

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

“[The businessman] knows that ‘politics’ has been a bad word for a long time—so bad, in fact, that no executive worthy of the name has wanted any part of it. As for ‘pressure groups,’ that phrase smacks of ‘radicals’ or, perhaps even worse, of ‘intellectuals.’ Taken together, the combination of ‘politics’ and ‘pressure groups’ is a very sour dish, and no self-respecting businessman would touch it.”

“POLITICS, PRESSURE GROUPS, AND THE BUSINESSMAN,” BY ROBERT F. BRADFORD



Advice Confidence Matters More Than Certainty

Research indicates that people prefer advisers who project confidence. But what about confident advisers who offer less-than-certain advice? In 11 experiments involving 4,806 subjects, researchers tested how people reacted to various combinations of communication style and certainty in predictions about stocks, sports, and the weather. In general, participants did prefer confident-seeming advisers. But they didn't penalize advisers who confidently communicated uncertainty about their predictions by suggesting a range of possible outcomes, offering statistical probabilities, or speaking about which event was "more likely" (although they seemed averse to the word "probably"). And when asked to choose between two advisers, one providing certain advice and the other providing uncertain advice, subjects preferred the latter. The study shows that people do distinguish communication style from substance and suggests there is no penalty for declining to inflate one's level of certitude. "Our results challenge the belief that advisors need to provide false certainty for their advice to be heeded," the researchers write. ■

People primed to feel busy—which typically boosts one's sense of importance—were less likely to choose a brownie over an apple than people primed to feel busy but decidedly not important, with 23 percentage points separating the two groups.

"Feel Busy All the Time? There's an Upside to That," by Amitava Chattopadhyay, Monica Wadhwa, and Jeehye Christine Kim

ABOUT THE RESEARCH "Do People Inherently Dislike Uncertain Advice?" by Celia Gaertig and Joseph P. Simmons (*Psychological Science*, 2018)

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