



CARM Reflections

SERIES:
INFLUENCE
The Human Connection

This Edition: “Subliminal Influence in Your Language”

In support of our recently released CARM “Influencing Negotiations Program” we now explore the benefits of incorporating Subliminal Influence into your negotiations and communication style.

Subliminal influence is often referred to as a stimulus that exists below the threshold of our conscious mind or outside of our conscious awareness. It’s an influence that we don’t notice (Vance Packard). In other words people have no awareness of the stimulus being used which is leading towards influencing their motivation and thinking. It’s the difference between something that we can process in our conscious mind and something that enters the subconscious mind without any conscious recognition.

A subliminal message passes beneath the conscious radar, and yet acts powerfully beneath the surface to contribute to any feelings we may experience or deductions we may process at our conscious thinking level. It is a verbal or non verbal message/action that is sufficient enough to influence the mental processing of our subconscious mind.

Subliminal messages influence the mental processing of our subconscious mind.

When an individual is told to do something they will generally think about what it is that has been said and look for meaning in the message through their conscious mind. The decisions the conscious mind makes are then based upon our level of awareness, knowledge and reasoning skills, which we have developed throughout our life’s experiences and learning.

Our state of cognitive readiness also helps determine what we consciously notice. The subconscious mind however, does not possess the ability to “reason”. It’s not the area where we, for example, **distinguish** right from wrong, **judge** information or **interpret** meaning.

What is interesting is that even before our conscious mind applies deductive reasoning our subconscious mind has already stimulated our thoughts in this direction. In other words, when someone walks past you smiling you may wonder what they are smiling about, but below the surface your subconscious mind has and is already introducing other information that includes: what the smile means to you, and whether the person’s “appearance” signals that they are friend or foe. These stored thoughts operating below the surface will activate different levels of conscious thinking and motivate you to explore certain areas in further detail, such is the effect of subliminal influence.

Our subconscious mind guides thinking in a particular way.

And once your conscious thinking is guided towards something, it sees so much more within that focal area. In much the same way as when you start thinking about a particular car or a certain style of fashion, suddenly you start seeing that car or that style of fashion everywhere, because your conscious mind is now attracting “like” information. In addition to “guiding the focus” of your conscious thoughts, subliminal thinking contributes to the “deductions” your conscious mind forms. Going back to the example of seeing someone smiling as they walk past you, you might conclude, *that the person looks like a nice person*, and this is something that attracts us. This is the end product of your conscious thinking, and yet it has been guided there by your subconscious. Subconscious thoughts are enriched with your stored experiences which are autonomously engaged in your next experience. This is the reason subliminal messages can have an influencing effect.

The idea of subliminal is often associated with clever advertising where carefully crafted messages, words or images are incorporated into ads to influence consumers to buy products. The advertiser’s intent is to unconsciously lure us towards the product or service in ways that attract us. We desire what they have, and we might feel strongly compelled towards it. In this context, some countries have sought to ban this type of advertising. When applied unethically, as has been the case in the past, it has influenced consumers towards products that are, in essence not in the best interest for their health.

So, how do we say and do things subliminally, staying outside another person’s conscious awareness and is this an effective approach when it comes to influencing? Well, it becomes a great deal more effective when it’s supported with persuasive language. In this way you will certainly deepen your level of influence, as well as helping a person’s natural information processing by leading their conscious thinking in a more desirable way.

Put simply, if you are communicating with someone and you tell the person what to do, or you use language that infers you are in control, or your manner is directive, or you blame someone else for an unintended outcome, then you run the risk of consciously creating resistance and invoking strong negative emotions. This may lead the other person to a negative emotional response and as a result they may challenge you back. Alternatively, if what you are intending to say is made in a more *suggestive way* (subtle) with a *friendly overture* (subtle) and you support this suggestion with a persuasive appeal (logical, emotional or character based) then you stand a far greater chance of influencing someone else’s thinking and you can minimise any potential levels of resistance.

For example, if you were to say, *“that’s not the way it’s done, you know I would never agree to that, and besides I’ve got a much better way of doing it”*, then you are most likely going to make someone feel challenged, threatened, inadequate and invoke negative emotions. If you also consider the type of dominant body language that would support this type of language, then such a proposition would no doubt be perceived as quite negative, unattractive, defiant and controlling.

If on the other hand you gave recognition (subtle) for the merits of what had just been said by the other party, along the lines of, *“I can see the point you are making here and I can also see from your perspective that it makes good sense as well. In addition, there may also be some other factors here that could be beneficial for us both to consider. I did have a previous experience with someone else where the end result was quite costly for both of us and I feel, in hindsight, a better result may have been reached if we had perhaps considered other factors together before making our final decision. Would you be prepared to look at this further?”* If you also consider the supportive body language that would accompany such a message it would generally be more friendly, suggestive and open, so these subtle non verbal actions embedded in a collaborative and friendly approach are more likely to be positively received by the other party.

People don’t have to consciously recognise the fact that you are being friendly and non-threatening towards them or their ideas. You can comfortably convey friendly attributes in subtle ways and make people feel more comfortable and less defensive.

When people are not personally or emotionally challenged by your words or actions then you are subtly influencing the situation and their state of mind.

Giving recognition, acting in a friendly manner (e.g. a genuine smile and a handshake), listening, and giving someone your time are all subliminal verbal and non verbal acts that lead towards a more positive perception of you and your message. This type of approach, particularly in a negotiation or in a discussion where needs and opinions might differ, helps to influence people in a positive way and seeks to open the door to dialogue. A friendly open disposition is far more likely to be favourably received than someone who is signalling sullen, stern, forceful or challenging behaviour. So subtle verbal (suggestive) and non verbal (friendly actions) communication, helps you to deliver your message with greater influence and appeal.

Psychologist Robert Cialdini infers that one of the principles of persuasion is that people are more easily influenced by what they like. There are many factors that someone can like about you, for example we mainly associate “likability” with physical attractiveness, however going a little deeper, people are also attracted to *politeness, friendliness and cooperative efforts* and these can be demonstrated subliminally. People also like similarity, they find it easier to like and trust someone who is similar to themselves and they are more attracted to people who can relate to them or their situation.

Therefore consider identifying with something that you can form common ground with someone over, as a way of establishing an attractive “connection” with the other person. People also like to be liked, it feels good, so consider relevant similarities between you and the other person to help support and build on this common ground.

A good question for you to consider is “how does your verbal and non-verbal communication contribute subliminally to the outcomes of your interactions?” Remember, everything you say and do, every action or inaction, however subtle is generating an effect. Bear these two thoughts in mind as you pursue your communication efforts with others:

- *Subliminal thoughts influence conscious thinking in “specific” directions. In what specific directions might you be subliminally prompting the thoughts of others? And*
- *Subliminal thoughts contribute to the “deductions” the conscious mind forms. What deductions are you helping others form through your subliminal messages?*

Interestingly, if you think about it (consciously of course), whilst the points in this article have stimulated your conscious thinking, you may be surprised to know that at a subconscious level, your previous experiences (stored subconsciously), would also have been contributing to the direction and deductions of your thinking. As you related to the earlier example of a “smiling stranger” your subconscious mind would have been making its own contribution.

Food for thought don’t you think?

We would love to hear your feedback on our CARM reflections and look forward to hearing from you!

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The CARM Team

**When outcomes
are critical**



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