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Our Behavior Change Practice

Positively Influencing Behavior to Achieve Greater Resource Efficiency

We've all heard the saying, "old habits die hard." Humans are undoubtedly creatures of habit, and those habits are sometimes, but not always, bad habits. The reasons people behave the way they do isn't always clear or rational, but the good news is habitual behaviors can and do change with proper guidance and prompting.

An employee's behavior has a significant impact on how buildings perform, especially in relation to energy consumption. For example, building occupants impact plugloads quite directly. Plugloads - the amount of electricity drawn from electrical outlets - account for an estimated 20%

of the electricity consumed in U.S. commercial office buildings. That is often a fairly large number and one that can be decreased.

Fortunately there are very real, specific, and research-validated strategies that are effective at changing the behavior of building occupants. We have years of experience and deep expertise in identifying, designing, and implementing strategies to change behaviors and build engagement.

Our goal is to help your organization's employees shift from energy-consuming habits to energy-conserving habits.

Leaving?

Please turn the lights off

Effecting sustainable behavior change takes more than simple education and awareness. Two important strategies include (at left) prompts that remind occupants to take certain actions and (at right) leveraging social norms - people are strongly influenced by what is perceived to be common behavior.

we care!

Over 1,791 people from UNMC have already completed the pledge! See the names of current pledgees by going to the UNMC LiveGreen Wall of Fame.

Outcomes

Our behavior change efforts culminate in the following:

- More highly engaged employees
- Reduced operating (primarily energy) costs
- Clearer communication between occupants and facility managers
- A more resilient community and planet

Through behavior change campaigns, our clients have experienced notable increases in sustainability awareness and knowledge. The Henry Doorly Zoo provides a good case in point: in 18 months, Zoo employees' awareness of sustainability efforts increased 40% and knowledge about how to personally conserve energy increased 33%. Both directly impact energy consumption.

> " The Verdis team offered invaluable support and guidance as we moved forward with our green efforts. **Their methods are backed by research, and they have strong knowledge of how to enact behavior change on a large scale.** Thanks to Verdis, we now have an initiative that benefits the environment, saves money, and increases employee satisfaction."

Melanie Stewart
Sustainability Manager
University of Nebraska Medical Center

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1 of 2

Our Approach

First, we identify the targeted behavior(s) that we are trying to encourage - a step that requires input from the client. We then baseline the targeted behaviors via a survey and/or systematic observations. Doing so ensures we have a place from which to measure progress. Several strategies (a few of which are mentioned below) are then considered; those that will be most effective are identified and an associated communication plan that taps existing communication channels is developed. Once the campaign of strategies has been implemented, we conduct post-intervention measurements to measure effectiveness and ensure sustained behavior change. Finally, we provide recommendations for maintaining the desired behaviors so that they can and will be engrained into the culture of the organization.

Research-Validated Strategies: A Few Examples

leverage social norms	People are strongly influenced by what is perceived to be common, normal behavior. If we can clearly demonstrate that the majority of an organization's employees support energy efficiency and follow suit with their actions, that finding should be leveraged to persuade the remaining few into action.
goals & timely feedback	People inherently like to know how well they are doing. Consequently, providing consistent feedback about progress and advertising employees' collective impact can be incredibly beneficial in motivating and sustaining behavior change.
modeling behaviors	In addition to providing static "how-to" instructions, it is also beneficial to demonstrate the actual desired behavior. People are typically more willing to try something when they observe someone else do it first and can subsequently test out the behavior at their own pace and in a safe environment where they won't feel embarrassed if they stumble in their attempts.
smart competition	People want to be individually and collectively recognized as part of the groups or teams they identify with the most. A smart and friendly competition leverages both desires to drive behavior change.
commitment (the Pledge)	Research shows that a pledge is one of the most cost-effective tools to influence behavior change. A pledge helps sustain behavior change more than strict incentive-based programs and basic educational campaigns. Our online Pledge tool can be used to secure voluntary commitments and remind folks of their pledge to act. Learn more about our online Pledge tool by clicking here.
reminder prompts	Most people want to act consistently and as expected. With straightforward behaviors, such as shutting off lights or other electronic equipment, a simple, visual, well-placed reminder can nudge people in the right direction.

The long and short of it is this: changing behavior is hard - sometimes really hard - but it doesn't have to be a difficult, teeth-pulling sort of endeavor. It can be seamless. The key is to integrate several strategies (such as those noted above) into one cohesive effort that compels people to act differently and makes them feel good about doing so.

> We wanted to take an organized, well-thought-out approach to improving sustainability, and Verdis Group fit the bill perfectly. They brought multiple disciplines together to create our plan, implement action steps, and **change the way our entire organization thinks on an individual level about the wise use of precious resources.**

Dennis Pate
Executive Director and CEO
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium

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2 of 2