

# Subliminal Persuasion

**INFLUENCE &  
MARKETING  
SECRETS  
THEY DON'T  
WANT YOU TO KNOW**

**DAVE LAKHANI**



**WILEY**

**John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**

# CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i> Kevin Hogan	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxi
Chapter 1 Creating Message Contagion	1
Chapter 2 Leverage Applied Propaganda	21
Chapter 3 Position and Package Your Legend	45
Chapter 4 Control the Emotion and the Content	63
Chapter 5 Get a Real Endorsement	77
Chapter 6 Understand Beliefs and True Believers	89
Chapter 7 Harness the Power of the People's Media	111
Chapter 8 Deliver the Experience	127
Chapter 9 The Subliminal Power of Words	143
Chapter 10 Creating a Cult Following	159
Chapter 11 Seduction	169
Afterword <i>Ben Mack</i>	177
Appendix Coaching for Influence <i>Dr. Rachna D. Jain</i>	183
<i>Bibliography</i>	191
<i>About the Author</i>	195
<i>Index</i>	197

# 1

---

# CREATING MESSAGE CONTAGION

*Ideas have to be wedded to action; if there is no sex, no vitality in them, there is no action.*

— Henry Miller

This is a book that walks a very fine line. My publisher, with whom I have a tremendous relationship, wouldn't publish the book I wanted this to be because it was too edgy, too dangerous. So, I'm going to reveal the most cutting edge subliminal persuasion techniques, anyway; I'm going to expose what makes people make decisions; and I'm going to reveal how to control their thinking and behavior as it relates to buying your products and services. I'm going to draw the shortest line between where you are and the information you really want. If I do my job right, you'll find yourself exposed to some of the most profitable thinking in sales, marketing, advertising, and

persuasion today. And, you'll be reading this because my publisher will agree that I took off enough of the edge without losing the value of the content.

Some ideas are too dangerous for polite company, but the last time I checked, your livelihood and mine was a deadly serious game, one we all hope to win.

You are about enter the arena of the winner, and you'll experience firsthand how those people who control the world around them think, how they act, and what tools of success they leverage to get what they want from you and from me.

**THE ESSENCE OF SUBLIMINAL PERSUASION IS THE MESSAGE: THE MESSAGE YOUR AUDIENCE HEARS, RECEIVES, AND EXPERIENCES AS BEING TRUE**

Persuasion is about messaging one-to-one or one-to-many. Subliminal persuasion occurs when you are able to successfully implant a message in the mind of a person or group of people whom you target for change without their conscious evaluation of the change, and encourage them to spread the idea organically to their associates.

Subliminal persuasion is about getting people to change their minds, to change their beliefs, and to accept new information as not only being correct, but having the necessity to spread.

Advertising, marketing, movie making, public relations, propaganda, negotiation, and religion all rely on subliminal persuasion.

The focus of this book is to teach you how to subliminally persuade the masses to take the actions you want them to take, to buy your products, services, and ideas. I'm going to teach

you how to use this information ethically, but the decision will ultimately be up to you as to how you leverage this material. I'll hold nothing back.

Because ideas spread through exposure, you'll find yourself compelled to share what you learn, to leverage what you learn here. The more you expose yourself to these ideas, and the more you expose others to them, the more effective you become.

Subliminal persuasion is a learned skill set that when fully learned and integrated, disappears into the area of competent competence; you don't have to think about it to do it, you just do it. And the more time you spend focused on experiencing, testing, and leveraging these ideas in your business, your marketing, your advertising, and your sales processes, the more you'll spread the ideas that you must, so you can get more of whatever it is that you want . . . money, sex, power, fame, or anything else.

Getting messages and beliefs to spread is the primary goal of the persuader. The extent to which you can get people to accept your ideas preemptively will determine how effective your persuasive process will be. Also, the extent to which you can leverage, combine, or attach to existing beliefs, fears, anxieties, and facts will determine how overtly or covertly persuasive you need to be.

In mass influence, too much emphasis is often put on the individual at the beginning of the process. In fact, to be effective at subliminally persuading the group, you must first understand the underlying beliefs, motivations, and desires of the group as a whole. You must also carefully define which group you are going to persuade.

To be a highly effective subliminal persuader, you must know whom it is you intend to persuade. When governments use propaganda and other mass influence techniques to create changes in the beliefs of a populace, they first examine who will most easily accept the new information, whose paradigm the narrative best fits. They then create a powerful story and present it to the audience. They give them just enough evidence in the beginning that the people who *want* to believe the information will. Then, once they've bought in, everything else is a much easier sell and it sounds like something they've already heard, thereby subverting critical thinking.

### **HOW MESSAGES ARE SPREAD AND ACCEPTED**

As human beings, we are programmed to spread messages; it is a condition of our humanity and our survival. We either consciously or subconsciously process the messages we receive, depending on the relevancy of the message we receive. The more closely the message matches our schema, the less conscious deconstruction is required. The more it motivates us in some way toward a better ideal, self, community, or universe, the more likely we are to spread it.

Ideas are spread when they are charged with emotion or meaning. They spread fastest when they are controversial, when they cast stones at our enemies, when they are motivational, when they promise salvation, or when they relieve a pressing pain that someone or a group is experiencing. In the wake of the September 11th tragedy, Americans were highly charged and looking for an enemy to strike back at. Regardless

of your political view of the Iraq war, any enemy would do at that point; we simply needed to vent some anger on a deserving enemy. In that moment, there were many easy targets that could be painted as an enemy and a very strong cause-and-effect connection that could be made in the minds of most people by simply connecting the event with the enemy. The message spread and the persuasion occurred. But the idea that led to the connection and the persuasion occurred much earlier than September 11th.

As humans, the first way persuasive messages spread are from parent to child. The parents pass on beliefs and ideals that are presented as a set of truths. The child accepts the message and, in most cases, adopts the message as being the truth, models it, and makes it a piece of the construct by which the child will live his life and interpret the world around him. There are other relationships in life when beliefs are built and approximate the intensity of the child-parent message transmission. They are:

Educator-Student Relationship

Employer-Employee Relationship

Parish-Parishioner Relationship

Intimate-Significant Other Relationship

By studying and understanding the messages that were spread in these relationships as they relate to the change in belief you hope to create, you will better be able to create a message that will be accepted and passed along as a truism. Subliminal persuasion will have occurred.

**Subliminal Sales Secret**

To persuade subliminally, craft a message that matches the reality of the audience you intend to persuade by tying it to beliefs, ideas, and behaviors learned in the parent-child idea transmission, in the educator-pupil transmission or the societal dictator-participant transmission. Subliminal persuasion occurs most seamlessly and deeply when you affect core beliefs and ideas. Those messages are also most quickly spread when they demonstrate something that you've always believed is not true and when it supports and builds on those beliefs.

What is the message you want your audience to believe and spread? How can you relate it to core beliefs that your audience already holds as being true? What are the three beliefs that your audience holds as being true? The more emotional the content of the belief, the more likely your message is to be accepted and spread.

If you hope to create long-term subliminal persuasion, you begin by creating messages that result in beliefs that parents will hold as being true and pass on to their children. Once you've sufficiently affected the beliefs of a couple of generations of parents, persuasion is no longer necessary, because your message has moved from idea to what is now believed to be fact. Subliminal persuasion in business is a long-term proposition: What messages should the parents, educators, significant others, and religious leaders be learning and spreading to their children?

Urban myths are one of the best examples of messages being spread organically. The components of a good urban legend that will spread are the same as the components of an idea that will



take off in a community of people whom you are influencing. Those components are:

1. A vivid and powerful story that plays on a preexisting belief or fear, or that creates the possibility of something that could be true.
2. The telling is done in a very vivid way that evokes urgency and plays on the beliefs or fears that already exist.
3. The story is typically reported by someone who presents the information as being true (whether it is or whether they know it is or not). Social proof is leveraged or implied.
4. The receiver has a similar reaction to the content of the story and because of the emotional impact of the story, maintains it at the top of the mind, and anchors the story in memory so that, in context, the anchor is fired and the story comes to mind. (More about anchoring later).
5. The receiver becomes the mouthpiece and spreads the story.

In subliminally persuading the masses, the process looks very similar.

1. Create a powerful hook, an idea that is intuitively accepted by the receiver. The hook may come in the form of a headline or sound bite that encapsulates the idea itself.
2. Set the presumption that the information is accurate by linking it to quantifiable evidence, trusted people, places, or things. Leverage social proof.
3. Tell the story with great gusto, make it vivid, emotionally appealing, and build big word pictures that people can dive in to.

4. Encourage interaction with the storyteller and encourage the next action. The more interactive he is with you and your message, the more persuaded he becomes.

Howard Gossage, the so-called Socrates of San Francisco and adman extraordinaire, created an ad for the Sierra Club to oppose “The Flooding of the Grand Canyon.” His ad said “Now Only You Can Save the Grand Canyon from Being Flooded . . . for Profit.” The copy goes on to talk about how a congressional bill would permit the building of two dams on the Colorado River and create a fluctuating shoreline based on hydroelectric needs, which would cause the Colorado River to become still water.

Gossage’s ad was very effective. He encouraged people to get involved, and to spread the message by including seven coupons: one to join the Sierra Club, make a donation, or ask for more information; the rest were preaddressed to the president of the United States, the secretary of the interior, the member of Congress sponsoring the bill, the message recipient’s representative in Congress, and two U.S. senators.

The ad was subliminally persuasive because it sold conservation through outrage. It was effective on two fronts. The bill didn’t pass and the Sierra Club’s membership jumped from 35,000 members to 50,000 members in six months. No one wants to see the Grand Canyon turned into a muddy lake (a future ad asked “Should We Also Flood the Sistine Chapel so Tourists Can Get Nearer the Ceiling?”). So, people wrote in and challenged the bill and they became conservationists in the meantime.

Subliminal persuasion is often effective because the message that is spread (in the case of Gossage, conservation) is not the

obvious call to action. Cults never say, “Please join us; we are destructive.” They offer something that is easily palatable and introduce you to a more controversial experience later (conservationism, like environmentalism today, was not an easy sell).

How can you make your message viral by leveraging the urban legend process, and how can you create a story in a story? Look carefully at your marketing, advertising, and public relations messages and see how you can carefully fold your core message inside something that is more easily palatable.

Volvo does an exceptional job of selling cars by wrapping their higher-priced cars in a story of safety. Whether you own a Volvo or not, you likely regularly use it as the standard of safety against which other cars are judged. Most people, when asked which brand of cars are the safest, will answer Volvo. Volvo never focuses on price, competition, or style (their cars are not that attractive); they focus on how important it is for a child to be safe in a crash, a message that is passed from parent to child as a fundamental truth about survivability. The message inside the message, though, is to buy a car that doesn't have high aesthetic desirability and costs more to do the same as the cool cars do, which is to get you from one place to another.

The process is really no different if you are subliminally persuasive in person. You craft a persuasive story that engages the emotions, tell it with passion, get people involved, and fold the most intense request inside an idea that is easy to understand. The folded idea is implicit or a natural extension of the story you tell.

My definition of persuasion is helping people come to their own natural conclusion, which happens to be the one you want them to have . . . this is the essence of subliminal persuasion.

## **CONNECTING MESSAGES FOR MAXIMUM PERSUASIVENESS**

For messages to spread and subliminally persuade, there has to be a continuity of messaging so that people receive the message often enough to accept it.

There are three types of memory that we will concern ourselves with as they relate to subliminal persuasion.

### **Semantic Memory**

The first type of memory is semantic memory. That is memory that is short-term in nature, echoic and that is diminished by sleep and short periods of time when the information is not repeated. This short-term memory must be impacted when you want people to take an instant action. The more charged the event around the memory, the more likely you are to remember it. If a beautiful woman gives you her phone number, you are much more likely to remember it than a list of things to pick up at the store. But if you don't write the woman's number down quickly, you'll lose it. When you are creating messages that you want to spread and building big ideas, you must go beyond this short-term memory and the only way to bypass it is through repetition. The more people are exposed to a message in a short period of time the more it moves from short-term memory into long-term procedural memory.

## **Episodic Memory**

Episodic memory is grouped memories, memories of things, times, or places. For example, you remember Disneyland if you went, but don't have a moment-by-moment recall of what happened. You do have a grouping of memories that you relate and that create a certain set of experiences and emotions when you bring the episode in your life to mind. Semantic and episodic memories make up one of the two major divisions of memory called declarative memory. Declarative memory includes those memories that can be consciously discussed; they tend to be facts.

## **Procedural Memory**

Procedural memory is the third type of memory and also the second general division of memory. Procedural memory is long-term memory, where processes, skills, and procedures are stored. Procedural memory is also referred to as implicit memory, and is often not easy to verbalize, but the process and procedures stored can be performed without consciously thinking about them. Strategies for making good buying decisions, motivational strategies, and so forth, are procedural memories.

### **Subliminal Sales Secret**

If you want to get people to take an immediate action, you need to focus on affecting short-term semantic memory. Repetition combined with emotion, urgency, and scarcity will work to create an intense impact that will result in holding the idea in mind long enough to take the prescribed action.

When you want to condition an audience that may not have an immediate need for, or is resistant to, your product,  
*(continued)*

*(continued)*

service, or idea, you need to connect memories, ideas, desires, actions, and beliefs to create new conclusions, which become emotional desires and beliefs. Once an idea becomes a belief, it moves to long-term procedural memory, where beliefs are held. When you can create an event or situation that connects the belief or procedural memory to create a new episodic memory, you reinforce the long-term memory, and encoding messages that are accepted subliminally is very easy. When you present information that fits the person or group you are persuading, you implant below the radar; acceptance and compliance are much more likely.

Another memory key that you can leverage is expectation. We all experience information through a set of filters that we have developed and have stored in our procedural memory and we view the world through these series of filters. We also attach the descriptions derived from our filters to situations, experiences, or people that tend to fit our expectations. So, for example, if I hold a belief that all skateboarders are not smart and cause problems, I'll see all skateboarders through that filter and find the support of my belief and that filter, not the exception. If I do find the exception, I'll identify it as an exception and probably view it as something that is going to change to fit my belief or schema.

I'm going to discuss beliefs, how they form, and how they propagate in another chapter. For now, leverage the idea that if you present information that is congruent with a belief, with a procedural memory, it is much more likely to be accepted without conscious scrutiny. Reducing the need for critical thinking and encouraging acceptance is one of your overriding goals as a subliminal persuader.

Message contagion happens when you focus on creating powerful messages that affect the group at a deeply subconscious level where their procedural memories lie.

Individuals and groups spread messages when they receive messages that are highly emotionally charged that are congruent with the deep-seated memories and beliefs of the intended audience.

For example, it is very tempting to make an analogy about the Iraq war right now because current polls show over 65 percent (as of this writing) of you reading this book are opposed to our involvement in the war. By leveraging those beliefs, I could either polarize you, and focus only on the ones who support the war, or I could send a message that polarizes those of you who don't. Either way, I'd become more acceptable to either audience by the message I send. If I create a message that you strongly agree with and makes an interesting argument, you are much more likely to store that message and share it with others.

But I'm not interested in debating the war, so let's look at something more practical and relevant to persuading the masses profitably.

## **ORGANICS**

Let's look at what grocers and growers have done to create a new, very profitable subsegment of products in your grocery store.

Organics have been available for many years but were largely the food preferred by a very small segment of the population.

As food prices began to reach fairly fixed levels of profitability, marketers were tasked with creating more profitable categories. The marketers started by leveraging a belief (which may

or may not be true) that the food we eat today contains fewer nutrients than foods produced 30 years ago.

The ideas were spread by creating stories in the media, in the grocery store ads, and in the customer loyalty newsletter that promoted the idea. The stories were made plausible by pointing out that the food you eat today, if you are a 30-year-old adult, does not taste the same as it did when you were a child. Episodic memory is fully leveraged, memories of your youth and Mom's home cooking come to mind and sure enough, the food doesn't taste the way it used to. Tomatoes grown the hydroponic way taste less robust than the ones you grow in your garden because they are grown in environments packed with chemicals. The stories provide research that seems likely but is rarely attributed to a reliable source, but you don't notice because the message-to-schema match is perfect. Food you eat today tastes different from the food of your childhood and those messages about how food should taste passed from parent to child are the most valuable, and they are shared values. Other people you talk to agree that the food you eat today tastes different. It makes for great water cooler conversation. So, the core idea is that food today is worse than food 30 years ago. You are hooked. Making the move from vegetables to milk and meat is a very simple process. Slightly altering the packaging to indicate something is *natural* or *organically* raised makes paying a little more a smart decision, because everyone knows that food 30 years ago must have been more organic. You buy the eggs with the Omega 3 added, and you get the milk that is organic, because you assume that it is from cows that from birth have never been exposed to chemicals that could harm you.



Without thinking, you spread the word that the organics you consume are better because . . . you got it, they taste better (read *different*).

The subliminal persuasion has occurred. You don't ask what the standards are to call something organic, you simply accept the idea that if it tastes different and the manufacturer calls it something that should be good for you, that it is. You've been persuaded and weren't even aware of it and you've become a willing evangelist, an unpaid marketer who endorses the idea that increases corporate profitability dramatically and raises your food bill.

But eventually, you may begin to question whether the decision you made was really right. Something might raise a little red flag. But that is okay, because here comes round two.

Once you buy in to the idea that organics are better for you, the next step is to hit you where you live. You drive a nice car, you provide your children with the very best possible life, you work a little harder, invest a little better, and do a little better than your neighbors. The competition goes right to the refrigerator and the pocketbook; the new status symbol of the millennium is the food you feed your family. The best families eat the best foods and the best foods are organics. Even if they come from a prepared meal created in a microwave oven.

The messaging is complete and the masses have complied. If you aren't eating organics, you know you should be and feel bad that you don't, so you eat them when you can.

The next step? Self-designed nutritional choices. My company, Bold Approach, is working with one of the nation's top specialty fertilizer producers and hydroponics manufacturer to create the ultimate status symbol, homegrown organics

that produce year-round. As you begin to hear more and more about people growing their own salads and veggies year-round in their garage or extra closet, you'll know that our messaging is working, too.

It'll be complete when you have your own hydroponics setup in your garage and are feeding your family the way they deserve to eat, with food that is as hearty and wholesome as the food you and I used to readily be able to get our hands on at the local family-owned grocery store.

What you eat matters, where it comes from matters, and the ultimate expression of self-actualization is to choose the level of nutrients you'll consume today more cost-effectively and more satisfyingly by simply going to your own grocery store, the one in your garage.

When you set out to change the minds of the masses or the individual, start with a message that harnesses the power of stored memories and beliefs. Build on those beliefs and introduce them to the logical extension of their current representation of the world around them. Encourage them to share the information, talk to their friends about it, and become involved with the message itself.

Engagement equals action; action is the best indicator of subliminal compliance. Persuasion is assured.

**Implementation Is Everything**

*Money Follows Action*

If writing is the doing part of thinking, action is the creating part of profit. Each section of this book will have action steps for you to take so that you can ultimately build your own black

book of effective subliminal persuasion strategies and tactics that will ensure your success.

1. Clearly identify the outcome you want from your persuasive efforts. The more specific and clearer you are, the easier developing message contagion is.
2. Identify the episodic memories that the target audience is most likely to have, identify which beliefs currently exist as procedural memories that direct their actions and make up their filters of reality. This can best be accomplished through
  - Research
  - Direct Questioning
  - Personal Experience (If, in fact, you are truly representative of your target market. Most marketers are not, even when they fit the demographic.)
  - Observation
  - Focus Groups
3. Develop messages that are congruent with the memories and beliefs of your target audience and take them to the next logical level. Make the stories emotional and believable, and tell them what to look for (food tastes different from the way it did 30 years ago). Encourage them to get involved, tie in emotion or beliefs that were created at the earliest stages in their life or in the most emotionally impactful relationships discussed earlier.
4. Begin spreading your message one-to-one and one-to-many. Set up a figurehead, a spokesperson who can be the face of the message. Create a persona that is powerful and persuasive (See *Persuasion: The Art of Getting What You Want* (continued))

*(continued)*

for details on creating a persuasive persona). To ensure the deepest audience penetration and the most effective persuasion, create message contagion by injecting your message here:

- Mass Media—PR, Advertising, Applied Propaganda.
  - Influence Groups—Direct Marketing, Public Speaking, Networking Groups, Business and Religious Organizations.
  - One-on-One—Use the Urban Myth Model. Spread the message directly to key influencers (bloggers, writers, movie makers, politicians, corporate marketers, gossips, paparazzi).
  - Nontraditional media—web sites, blogs created to support your message, viral videos on Google and YouTube.
5. Evaluate the response to your message and continue to create as many messages as necessary and put them into circulation as are required to make the message spread and accepted. Massage your messages to make them more attractive on the basis of their effectiveness and the feedback you get, and rerelease the new messages with the new spin for maximum effectiveness.

I'm going to give you in many chapters essential complementary study materials that you should acquire and consume immediately. Build a library of the most powerful subliminal persuasion ideas. Volume one will be this book, volume two will be your Moleskine full of your ideas, and the essential further study material that I share will make up the rest of the library.

## ESSENTIAL FURTHER STUDY

### **Books**

*Think Two Products Ahead*—Ben Mack (Wiley, 2007)

*Fog Facts*—Larry Beinhart (Nation Books, 2006)

*Thought Contagion*—Aaron Lynch (Basic Books, 1996)

### **Viral Video and Web Sites**

The Bionic Burger: [thebestdayever.com/burger.htm](http://thebestdayever.com/burger.htm)

### **Movies**

*Thank You For Smoking*—Twentieth Century Fox, 2006