

A SHORTLIST OF BEST PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR

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“Change the Default”

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DEVELOP SOCIAL NORMS

SHOW THE BEHAVIOR YOU WANT TO HAPPEN. Use words & images that showcase the actions that you are encouraging - exhibit your campaign, product, or idea is popular. Don't fall for the trap of describing unwanted behavior to explain a case for change. The Iron Eyes Cody commercial showing litter everywhere to dramatize why it's bad is an example of what to avoid.

FIND THE RIGHT PLACE & TIME

EXPLAIN WHAT ACTION(S) NEED TO TAKE PLACE & WHEN TO DO THEM. Bringing behavior into the moment, making it more concrete by being clear about what needs to be done, & making it personal, gives you a much greater chance of that behavior being enacted. Also, people are more susceptible to change in transition periods: spring and autumn, pay days, summer holidays.¹

CHANGE THE DEFAULT

MAKE THE DEFAULT SETTING THE BEHAVIOR YOU'D PREFER USERS TO PERFORM. This is key. We all have automatic behaviors which make day-to-day life easier. And, we have a tendency to go along with the default option. Make double-sided printing the default setting; place the organic/local/low packaging food item at eye level. Thaler and Sunstein call this 'libertarian paternalism', and encourage us all to be 'choice architects.'²

FRAME YOUR SITUATION

ASK YOUR AUDIENCE THE RIGHT QUESTIONS. Framing is a classic marketing technique of businesses and advertisers. Why not use it to promote sustainability? Framing describes that our choices depend on how the problem is presented - the way the question is "framed". Think anchoring, decoys, and scarcity. You can also frame the desired behavior as fun! Think Volkswagen's 'Fun Theory.'

GIVE SOMETHING BACK

ENCOURAGE USERS TO TAKE UP OR CONTINUE A BEHAVIOR BY REWARDING IT. When we receive a gift or favor we are inclined to return it. We don't want to feel indebted & fear being viewed as a scrounger. So give people something: candy, buttons, drinking bottles, ... use your imagination (but make it sustainable). Also, feedback reduces anxiety, reinforces behavior, & helps people know that they are making a difference³. Feedback on energy use can create savings of up to 20%⁴.

PITFALLS

Don't rely on fear, people have a finite pool of worry: they can only handle so much bad news at a time. Couple threatening messages with empowering ones & once people understand the crisis move quickly to the solution.

Be careful with removing incentives. When internal motives are replaced with incentives, the original motivations can be undermined. If an incentive can't be maintained for a long time it may be unwise to use it.

Highlight losses rather than gains. Messages highlighting losses which occur as a result of inaction are always more effective than messages that highlight savings as a result of changing behavior.⁵ So highlight the money people will lose if they don't insulate their house, rather than the money they will save if they do.

Beware of 'totem behaviors', 'the single action bias', and 'moral licensing.' People often pick a small, or totem, behavior to change and then stop there.⁶ This is because their sense of vulnerability is reduced ('the single action bias'), or because of 'moral licensing': we feel better about our behavior & like we deserve to behave badly on another aspect.⁷

Don't be too dramatic! It is important to know your audience in order to judge what might be deemed too big or too small.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Observe their actions. Interview them and get their take on the situation. Segment your audience for a targeted & effective message.

PRACTICE EXERCISE: CHANGING THE DEFAULT

Scenario:

Your Athletics Department has just decided to start recycling and composting at football games. In fact, they want to eventually have 'zero waste' games. Around 40,000 people attend the games, and while most of them live in communities that offer recycling, not all regularly compost. This new recycling and composting program will start with the first game of the season – against an in-state rival.

Give it a try:

Using 2 or 3 of the concepts (see front) from the presentation, write and/or draw your suggestions on how Athletics could rollout this new program in a way that will get the most people to recycle and compost. Assume that Athletics has a reasonable (but not unlimited) budget and that not all items sold in the concessions stand will be recyclable or compostable. Focus on messages and ways to communicate information.

NOTES:

(All cited from James, Rachel "Promoting Sustainable Behavior")

¹ Futerra Sustainability Communications (2010a) New Rules: New Game. Available at: http://www.futerra.co.uk/downloads/NewRules_NewGame.pdf. (Accessed: 29 July 2010).

² Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Penguin Books Ltd, London.

³ Futerra Sustainability Communications (2010a)

⁴ Darby, S. (2006) *The Effectiveness of Feedback on Energy Consumption: A Review for DEFRA of the Literature on Metering, Billing and Direct Displays*. Environmental Change Institute, Oxford.

⁵ Futerra Sustainability Communications (2010a); Mckenzie-Mohr & Smith (1999)

⁶ Futerra Sustainability Communications (2010a)

⁷ Rosenthal, M. (2010) Why going green won't make you better or save you money. The Washington Post, Sunday 18 July.

FURTHER READING

Books:

Brown, Tim, and Barry Katz. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*. [New York]: Harper Business, 2009.

Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York: Morrow, 1993.

McDonough, William, and Michael Braungart. *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*. New York: North Point, 2002.

Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. New York: Broadway, 2010.

Senge, Peter M. *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.

Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008.

Videos:

"Dan Ariely Asks, Are We in Control of Our Own Decisions?" TED: Ideas worth Spreading. www.ted.com/talks/dan_ariely_asks_are_we_in_control_of_our_own_decisions.html

"Leadership From A Dancing Guy." www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO8MwBZI-Vc

Links:

"Community Based Social Marketing: Fostering Sustainable Behavior." www.cbsm.com/public/world.lasso

Design with intent Toolkit: [/www.danlockton.com/dwi/Main_Page](http://www.danlockton.com/dwi/Main_Page)

Futerra Sustainability Communications: www.futerra.co.uk

Freedman, David H. "The Perfected Self." The Atlantic. June 2012. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/06/the-perfected-self/8970

The Hunting Dynasty | A Behavioural Insight & Communication Agency: www.thehuntingdynasty.com

IDEO Method Cards App: www.ideo.com/work/ideo-method-card-app

James, Rachel "Promoting Sustainable Behavior, A Guide to Successful Communication" www.sustainability.berkeley.edu/os/pages/talkinglouder/docs/Promoting_Sustain_Behavior_Primer.pdf

"Lunch Line Redesign." The New York Times. The New York Times, 21 Oct. 2010: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/10/21/opinion/20101021_Oplunch.html

Nudge Blog • Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness: www.nudges.org

TEST YOUR SOCIAL MARKETING RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE

1. WHICH PHRASE WAS MORE EFFECTIVE AT REDUCING THEFT OF PETRIFIED WOOD?

- (A) Please don't remove the petrified wood from the park
- (B) Many past visitors have removed the petrified wood from the park, changing the state of the Petrified Forest

2. WHICH PHRASE IS MORE EFFECTIVE AT GETTING HOMEOWNERS TO ADD INSULATION?

- (A) Adding insulation to your house can save up to up to 50% of your monthly heating and cooling costs!
- (B) Having an uninsulated house can add 50% to your monthly heating and cooling costs!

3. WHICH PHRASE GOT MORE HOTEL GUESTS TO REUSE THEIR TOWELS AND LINENS?

- (A) Help the hotel save energy
- (B) Help save the environment
- (C) Partner with us to help save the environment
- (D) Help save resources for future generations
- (E) Join your fellow citizens in helping save the environment

4. WHICH PHRASE WAS MOST EFFECTIVE AT KEEPING PEOPLE ON PARK TRAILS?

- (A) Please stay on the established paths and trails, in order to protect the sequoias and natural vegetation in this park.
- (B) Please don't go off the established paths and trails, in order to protect the sequoias and natural vegetation in this park.
- (C) Many past visitors have gone off the established paths and trails, changing the natural state of the sequoias and vegetation in this park.

5. WHICH 'PRICE' YIELDED THE MOST PROFIT?

- At a popular rollercoaster ride in a large amusement park, researchers offered different prices on the "action" photos that are taken of visitors while they are on the ride.
- (A) Offering the photos at the regular price of \$12.95
 - (B) Offering the photo for \$12.95 and telling customers that half of the 12.95 collected will go to charity
 - (C) Offering the photos for whatever price the customer wanted to pay, including zero dollars
 - (D) Offering the photos at pay-what-you-want pricing and telling customers that half of what they spent would go to a specific charity. The researchers told the customers the name of the charity, a popular patient support organization.

ANSWERS

1. (A) is correct. Cialdini et al used different kinds of social norms to see which were the most effective at reducing theft of petrified wood. Using negative descriptive norms (B) actually increased theft. The most effective message used negative injunctive norms (A).
2. Messages highlighting losses which occur as a result of inaction are always more effective than messages that highlight savings as a result of changing behavior. (B) is correct.
3. (E) is correct. Cialdini found that articulating the social norm was the most successful (41%), with answers urging environmental protection and the benefit to future generations (about 31% reuse). The least successful (20%) described the benefit to the hotel.
4. (B) is correct. "It was better to tell people not to go off the trail (negative/proscriptive; 5.1% left the trail) than to stay on it (positive/proscriptive; 15.9% left)." "Least effective (descriptive/proscriptive; 18.7% left) was the message describing other's behavior in a negative way."
5. (D) is correct. Half a percent of riders (28,224) purchased a photo at the regular \$12.95 price, yielding a small profit of about 7 cents per rider. Slightly more, 6% (30,592) paid \$12.95 when they learned that half would go to charity. When it came to pay-what-you-want pricing, 8.4% (28,263) bought pictures, but paid only about 92 cents each, slightly less than the cost of production. But the most impressive result came when pay-what-you-want prices were combined with the charitable partner. Fewer people bought photos (about 4.5%), but they paid an average of \$5.33 per photo, substantially more than without the involvement of the charity. This yielded post-cost revenue of nearly 20 cents per rider.
Nelson attributes the findings to longstanding social norms. Furthermore, he argues that pay-what-you-want pricing can be a sustainable pricing and social responsibility strategy. "There is a built-in social norm that when it comes to charity, you are not supposed to look for lowest price, this is when you are supposed to be a little more generous and I think that willingness to pay more would become more stable over time."