

Attraction and Rejection (Part 9)

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3.3 Social Rewards/ Reinforcement

People's feelings toward a potential partner are dependent on their perception of rewards and costs, the kind of relationships they deserve, and their likelihood for having a healthier relationship with someone else. Rewards are the part of a relationship that makes it worthwhile and enjoyable. A cost is something that can cause irritation like a friend overstaying his welcome.

Two themes of ingratiation research confirm the importance of interpersonal rewards. A first broad strategy for getting someone to like you is to do favors for that person. By definition, favors bring benefits to the recipient and so favors make the person feel positively toward the person who did the favor. A man who wants a woman like him will often do a broad variety of favors for her, such as sending her flowers, buying her dinner and giving her gifts. Now and then people will recognize a favor as manipulative and resent it (Brehm & Cole, 1966), but in general favors are a good way to promote liking.

The second broad strategy involves praise. Most people feel good when they receive a compliment, so if you want someone to like you, you will probably be tempted to give that person plenty of compliments. Telling people what you like about them and what you see as their best traits is by and large a good way to go through life, because it both reinforces the traits you approve of and makes people like you. The most powerful rewards, however, are based on upon what people say. Equipped with a little background in behavioral psychology, you might be ready to flatter everyone in sight. Dale Carnegie, author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, recommends just such an approach. The Carnegie style is to use flattery and praise continually. The advice is: be ingratiating- flattery will get you anywhere.

The only limitation is that if people see the praise as manipulative or insincere they may discount it. The Dale Carnegie approach to flattery could also be faulted because you might

suspect that someone who praises you lavishly is out to manipulate you. The nice comments directed at you may be merely devices to get your money, your time or your body.

Traditional folk wisdom, however, also teaches us that flattery should get you nowhere. In fact, many people shy away from flattery. One reason for this is that such praise may cause the receiver's head to swell. In response to a laudatory introduction, Adlai Stevenson once wryly remarked that "flattery is all right, as long as you don't inhale it." Otherwise, however, praising people is a reliable way to get them to like you (Jones & Wortman, 1973).

Besides, comparison level is also taken into account during a relationship. This suggests that people expect rewards or costs depending on the time invested in the relationship. If the levels of expected rewards are minimal and the level of costs is high, the relationship suffers and both parties may become dissatisfied and unhappy. Lastly, the comparison of alternatives means that satisfaction is conditional on the chance that person could replace the relationship with a more desirable one.

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