Leveraging Human Psychology for Manipulation: Influence Techniques

In addition to leveraging trust, professional social engineers will also utilize any number of the following **influence techniques**:

Liking: As victims are more likely to provide assistance to someone that they find to be pleasant, the social engineer will attempt to develop strong personal rapport prior to making the request. How can we social engineers quickly develop rapport with someone? By being very pleasant, maintaining eye contact, smiling and perhaps demonstrating that we have something in common which forms a bond. For example, if I have seen on the individual's social media profile or a displayed diploma in their workspace, that they went to the University of Wisconsin, I can pretend to have visited Wisconsin. I can easily insert having experienced extreme cold, going to a Green Bay Packers game or enjoying beer and brats. I immediately develop a bond with this person.

Authority: Victims are more likely to comply if they believe that the request is coming from someone in authority or representing authority figures such as the boss, building security or law enforcement. People tend not to question the request or whether or not it is rational. They feel an obligation to immediately comply. People tend to believe that failure to comply
may result in negative consequences for them. Most people, if approached by someone dressed in a security uniform, would not question the legitimacy of instructions given to them.

Reciprocation: After the social engineer has conducted a kind deed for the victim, latter will often times automatically reciprocate by performing a kind deed for the social engineer. A very basic example is holding open the first set of double doors for someone coming behind you. Almost certainly, that person will walk through and then hold open the second set of
doors.

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Obligation: Victims will often feel a strong sense of obligation to help the social engineer after having some significant courtesy or favor extended to them. Examples of this could include the social engineer providing assistance to help the individual with a problem and then subsequently asking the person for a favor. Other examples may be sense of obligation felt after having been taken out to lunch by, or receiving a gift from, the social engineer.

Concession: Here the social engineer will ask for something that the victim initially finds implausible to comply with. The victim will subsequently agree to comply with a request from the social engineer which appears to be "meeting halfway."

Example:

Receptionist: "Sir, you must have an appointment for authorization to proceed to the executive floor."

Social Engineer: "I understand. I will definitely come back after setting one up. However, I previously spoke with Mr. Grim and mentioned that I would be sending product information to his attention. I understand that he will be leaving on extended travel later today. I really need to get this information to him. Can I just drop this off with his executive assistant? I will be in and out in five minutes. You can even retain my driver's license if you would like."

Receptionist: "Ok. No problem. You can leave your driver's license with me." (slide with text)

Scarcity: Here the social engineer will put pressure on the victim to make a quick decision as the window of opportunity for the victim is about to close. We see this tactic utilized frequently in sales gimmicks. "while supplies last", "going fast", "only two more left"

Consensus or Social Proof: Here the social engineer places pressure upon the target by implying that refusing to assist will be seen by others as socially unacceptable. Many of us have personally experienced this at a checkout counter when the cashier asks aloud in the presence of other customers whether or not we want to make a contribution to a particular charity. You feel like everyone is waiting to hear your response and you might feel greater pressure to make a contribution compared to having received such a solicitation through the mail.

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The aforementioned influence techniques can be utilized in a variety of situations, even during a first-time encounter with an insider to accomplish a one-time task.

However, there are times when a social engineer may want to manipulate a target to undertake an action that would appear to be very compromising to the target entity and potentially risky for the target insider. In such cases, the social engineer would seek to collect as much information as possible on his target insider to enhance the likelihood he will react favorably to such a request. The social engineer would need to learn what makes this particular target insider tick. What are his aspirations? What are his fears? We can break this down by identifying the motivations and vulnerabilities unique to this target's profile. Everyone, including you, has them in varying degrees:

Possible Motivations

- Family (the welfare of parents, siblings, children)
- Money (accumulating money as well as what money can buy)
- Education (for themselves as well as for their children)
- Career (progressing in one's career)
- Better home (larger, nicer, better neighborhood)
- Luxury goods (sports cars, yacht, artwork, expensive watch/jewelry)
- Desires/wants (dreams of travel, having their own business, etc.)
- Ideology (political parties, political systems, communism vs capitalism)
- Religion (Fundamentalists of all sects)
- Politics (Political party platforms)
- Excitement (want to play James Bond)

Possible Vulnerabilities

- Money (extreme financial hardship)
- Gambling (addiction leading to financial hardship)
- Drinking to excess (leads to family/social problems, health issues, lowers barriers to elicitation)
- Drug addiction (strong chemical dependency)
- Sex (can be easily baited, lend themselves to blackmail)
- Greed (they can never accumulate enough power or wealth)
- Revenge (desire to get back at someone)
- Hate (usually linked to revenge)
- Jealousy (coveting something that someone else has, wanting to do better than them)
- Guilt (wanting to make amends for doing something immoral/ unethical)
- Ego (wanting to constantly prove their intelligence and capabilities)
- Low self-esteem (looking to someone who can help lift them up)

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You might ask how we could learn these things about a complete stranger? A starting point is going back to our module 3 discussion on collecting information about prospective insiders from social media. From their Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, we can already develop a profile of who they are as well as who they aspire to be. Acquiring a full appreciation of motivations and vulnerabilities will best be accomplished thru face-to-face interaction with the target. Here is where the elicitation skills come into play. We get the target to talk about themselves while we control the conversation and spend most of the time listening. Becoming an effective listener will also help build greater trust in the eyes of the target. As this trust builds, the target will feel more and more comfortable in sharing his inner being with you. He will confide things that no one else knows about him.

This process plays well into the hands of a social engineer. Clearly understanding the motivations and vulnerabilities of a target will help us formulate a plan that will play upon these motivations and vulnerabilities. Knowing what buttons to push, as well as earning the full trust of the target, leaves the target extremely vulnerable to agreeing to undertake our request.

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