

Four Ways to Nudge Others Into Action

By Kare Anderson

As the invisible gorilla test famously proved, we are sometimes blind to what's happening around us, and oblivious to signs that sway us. To become more aware of how you are influenced by what you see and hear, and to get ideas on how to influence others, here are four nudges:

One: Give Them an Obvious Sign

- If you see a path of big green footprints you are more likely to follow them to the public trash bins and throw your trash away. That's what the Danish Nudging Network discovered. First they gave distinctively wrapped caramel candies to pedestrians in an area. Afterwards they searched nearby garbage cans, bicycle baskets and even ashtrays for the empty wrappers, and counted them. Then they painted green footprint up to recycling bins and repeated the experiment. While 70% of the wrappers weren't found in both settings, 46% fewer wrappers were littered in the "green footprints" experiment.
- After an image of a housefly was etched inside the urinals at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, the amount of misdirected urine fell by about 80%, according to the airport. They had something to aim at so the idea has spread.
- To sway more people to take the stairs, the Dutch NGO Hivos painted bright red strips from the lobby to the stairs. During the 24-hour experiment, they saw a 70% increase in the number of people who choose to climb the stairs. It's all part of their Seduction Project, a clever label that's sure to nudge people to volunteer for it.

- To nudge people to switch lights off, Hu2 created this wall sticker to tie their action to the carbon costs of keeping lights on.

We can also be nudged to not forget our belongings.

Hint: What symbolic scene can you use to nudge people to move, or put something down or pick it up?

Two: Beware of Being Nudged to Act Against Your Best Interests

- Companies can create offers that nudge us to make bad decisions. For example credit card firms get more money by suggesting, on the bill, a “minimum payment” option that tempts us to not pay the entire bill and thus paying more in interest.
- Another way we are swayed to make a bad decision is when someone uses the disrupt them re-frame (DTR) process on us. For example, to raise money for a charity, those selling note cards door-to-door, got 40% of households to buy when they said eight cards cost \$3.00. Yet they convinced 80 percent of the households to buy by saying that eight cards cost 300 pennies, and adding, “which is a bargain.”

Hint: When offered a choice, “reverse engineer”: decide what your most important need is in the situation, then look at the facts in that context to make your smartest choice.

3. Three: Appeal to Our Better Side

A hospital motivates more medical staff hand washing when they suggest it keeps patients safe, and an anti-littering campaign in Texas was successful by appealing to Texans’ strong sense of pride, in themselves and their state. Two approaches were taken in signs at the hand-washing stations:

Less successful: “Your hand hygiene prevents you from catching diseases.”

More successful (use 45 percent more hand sanitizer): “Your hand hygiene prevents patients from catching diseases.” The Texas anti-littering campaign message matched the strong sense of loyalty that Texans have for their state.

Hint: To spur others to do the decent thing:

- Adapt the “presumptive close” technique from sales and assume that they were going to do the right thing.
- Speak to their positive and proud self-image.

Four: Don’t Make Them Feel Cornered

The counterintuitive way to pull others into buying or helping is to verbally reinforce, in a face-to-face situation, the feeling that they are, of course, free to do what they want. The exact language does not matter, according to several studies. Phrases such as “but you are free” or “But obviously do not feel obliged” seem to work equally well.

Hint: Giving others the freedom and cues to talk themselves into something specific often increases the chances they will.

As Influence author, Robert Cialdini wrote, “The thing that is most likely to guide a person’s behavioral decisions isn’t the most potent or familiar or instructive aspect of the whole situation; rather, it’s the one that is most prominent in consciousness at the time of the decision.”