Public commitments are especially apt to produce compliance (Lewin, 1952). Many self-help groups, such as those designed to help people lose weight or quit smoking, invite members to stand up and publicly announce their intentions to rid themselves of an unwanted habit. After publicly announcing their intentions, people feel greater pressure to honor their commitments. Although there is some evidence that this sort of commitment is particularly potent in individualistic cultures, such as America and the countries of Western Europe, it also plays a role in collectivistic cultures, such as the countries of East Asia and Eastern Europe (Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, & Gornik-Durose, 1999).

4. The Norm of Reciprocity

If you’ve ever received a letter from a charitable organization accompanied by a calendar or a set of address labels, you may have wondered, “Why do they give things away? What purpose does it serve?” For the answer, we need to consider a powerful norm that regulates human conduct: the norm of reciprocity. As noted earlier, this norm mandates that people should repay a favor in kind. In effect, we are obliged to do unto others as they have done unto us. Charitable organizations use this obligation to great effect. After receiving a gift (even one as small as a shiny penny), you feel obliged to return the favor by making a contribution (Cialdini, Green, & Rusch, 1992).

This principle was illustrated in a study by D. T. Regan (1971). Working in pairs, male participants rated a series of paintings as part of an alleged experiment of art appreciation. In fact, only one of the participants was a real participant; the other was a confederate. In one condition, the confederate did an unsolicited favor for the real participant: During a short break period, the confederate went to get a Coke for himself and brought back one for the participant as well. In another condition the confederate simply left and returned empty-handed, and in a third condition the experimenter gave both participants Cokes. After the pair had rated all of the paintings, the confederate mentioned that he was selling raffle tickets at 25 cents apiece and asked the participant to buy some. Figure 8.12 shows that participants bought the most tickets from confederates who had previously done them a favor. These results can be explained by the

**FIGURE 8.12**
**Reciprocity and Compliance**

According to the norm of reciprocity, we feel obliged to help those who have helped us. In this study, participants were more likely to comply with a request to buy raffle tickets when the requester had previously done them a favor.

Source: Regan (1971).