

Reward Power: Gain Willing Cooperation

Reward Power refers to the ability to deliver rewards or benefits as a means of influencing others. This type of power can come in the form of financial, material or psychological rewards. The use of Reward Power is one of the fastest ways to persuade. This power is the opposite of Coercive Power. With Coercive Power you punish, while with Reward Power you offer incentives. Reward Power is based on utility, which is an understanding that in every transaction there is a potential for exchange. Basically, utility 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. Prizes are a form of utility power. They are a way to reward people for doing what you want them to do. With Reward Power, the reward becomes the incentive for compliant action. Examples of utilities include sales bonuses, paychecks, incentive clauses on contracts, bonus miles on airlines and bonus points on credit cards.

It is important to understand that while some incentives will work well with one person, they will not work with another. To some people, money is the reward. Still to others, recognition is the reward. As a persuader, you need to find the motivating force or reward that will work for each person you are dealing with. That is, you must understand the particular desires of the person or group. Reward Power is extremely effective in changing human behavior and in increasing your ability to persuade. When you effectively wield such power, you get what you want with minimal effort. Let's face it—everyone has a price.

There are several inefficiencies to note, however, when using rewards. First of all, keep in mind that the law of diminishing returns quickly takes over when you employ this type of power. Diminishing return means the more you use the reward, the less powerful it becomes. When people become accustomed to an incentive, they can become bored with it. Then they will either expect more or drop performance standards if the incentive is removed. One example of diminishing return is the common practice of offering elementary school children rewards for reading. Under such a program, the students win

pizza or other prizes after they have read a certain number of books. Unfortunately, these incentives often backfire 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 if the desired outcome is to be achieved each time. Moreover, the reward is only effective as long as the prospect doesn't see a "better deal" elsewhere. In other words, your incentive will always be compared to the next person's offer so you have to keep upping the ante. Rewards reinforce behavior, but as long as you are using them, expect your prospects/employees to keep demanding them.

Reinforcement Theory has a lot to do with both Reward Power and Coercive Power. Basically, if a person knows a positive consequence will follow a certain action, then s/he will willingly perform that action. Consequences, be they positive or negative, influence behavior. The type of consequence involved influences what actions people will take and what ones they will avoid. Three main rules of consequence exist. They are:

- (1) Consequences that provide rewards increase behavior.
- (2) Consequences that provide punishments decrease behavior.
- (3) Consequences that provide neither rewards nor punishments extinguish behavior.

Remembering these basic rules can serve as an excellent guide for deciding what to do in certain situations, depending on the desired outcome. Just be sure you take into account some of the Reinforcement Theory's limitations. Some examples of such limitations are listed below.

Limitations of Reinforcement Theory

1. What is considered a reward or a punishment will vary according to who you're working with and what her/his exact circumstances are.
2. As mentioned earlier, rewards can lose their value over time. When that happens, instead of feeling rewarded, the person will feel like you owe her/him something.

3. Other sources of reward or punishment may interfere. For example, an employee may value the reward of esteem and friendship with other less productive employees over what you, as the employer, have to offer.

4. If a person is merely responding to a reward, then there has not really been an internal change. S/he will revert back to her/his old behavior if the reward doesn't remain part of the new routine.

5. Punishment is difficult to deliver well. It is a powerful tool, but it must be executed appropriately if it is to work right. Punishment must have the following elements to be effective: a) it must be immediate, b) it must be strong or firm, c) it must be unavoidable and d) it must be consistent.

6. Punishment can breed anger, fear and hopelessness. These negative emotions will be associated with the person inflicting the punishment.

The challenge you face when using rewards in your persuasive efforts is the decrease in internal motivation that results. Once you condition your prospects to expect something for their compliance with your request, they will continuously seek out external rewards for their behavior. This endless search for reward causes your prospects to perform your request only for the benefit you are offering as incentive and not for any other reason. We have found that even if a person were willing to exhibit the desired behavior without the reward, once the reward is given as an incentive, the subject will no longer perform the desired behavior without the reward. An experiment proved this concept.

Subjects, sitting together at a table, worked on a puzzle for half an hour. 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 went into the waiting room and began to monitor the behavior of the subjects. 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 for doing the puzzles were far less likely to play with

them for fun during their free time. What's more, those who did not receive an external reward for their efforts were far more likely to play with the puzzles during their free time. Persuaders know that a behavior that is chosen out of free will last longer than a behavior that is rewarded by an external benefit.

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