

How to Use Contrast

By going through the examples that we have just outlined, I think you can guess the steps you need to take when employing this law. But let's see if I can simplify the process a little bit. We are going to look at a few different elements of the Law of Contrast.

Starting High

As the name suggests, make sure your initial request is really big –not so big that it is totally unrealistic, but big enough that you know you will get a “no.” Then, follow this initial request with smaller offers that will bring about the result you really desired all along.

For example, fundraising organizations often send letters asking for donations in amounts that are usually pretty high for most people's pocket books. Soon after the letter is sent out, the organization places a follow-up telephone call. The person making the call asks if the letter was received and then makes a request for a smaller donation.

Timing

For contrast to be effective, it is important that the two scenarios, options, or offers are presented one right after another. Researchers Dillard and Fern argued that the timing between the initial and follow-up requests influenced the successfulness of using this technique. Specifically, in order to increase compliance, the delay between the two requests must be short. If there is too much of a delay between the first request and the second request, your prospect may not realize that you are comparing the two items or requests and your ability to persuade will falter.

The effects of timing play a key role in people's reactions and the actions they take. Let's say that you just found out your twelve-year-old son took the family car for a joyride and was brought back by the police. You might be understandably upset. However, what if you just found out instead that your nineteen-year-old son took the car out for a joyride seven years ago? In both scenarios you discovered the same news, but your reaction would be entirely different. You can see how the passage of time dulls the impact an event or situation can have. The same holds true with your requests – the passage of time will dull their impact.

Situation

Situation applies to most of the persuasion laws, and certainly to the Law of Contrast. You have to think about the situation that you are in before you can choose which method and to what degree you will implement the law. It is easy to see that the feelings of funeral attendee will be different from those of a wedding guest. Each event puts the attendee in a different frame of mind. So, if you approach the funeral attendee with a happy, fun presentation, obviously their sentiments will not compare to yours, making the approach totally inappropriate.

You can also determine the best time to bring up your topic by assessing each individual situation. Should you ask close to the time you want someone to take action, or as far in advance as possible? The answer is: “the sooner the better”; when the event is farther in

the future, you should make your request as soon in advance as possible. As the event approaches, the greater the anxiety and the “realness” of what we have to do sets in, and the less likely it will be for you to gain cooperation. If you need help with something right away, studies suggest that you should find someone who is not rushed or preoccupied with something else. The ability to gain cooperation from someone who is not under a time constraint goes up dramatically when compared with someone who is preoccupied or rushed.

Automobile dealers use the contrast principle. They wait until the final price for a new car has been negotiated before suggesting one option after another that might be added on. After committing to \$15,000, what is an extra \$200 for undercoating, an extended warranty, or a CD player? The trick is to bring up the extras independently of one another. After you’ve already decided to buy a \$1,000 couch, what is \$70 for fabric protection? Your prospects will always pay more for accessories or add-ons they buy after the purchase has been made.

Airlines also contrast news to you one piece at a time. They will say there is a slight delay, but they add that they should be ready to go in a few minutes. Then a later announcement comes stating that while everything is fine, they don’t want to take any chances, so they are going to replace the part. They come back on loudspeaker and say they are close to being finished and will announce when they are ready to go. The next announcement you hear is that they are waiting for final clearance and will be taking off shortly. These small announcements, in relation to each other, keep the passengers calmer and more peaceful than if the airline had just come right out and announced a two-hour delay.

We also see the contrast technique used at large amusement parks. If we hear ahead of time how long the lines are going to be, we won’t stand in them. You look to see how long the lines are then, finding them reasonable enough, you get in. After you think you are almost there, you see another section of ropes and people. This happens three more times until finally, two hours later, you are at the front of the line.

Here is another charity example: Often when solicitors call for a donation, they begin by asking you how you are. Usually you reply, “Fine,” or “Doing well,” or something like that. After you have announced that your circumstances are favorable, the solicitor then proceeds to say, “I’m glad you’re doing so well. I’m calling to see if you would make a donation to help the unfortunate victims of...” Now what? You don’t want to seem stingy or unfeeling, especially now that the solicitor has reminded you of your easy life compared to those that his company is soliciting for. In one study, 18% of the people donated when they were approached *without* the initial “How are you doing this evening?” while 32% donated when the initial greeting was employed.