



American Expression E2274 Foot in the door

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The foot-in-the-door technique is a psychological strategy used to gain compliance from others by first securing a small, initial commitment, which makes them more likely to agree to a larger request later. This technique is rooted in the principle of consistency, where people strive to align their behaviors with their previous actions and commitments. By agreeing to a small request, individuals are more likely to perceive themselves as helpful or cooperative, making them more likely to agree to subsequent, larger requests to maintain this self-perception.

The concept of foot-in-the-door was first studied and named by psychologists Jonathan Freedman and Scott Fraser in the 1960s. In their classic experiment, they demonstrated that people who agreed to a small request, such as signing a petition, were more likely to comply with a more significant request, like placing a large, unattractive sign in their yard, compared to those who were only asked the larger request initially. This finding has been replicated in numerous studies, confirming the reliability of the foot-in-the-door technique across different contexts and cultures.

This technique is widely used in various fields, including marketing, sales, politics, and social movements. For example, a salesperson might first ask a potential customer to try a free sample before attempting to sell a full-sized product. In politics, campaigners might ask individuals to display a small sticker or sign before requesting a more substantial commitment, like a donation or volunteer work. Social movements often use this approach by initially asking for small acts of support, such as signing a petition or sharing information on social media, before seeking more significant involvement or contributions.

One of the key reasons the foot-in-the-door technique is effective is because it leverages the psychological desire for consistency. Once people commit to a small action, they are more likely to follow through with related actions to avoid cognitive dissonance, a state of mental discomfort arising from holding contradictory beliefs or attitudes. By agreeing to a small request, individuals begin to see themselves as supportive or agreeable, and this self-perception influences their future behavior, making them more amenable to larger requests.

However, the effectiveness of this technique can vary depending on several factors. The initial request must be small enough to be easily accepted but significant enough to create a sense of commitment. Additionally, the time interval between the initial and subsequent requests can influence the success of the technique; too long a gap might weaken the perceived connection between the two actions, while too short a gap might seem overly pushy or manipulative.

In conclusion, the foot-in-the-door technique is a powerful psychological tool for gaining compliance by leveraging the principle of consistency. By starting with a small request, individuals are more likely to agree to larger requests later, as they seek to maintain a coherent self-image and avoid cognitive dissonance. This method has proven effective in various contexts, from sales and marketing to politics and social activism, highlighting its broad applicability and influence on human behavior.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the foot-in-the-door technique leverage the principle of consistency to influence behavior?
2. In what ways can the foot-in-the-door technique be ethically applied in marketing and sales?
3. What factors determine the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door technique in different contexts?
4. How might cultural differences impact the success of the foot-in-the-door technique?
5. Can the foot-in-the-door technique backfire, and if so, under what circumstances?