



THE SCIENCE OF ETHICAL PERSUASION

An Invitation to Schools, Business Schools, and Universities

A COMMUNITY PROJECT

Donating our time to help students develop one of the world's most
valuable workplace skills
before they enter higher education or the workforce.



Patrick van der Burght

Speaker • Trainer • Consultant • Author

Founding Member & Licensed Trainer of the Cialdini Institute

Dear Principal, Teacher, Professor, Dean, Faculty Member, Principal, Careers Adviser or Events Coordinator,

Firstly, thank you.

As educators, I believe we are all part of the same family. Whether we teach in classrooms, lecture theatres, workshops or corporate training rooms, we have chosen careers centred on helping others build better futures. Few opportunities allow us to have a greater impact than helping young people develop the knowledge, skills and confidence that will shape their lives for decades to come.

This letter has been prepared to accompany a dedicated episode of my *Ethical Persuasion Unlocked* podcast for young adults. **During that episode, I invited students who believe they and their fellow students would benefit from a deeper introduction** to the science of ethical persuasion to download and share this letter with teachers, lecturers, faculty members or educational leaders who may wish to consider such an opportunity.

As part of one of my community projects, I donate a limited amount of my time each year to introduce this important life skill to young adults through presentations delivered in schools, business schools and universities, either online or in person. These introductory presentations are **available complimentary via live video call**, or in person for the reimbursement of reasonable travel and accommodation expenses only.

I am able to make this contribution because I am a **Founding Member and Licensed Trainer of the Cialdini Institute**—the organisation established to preserve and advance the scientific work of **Dr Robert Cialdini** (image right), widely



regarded as the world's leading authority on the science of Persuasion and Social Influence. Having taught this science since 2000, I have become convinced that every young adult deserves an introduction to this increasingly valuable skill before entering higher education or the workforce.

The fact that this letter has found its way to you suggests that **one of your students, a parent, or another member of your educational community believes this is a topic worthy of your consideration.** Whether or not you ultimately decide to organise a presentation, I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to consider a suggestion that someone in your care felt was important enough to place before you.

A Skill That Is Growing in Importance

The **World Economic Forum's** *Future of Jobs Report* identified **Leadership and Social Influence as the fourth most important workplace skill** organisations needed to develop in 2023. Only two years later, **in the 2025 report, that same skill had risen to third place**, demonstrating that employers and business experts consider it to be increasing in importance rather than becoming less relevant.

Another large-scale study by **CashNet**, later published by **Forbes**, analysed more than 17 million job advertisements published on Indeed.com. It found Persuasion to be the third most-requested soft skill sought by employers.

Interestingly, Strategic Thinking ranked first, Negotiation second, Persuasion third and Presentation Skills fourth. It is difficult to become an outstanding negotiator, presenter or leader without also understanding the science of persuasion.

Future of Jobs Report 2025

Core skills in 2025

WORLD
ECONOMIC
FORUM

1.  Analytical thinking
2.  Resilience, flexibility and agility
3.  Leadership and social influence
4.  Creative thinking
5.  Motivation and self-awareness
6.  Technological literacy
7.  Empathy and active listening
8.  Curiosity and lifelong learning
9.  Talent management
10.  Service orientation and customer service

 Cognitive skills  Self-efficacy  Working with others  Management skills  Technology skills  Engagement skills

Note: The skills selected by surveyed organizations to be of greatest importance to workers at the time of the survey.
Source: World Economic Forum, (2025), *Future of Jobs Report 2025*.

Leading educational institutions, including **Harvard University**, have referenced Dr Robert Cialdini's work for many years. As employers place increasing value on persuasion and social influence, more schools, business schools and universities are recognising the benefits of introducing students to this science before they hope to persuade their way into higher education or the workforce.

The significance of this extends well beyond employability.

Why This Matters

Educational institutions prepare students with technical knowledge, subject expertise and professional qualifications. Yet communication, **influence and leadership skills profoundly impact student success** and are often assumed rather than explicitly taught.

Every student will spend much of their life attempting to persuade other people.

They will:

- apply for scholarships, university places, apprenticeships and employment;
- prepare written applications and persuasive proposals;
- participate in interviews and negotiations;
- present ideas to lecturers, employers, colleagues and clients;
- lead teams and influence stakeholders; and
- build relationships throughout both their professional and personal lives.

The extent to which they communicate persuasively—both verbally and in writing—will have a lasting impact on how often they achieve their goals and, ultimately, the opportunities they achieve or miss throughout their lives.

Educational institutions are increasingly recognised not only for the quality of the education they provide, but also for the opportunities their graduates go on to achieve. Students who communicate more effectively during interviews, scholarship applications, presentations and workplace interactions are naturally better positioned to succeed. Over time, this can

contribute to stronger graduate outcomes, enhanced alumni success stories and an even stronger reputation among prospective students and their families.

Educational Institutions Continually Introduce Students to Skills They Should Not Miss

Schools, business schools and universities regularly introduce students to valuable topics beyond their core curriculum, including cyber safety, wellbeing, leadership, career planning and responsible online behaviour.

The science of ethical persuasion deserves similar consideration.

Because persuasion science complements existing subjects, it can often be incorporated with little or no disruption to existing curricula while **providing the scientific explanation** for why many accepted communication, persuasive writing, marketing, advertising, leadership and presentation strategies work—provided those strategies themselves are ethical.

The presentation can integrate naturally into subjects such as:

- English;
- Communication;
- Persuasive Writing;
- Business;
- Marketing;
- Advertising;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Leadership;
- Public Speaking; and
- Career Preparation.

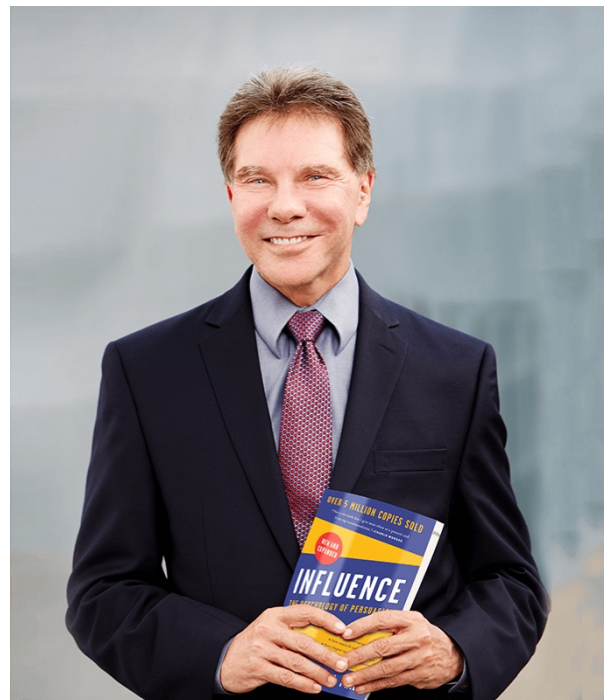


Teachers are welcome to build classroom discussions, activities or assignments around the presentation, either beforehand or afterwards, should they wish.

What We Mean by Ethical Persuasion

One reason I chose to become a Licensed Trainer of the Cialdini Institute is that **ethical communication** has always been at the heart of Dr Robert Cialdini's life's work.

His internationally acclaimed book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, first published in 1984, was originally written to help consumers recognise and protect themselves against unethical business practices. Over the decades that followed, his research demonstrated that the very same scientific principles could also **help honest individuals and organisations communicate more effectively**, achieve success that would otherwise have been missed, and build stronger long-term relationships—without compromising their integrity.



The objective is not to persuade more people at any cost.

Rather, it is to **help truthful ideas, worthwhile requests and genuinely beneficial opportunities receive the consideration they deserve** while building stronger long-term relationships with clients, colleagues, students, parents and other stakeholders—all while respecting their freedom to choose.

Before encouraging the use of any persuasive approach, the Cialdini Institute advocates a simple three-question ethical filter:

1. Is it truthful?
2. Are you presenting information honestly, without exaggeration, twisting or omitting important facts?
3. Is it wise? If others complied with your request, would they be happy to deal with you again in the future?

While no simple framework can resolve every ethical dilemma, these questions clearly demonstrate the philosophy underpinning both the Cialdini Institute and my own teaching.

It Requires Far Less Time Than Many People Assume

Some educational institutions may assume that introducing a subject such as persuasion science would require a significant commitment of curriculum time.

In reality, the flagship Cialdini Institute certification program, facilitated by a Licensed Trainer, requires approximately twenty hours of learning, typically spread across eight weeks. Approximately half of this time consists of self-paced study through professionally produced video lessons presented by Dr Robert Cialdini, while the remaining time is devoted to live discussions, practical application and confidence building with a Licensed Trainer.

Against that background, **one or two introductory presentations of approximately ninety minutes can provide students with a surprisingly substantial introduction to the science,** together with numerous practical, scientifically supported strategies



they can begin applying immediately. While these sessions are not intended to develop mastery, they provide an excellent foundation for students to begin applying these principles immediately in both their professional and private lives.

Institutions wishing to explore the subject further may later decide to discuss offering more comprehensive Cialdini Institute training as part of their curriculum or as an optional enrichment opportunity for interested students and parents. Such an offering could provide a distinctive point of difference while equipping students with one of the workplace skills employers increasingly seek.

Our Community Project

Within the limits of my availability each year, **I offer educational sessions to schools, universities and business schools to help students better understand how people make decisions** and how they can communicate more effectively without compromising their integrity.

These sessions are designed for young adults aged fifteen years and older.

Schools may choose either:

- a complimentary presentation delivered via live video conference call; or
- an in-person presentation, where only reasonable travel and accommodation expenses are requested.

Naturally, an in-person presentation allows for greater interaction, engagement and knowledge retention.



There is absolutely no expectation that an institution commits to multiple presentations from the outset. **I prefer that schools begin with a single introductory presentation and, afterwards, invite students to express whether they would value the opportunity to explore additional Principles of Persuasion** and research findings during a second presentation at a later date.

Because these presentations form part of a community project, **I generally do not repeat substantially the same introductory presentation at the same educational institution within a two-year period.** Institutions wishing to make the greatest use of this opportunity may therefore wish to invite all students for whom the content is age-appropriate. Two years later, the presentation can be offered to the next generation of students.

These sessions are educational in nature and are not intended to be sales presentations. Their purpose is simply to provide students with an opportunity to learn the science of ethical persuasion from one of the few Cialdini Institute Licensed Trainers, ensuring they are introduced to Dr Robert Cialdini's research and teachings as he intended them to be taught.

What Students, Educators and Your Institution Would Gain

These presentations are designed primarily to equip students with a practical understanding of the science of ethical persuasion before they enter higher education or the workforce.

However, the benefits need not end there.

I would also be delighted to **welcome teaching staff, administrative staff, and admissions or enrolment personnel** directly employed by the educational institution.

While these introductory presentations cover only a fraction of the complete science taught through the Cialdini Institute certification program, staff will leave with practical insights they can begin applying immediately throughout their professional roles.

Examples include:

- encouraging students to complete their work on time while giving it the focus, effort and attention it deserves;
- increasing student engagement during lessons and classroom activities;
- strengthening relationships with parents and carers;
- increasing parent loyalty and encouraging families to become ambassadors for the institution;
- improving the effectiveness of brochures, websites and other promotional material;
- strengthening open days, information evenings and enrolment presentations;
- improving conversations with prospective students and parents during the enrolment process;
- increasing enquiry-to-enrolment conversion rates; and
- strengthening commitment from families who have accepted enrolment offers but who may still be considering alternative educational institutions.

Like every organisation, educational institutions continually communicate their value to prospective students and their families. They compete for enrolments, strive to build lasting relationships with parents and carers, and work to ensure students remain engaged, succeed academically and ultimately become proud ambassadors for the institution.

For these reasons, I believe **these presentations have the potential to create value well beyond the students attending them**, benefiting the educators, staff and institutions committed to helping those students succeed.



Patrick van der Burght delivering a keynote at WESTPAC, one of Australia's four biggest banks.

About Patrick van der Burght

Allow me to provide a little background so you understand where this invitation comes from.

I am based in Melbourne, Australia, and have been teaching persuasion science since 2000.

I am a **Founding Member and Licensed Trainer of the Cialdini Institute. Dr Robert Cialdini**, whose scientific work the Institute was established to preserve and advance, is widely regarded as the world's leading authority on the science of persuasion and social influence. His internationally acclaimed book *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* has **sold more than seven million copies in 48 languages** and continues to appear on many of the world's most respected business reading lists, including those published by *Forbes*.

On the Cialdini Institute website, I am listed as one of the highest-ranked of only a small number of Licensed Trainers worldwide authorised to teach Dr Cialdini's material.

In 2024, I co-authored *How to Hear YES More Often*, a practical companion to *Influence*, and I host the *Ethical Persuasion Unlocked* podcast.

What Students Would Learn

The proposed sessions introduce students to:

- how human decision-making works;
- the science behind ethical persuasion;
- the Universal Principles of Persuasion;
- fascinating research findings and real-world case studies demonstrating the remarkable impact persuasion science can have on the outcomes of communication;
- practical strategies that immediately improve our persuasiveness;
- ways to strengthen scholarship, university and job applications;
- methods for building trust, credibility and long-lasting relationships; and
- techniques that increase cooperation while maintaining integrity.

By introducing students to these concepts before they enter higher education or the workforce, **they gain an advantage many of their peers will not develop until much later in their careers**—if at all.

These presentations are not intended to replace the comprehensive Cialdini Institute certification program. Rather, they provide students with an **engaging introduction and a practical toolbox of immediately applicable strategies** that organisations throughout the world invest significant resources in having us teach their employees.



A Lifelong Skill

Many technical skills become outdated as industries, technology and workplaces evolve.

The science of persuasion is different.

Once learned, its principles continue to serve students throughout their education, careers and private lives.

Although Dr Robert Cialdini has spent more than forty years researching this field, its importance has continued to increase rather than diminish.

Human nature has not fundamentally changed. What has changed is the overwhelming amount of information competing for our attention every day. **As our world becomes increasingly information-rich, people rely even more heavily on the intuitive decision-making processes that the science of persuasion helps us understand.**

For that reason, ethical persuasion is not simply another business skill.

It is a lifelong communication skill that influences our education, careers, relationships and our ability to achieve goals that depend upon the agreement, cooperation or support of others.

If This Opportunity Interests You

If you believe the science of ethical persuasion could benefit your students and educational community, I would be delighted to discuss the possibilities with you, answer any questions you may have, and explore whether one or two presentations would be appropriate for your educational institution, subject to my availability.

You are welcome to **contact my team through the enquiry form on ethicalpersuasion.com.au.**

Alternatively, you may first wish to watch or listen to the podcast episode that inspired this letter.

Created specifically for young adults aged fifteen years and above, the episode introduces many of the concepts explored more fully during the live presentations. It demonstrates how surprisingly small changes to truthful words, images and communication can significantly recover our ability to influence ethically.

Among other topics, students discover:

- a fascinating introduction to research findings and real-world case studies demonstrating just how dramatically persuasion science can influence the outcomes of communication;
- a simple explanation of how people actually make decisions, based on the Nobel Prize-winning work of Professor Daniel Kahneman;
- a logical understanding of why three of Dr Robert Cialdini's seven universal Principles of Persuasion work so consistently across cultures and situations;
- why genuinely helping others often encourages others to help us in return;
- how our appearance and presentation influence first impressions and the willingness of others to listen to us;
- how simply rephrasing an observation using loss framing can dramatically increase its impact;
- why the English word "because" possesses remarkable persuasive power in everyday communication; and
- why the science of persuasion should always be applied ethically, never through manipulation or coercion.

The episode is available through the major podcast platforms. However, I generally recommend the YouTube version, as it has been enriched with supporting images, visual demonstrations and short quiz questions that encourage students to think critically about the material while giving them a sense of achievement as they progress.

Some educators may even choose to recommend the episode as optional viewing or listening for students, or use it as the basis for a classroom

discussion or assignment. Afterwards, you may wish to invite students to express whether they would value a live presentation exploring the science in greater depth.

A Request for Your Consideration

As an educational leader, you are no doubt continually looking for opportunities to equip your students with knowledge and skills that will serve them long after graduation.

Given the growing importance employers now place on persuasion and social influence, and the profound impact these skills can have on whether students achieve—or miss—the opportunities available to them, I believe even one or two sessions introducing this science could become **one of the most practical, engaging and empowering educational experiences** you provide before students enter higher education or the workforce.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Like me, you have chosen a profession dedicated to having a constructive and lasting influence on the lives of others. I sincerely admire the commitment you have made to preparing young people for successful futures, and I believe a presentation introducing the science of ethical persuasion would fit naturally within that shared mission.

Should you wish to explore this opportunity further, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Wishing you and your students an influential future,



Patrick van der Burght

Founding Member & Licensed Trainer of the Cialdini Institute
Speaker • Trainer • Consultant • Published Author

Teaching the Science of Ethical Persuasion since 2000

Website: ethicalpersuasion.com.au

Contact: ethicalpersuasion.com.au/contact

Podcast *Ethical Persuasion Unlocked* 'Young Adults' Episode:
ethicalpersuasion.com.au/podcast/0020

Resources for Further Exploration

If you would like to independently explore the science of ethical persuasion before making a decision, the following resources may be of interest:

About Patrick van der Burght

- Keynote presentation highlights video
ethicalpersuasion.com.au/keynote/
- Ethical Persuasion Unlocked – Episode 20
ethicalpersuasion.com.au/podcast/0020
- How to Hear YES More Often
yesmoreoften.com



About the Science

- Dr Robert Cialdini's Explainer Video
The Science of Persuasion (17 million views)
ethicalpersuasion.com.au/video-science-of-persuasion/
- The Cialdini Institute
www.cialdini.com
- World Economic Forum
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/>
- Forbes
The Top 10 In-Demand Soft Skills to Learn in 2024
<https://tinyurl.com/5a6azz56>
- Forbes
Six Timeless Books for 2025
<https://tinyurl.com/56eprwjx>



Reference to Dr Cialdini by Educational Institutions

- [Harvard Business Review](#)
The Uses (and Abuses) of Influence
- [Harvard Business Impact](#)
Harnessing the Science of Persuasion
- [Stanford Business](#) – Matt Abrahams, teacher of
Strategic Communication, interviews Dr Cialdini
- [Arizona State University](#)
The Robert B. Cialdini Social Psychology Laboratories
- [Cambridge University](#)
The Cambridge Handbook of Compliance
- [Oxford Academic](#)
Book: Six Degrees of Social Influence: Science,
Application, and the Psychology of Robert Cialdini
- [The Open University](#)
Collaborative Problem Solving, Week 4, Influencing
- [Carnegie Mellon University Qatar](#)
Jocelyn Bélanger, professor of psychology,
recently awarded the 2025 Robert B. Cialdini Prize



Cialdini Prize

