Low-Balling Compliance technique

Low-balling is based on getting agreement to an attractive deal, which is then made less attractive. The participant still complies with the less attractive request.

For example:

A car salesman offers a customer a good deal after the customer accepts it the sales person finds an excuse to change the deal and make it less attractive to the customer. Very often customers in such situations agree to the new, less desirable deal.

**Evidence:**

**Burger and Cornelius (2003)**

Aim: To investigate whether or not people will remove themselves from a deal when given three conditions: lowball, interrupt and control.

Method: Students were contacted by phone by a caller and asked to donate five dollars to a scholarship fund for underprivileged students. There were three conditions that they did:

1. Lowball – Students were told that those who contributed would be given a free coupon; students who agreed were then informed that there was no coupon.
2. Interrupt – Students were told that those who contributed would be given a free coupon, but before they could answer they were informed there were no coupons.
3. Control – Students were simply asked to donate five dollars without any mention of coupons.

Findings:

* For the lowball condition: 77.6% agreed to make the donation.
* For the interrupt condition: 16% agreed to make the donation.
* For the control condition: 42% agreed to make the donation.

Evaluation:

+ The strength of this study is that it successfully supported the view that the lowball technique is based on the principle of commitment. The technique is effective only when individuals make an initial public commitment.

+ The study has some ecological validity because although the situation was set up, it was based on a real life situation.

- However, participation was limited to students so the findings cannot be generalised to other populations.

- It plays on people’s emotions and sympathies by involving underprivileged students as the donation.

**Ciadini et al (1974)**

Aim: to study the effect of commitment and low-balling on compliance of participants. Hypothesis**:** Subjects who commit to participating in experiment, without starting time of experiment disclosed, will still agree to the request even after being told it would be held at 7 am.

Method:

1. Psychology students were asked to participate in a study on cognition.
2. *Control group*: asked to participate and immediately told experiment was scheduled for 7:00 am
3. “*Low-ball*” group: first asked to participate in the experiment, and once they agreed, they were informed it was at 7 am

The number of people who agreed from each group was recorded, and the number of people who showed up recorded.

Findings:

* Control group: 24% agreed to participate.
* Low-ball group: 56% agreed to participate. After being told of 7 am time, none of them changed their mind
* 95% of Low balled subjects showed up at 7am

Evaluation:

+ Supports the view that the lowballing technique is based on the principle of commitment.

- However, participation was limited to students so the findings cannot be generalised to other populations.

Explanation of why lowballing works:

The lowball technique is based on the principle of commitment. According to Cialdini 2009, once someone has made this commitment, individuals feel obliged to act in accordance with it even when the conditions that led to them making the commitment have changed. They encounter personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with that commitment. Kurt Lewin (1951) argued that behavior is motivated by **goal gradients**. The longer people commit themselves to something, the less likely they are to abandon the goal (also applies to FITD technique).

Evaluation of Low-balling technique:

+ Lowballing can be used in real life settings. Palak et al 1980, used it to encourage homeowners to save fuel (natural gas). Homeowners were told that those who agreed to save fuel would have their name published in a newspaper article describing them as good fuel conserving citizens. Even though they were later contacted to say their names would not be published, the families continued to save 15.5% of natural gas.

- The technique is effective only when individuals make an initial public commitment.