

## **Benefit Power**

Reward power refers to delivering rewards or benefits to influence others. These rewards can be financial, material, or psychological in nature. Reward power is the fastest way to persuade. You have to be careful, though, because the danger is that such rewards can come to be expected. Once you condition your audience to expect something for their compliance, they will always seek external rewards for their behavior. This strategy may well cause them to do your bidding only for the reward and not for any other reason. In that case, even if the person were willing to exhibit the desired behavior *without* the reward, once the reward has been given, the subject will rarely perform the desired behavior without the reward.

One experiment proved this concept. Subjects sitting together at a table worked on a puzzle for half an hour. Some were being paid to be research subjects and some were not. After the half hour was up, the experimenter told the subjects that the solving session was over and that they had to leave the room. The experimenters then began to monitor the behavior of the subjects when they went into the waiting room. What would they do during their free time? Would they play with the puzzles? Would they choose other activities? The study found that those subjects who were paid to do the puzzles were far less likely to play with them for fun during their free time in the waiting room. On the contrary, those who did not receive an external reward for their efforts were far more likely to play with the puzzles during their free time in the waiting room.

Persuaders know that a behavior that is chosen out of free will last longer than a behavior that is selected in expectation of external reward.

Reward power is based on utility—on an understanding that in every transaction the potential for exchange exists. Basically, reward power recognizes that there is always something I want and something you want. We can meet each other's needs by swapping what we have for what the other wants. Other examples of reward power include sales bonuses, paychecks, incentive clauses on contracts, bonus miles on airlines, and bonus points on credit cards.

It is important to understand that some incentives will work well with one person but not with another. For some people, money is the optimal reward. For others, it is recognition. As a persuader, you need to find the reward that will most inspire each person you work with. In other words, you must understand the desires of the person or group you are attempting to persuade. Reward power is extremely effective in changing human behavior and in increasing your ability to persuade. You can get what you want with minimal effort.

However, there are several inefficiencies to note when using rewards. For one, “diminishing returns” quickly takes over when you employ this type of power. Diminishing return means that the more you use the reward, the less powerful it becomes. When people become accustomed to an incentive, they can also become bored with it. As we discussed earlier, they will then either expect more of the reward, or drop performance standards if it is removed. One example is the common practice of offering elementary school children rewards for reading. They win pizza or other prizes after they have read a certain number of books. These incentives often backfire, though, because many of the children think they need a reward to read.

Reward power ultimately leads to the desired outcome, but the incentive generally has to be repeated each time to get that desired outcome. The reward is only effective as long as the person doesn't see a "better deal." It is important to recognize that your incentive will always be compared to the next person's offer. Rewards reinforce behavior, but so as long as you are employing them, also expect your audience to keep demanding them.