4.7: Manipulation by Reversing the Burdens

Understanding the claim and burdens of an argument make it more difficult to be manipulated by others. Imagine you go into a store to purchase a new coffee maker. The salesman approaches to help you out. After talking to you he suggests a specific coffee maker. You don’t really like it and tell him so. He, however, does not take no for an answer and asks you why you do not like it. You begin to give him reasons and he has a response for each one. He keeps overcoming your objections and in the end, you feel foolish not to purchase the new coffee maker.

What happened here? How were you manipulated?

The answer is you fell for a classic sales strategy referred to as the “reversing of burdens.”

When you walked into the store, the unspoken claim was, “You should purchase a coffee maker.” The status quo was that you would not purchase one. This clarifies the burdens.

- **Burden of Proof**: the salesperson. He needs to present a compelling argument as to why you should purchase a specific coffee maker.
- **Burden of Presumption**: you. Unless a compelling argument is presented you need do or say nothing.

When the salesman asks why you do not want to purchase a specific coffee maker he is attempting to reverse the burden of proof on to you. Now you are expected to give “good and sufficient” reasons why you would not want that coffee maker. And if you fail giving valid enough reasons, then there is nothing left but for you to purchase that appliance.

Don’t give up your Burden of Presumption. If you are asked, “Why wouldn’t you want that coffee maker?” just respond with, “No, it is not my responsibility to tell you why I don’t like it, it is your responsibility to give me good enough reasons to want it.” Don’t feel guilty, like you should have an answer. Remember, the salesperson has the burden of proof.
Those of you who are parents will recognize this with your children. You tell them they have to do their homework and they respond with, "Why do I have to do my homework now?" Don’t forget, they are attempting to reverse the burdens. As you give them reasons why they need to do their homework now, they will argue those reasons. Don’t let them switch burdens. Have them give you “good and sufficient” reasons why they should not have to do their homework at this time.

4.7.1: "The Key" by Peggy Marco on Pixabay