment principle to try and persuade them?
2. How can you protect yourself from being persuaded by the commitment and consistency principle?