

Reason-Respecting Tendency

“There is in man, particularly one in an advanced culture, a natural love of accurate cognition and a joy in its exercise. This accounts for the widespread popularity of crossword puzzles, other puzzles, and bridge and chess columns, as well as all games requiring mental skill. This tendency has an obvious implication. It makes man especially prone to learn well when a would-be teacher gives correct reasons for what is being taught, instead of simply laying out the desired belief ex cathedra with no reasons given. Few practices, therefore, are wiser than not only thinking through reasons before giving orders but also communicating these reasons to the recipient of the order.”
-Charlie Munger

This article is part of a [multi-part series](#) on human misjudgment by Phil Ordway, managing principal of [Anabatic Investment Partners](#).

“In general, learning is most easily assimilated and used when people consistently hang their experiences on a latticework of theory and answering **the question: Why?** Indeed, the question “Why?” is a sort of Rosetta stone opening the major potentiality of mental life.”

“Unfortunately, Reason-Respecting Tendency is so strong that even a person’s giving of meaningless or incorrect reasons will increase compliance with his orders and requests. This has been demonstrated in psychology experiments wherein ‘compliance practitioners’ successfully jump to the head of lines in front of copying machines by explaining their reason: ‘I have to make some copies.’ This sort of unfortunate byproduct of Reason-Respecting Tendency is a conditioned reflex, based on a widespread appreciation of the importance of reasons. And, naturally, the practice of laying out various claptrap reasons is much used by commercial and cult “compliance practitioners” to help them get what they don’t deserve.

Anyone with children will surely recognize the parallel – despite the tendency to miss the many small changes that come at parents almost daily as they observe their children’s growth, it is truly stunning how quickly they learn. And the question “Why?” is often asked over and over and over again by children of a certain age. Only the shame of social proof seems to dissuade older adults from doing the same.