

Attitude to action

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Attitudes and actions are not the same. We can have an attitude towards something, such as sustainability, but not necessarily act on it. Turning an attitude into an action is a behavioural change process that is predicated by a number of factors. These factors can be successfully influenced and persuaded with a well thought out strategic behavioural change plan.



Action 1

Understand the 'who'

To get started on a behavioural change program, first take the time to understand the stakeholders. Using a stakeholder analysis, break people into different sub-groups and define their attitudes, needs, values, culture, history and readiness to change. Tools such as surveys, focus groups, cultural reviews and change readiness assessments will help with the process. When doing this, also define what new behaviours or actions you are looking for with the change and identify what the stakeholders may see as the benefits or the constraints of the new action. Understanding the new behaviours and constraints will guide you in what types of strategy and ongoing tactics you will need to embed to sustain the change.

Behaviour begins with people and so too should all change programs. Understanding the 'who', or key stakeholders, their current behaviours, values, culture, history and moreover attitude, is paramount to successful change. Attitudes are one of the three key components of behavioural change because of their direct impact on our intentions.

Attitudes are formed from beliefs and are ultimately derived by our internal evaluation of the positive and negative impacts of a certain behaviour. We all have multiple behavioural beliefs at any one time, but only a few will be strong. And the strong attitudes are the important ones, as they are more likely to guide a behaviour and generally don't change over time (Holland, Verplanken & Van Knippenberg, 2002).

For sustainable change, understanding people's strong attitudes will help define the type of strategy and tactics required to change stakeholder actions. Strong attitudes are formed from a number of factors notably temporal stability, accessibility, direct experience, involvement, affective-cognitive stability, ambivalence and certainty (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004; Armitage & Christian, 2003).

Temporal stability describes those attitudes that are clearly defined values and beliefs which have been consistent over time. These attitudes are demonstrated not only in the way that people behave, but also in how they communicate, what they value and how they make decisions. Understanding these types of attitudes is important, as it is extremely difficult to change behaviours of those who have behaved a particular way for a long period of time. So, if you are looking to change the minds of those who do not consider sustainable principles to be important and have believed this for a long period of time, then don't expect change to be easy or immediate. In fact, it's often better to focus on those who have more favourable or ambivalent beliefs, as they are easier to persuade to change and can often influence those with strong negative values.



Action 2

Explain the 'why'

When writing the 'why' ensure that the purpose, format and language of the message is clear. The purpose should demonstrate an understanding of the needs and the values that you are appealing to. In terms of format, consider how you are going to persuade behaviours not only with words but also in symbols, stories, visuals, metaphors and actions. Finally, make sure that the language you use is clear, consistent and has emotional impact.

Innately we all want to know why... "Why should I?" Persuading people to change their attitude and actions requires logic. In successful change programs, the logic comes in the form of a clear and articulate vision and is reinforced in all communications (both verbal and non-verbal).

A vision should clarify the direction and the purpose of the change, and motivate people to take action and help align individuals (Kotter, 1996). The Bank of America's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Ken Lewis, has a vision that is very clear: "The Bank of America is involved in financing the green economy for a lot of good reasons. We believe it represents the future, and a tremendous business opportunity. We believe it's what our customers and clients need us to do to support them. And we believe it's the right thing to do for our communities, our country and our planet" (Lewis, 2008).

To act on this, last year the Bank of America announced a ten-year, \$20 billion environmental initiative to help address climate change by championing sustainable business practices in lending, investments, products and services, operations and staff involvement. Through this initiative the bank is financing eco-friendly residential developments and green mortgages; developing new 'green' workplaces for their banks; piloting computer software in 3200 of their banking centres to monitor and adjust HVAC systems; and encouraging their staff and customers to be more sustainable with their Environmental Network, 'Make it second nature' and 'Live green' programs.





Plant-a-tree Day



Must keep green top of mind.



Walked to work for two weeks now!



Succumbed to the car. It's raining!

Action 3 Communicate the 'what'

Effective communication is more than an email. Effective communication strategies involve the use of both one-way (emails, advertising and media) and two-way communications (forums, meetings, feedback sessions and other interactive environments). To be successful, the communications must repeat the 'what', using different mediums such as leadership behaviours, rewards, acknowledgements and experiences (Kotter, 1996). Using techniques such as symbols, metaphors, analogies and stories will also influence and persuade stakeholders, helping them to remember the messages (Simmons, 2006).

Vision is one thing, communicating, repeating and reinforcing it is another. Behavioural theory tells us that the more accessible the attitude, the more likely it will impact behaviour (Armitage & Christian, 2003). Advertisers know this, which is why last year the global advertising market was estimated at US\$605 billion and is expected to reach US\$707 billion globally in 2012 (Kelsey Group, 2008). However, behavioural change is rarely an outcome of mass media campaigns and thus sustainable change strategies need to reinforce the vision and key messages incorporating a variety of mediums and tactics to reinforce and reiterate the message.

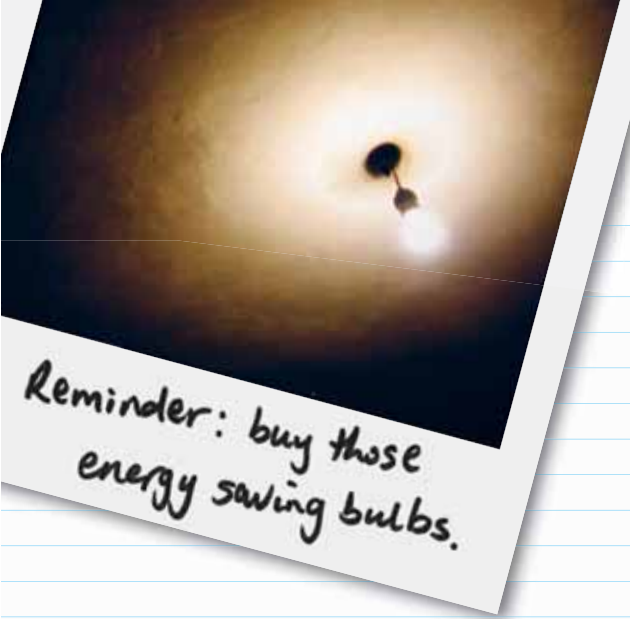
Action 4 Involve your 'who'

Major transformation change rarely happens unless people are able to support the process and thus empowerment is critical (Kotter, 1996). Firstly, make sure that leaders and role models are on board and are supportive of the vision. Secondly, create the right structures to enable people to take responsibility and action. Thirdly, develop systems and communications to support the processes, and finally, teach the stakeholders with the skills to perform effectively. Without these four elements, stakeholders are more likely to become frustrated, feel powerless and will be less motivated to act.

Strategies that involve stakeholders can be effective in ensuring attitudes become actions. Experiences produce informative attitudes and intentions that influence future behaviours over time (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004).

Operation Flinders Foundation, an Australian charitable organisation that runs wilderness adventure program for young offenders and young people at risk, uses direct experience to encourage organisations to financially support the foundation. The foundation takes professionals from targeted organisations on parts of the 100 km trek through the remote Australian bush in the Flinders Ranges to experience and meet with teenagers whose lives have been changed by the program.

Involvement can also occur through indirect experience. Social learning theory tells us that people can learn by observing the behaviour of others and the outcomes of those behaviours. In the Academy Award winning documentary, *An inconvenient truth*, director Davis Guggenheim effectively used indirect learning through simulations and time-lapse photography to involve stakeholders and demonstrate the impact of climate change on the environment. Similarly, Morgan Spurlock's 2004 documentary, *Super size me*, involved the viewer in the effects of poor diet on Spurlock's physical and psychological well-being.



Reminder: buy those energy saving bulbs.



Earth hour dinner party at Kylie's was really fun.



I can't believe this local market has always been in the neighbourhood!

How do I end up with so many cans in the pantry?

Action 5

Use social networks and peer pressure

Working with social networks to influence action can be effective but takes time. Good change programs recognise this, developing long term strategies that understand the specific attitudes and needs of different stakeholders and how social networks can create an environment that supports and influences action.

Intentions to act are also influenced by subjective norms. Subjective norms relate to the amount of pressure that an individual perceives they are under from people they value.

Subjective norms are complex and are based on our referent beliefs and motivation to comply. These two components have a multiple effect, as we are unlikely to experience social pressure if we aren't motivated to comply. Similarly, if we don't identify strongly with a social group, subjective norms will have limited impact on intention and ultimately our behaviour. For example, in a study of the impacts social networks in the Netherlands had on increasing energy efficient behaviours (Weenig, 2002), it was found that residents who considered their neighbours opinion highly, ordered more home insulation measures, or showed greater increases in environmental knowledge, than residents who had a low motivation to comply with their neighbours. Social pressure can be extremely influential. In March 2007, for one hour the city of Sydney in Australia turned off its lights to make a statement about energy consumption. It was estimated that 2.2 million Sydney residents and over 2100 businesses switched off, leading to

a 10.2% energy reduction across the city (Earth Hour, 2008). In the following year, twenty-four global cities participated in Earth Hour.

Equally, the United Nations draws on the impact of subjective norms with the use of celebrities as UN Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors, such as Roger Moore, Angelina Jolie, Jackie Chan and Ronaldo, to create greater awareness and incite action on issues of human rights, justice, peace and support for developing countries. Similarly, former US President Bill Clinton has used his influence to initiate private and public partnerships with companies across America to retrofit public and private buildings through the Clinton Climate Initiative.

Closer to home, researchers have found that social pressure can be used effectively to improve health and reduce sedentary lifestyles. Drawing on the experiences of fifteen lifestyle programs, social researchers, Cavill and Bauman (2004), found that community-based programs that use a combination of social support groups, such as self-help groups, counselling, and education, community events and walking activities are more effective than media

alone. Likewise, the Agita São Paulo Program in Brazil has used a multilevel intervention strategy of social networks, incentives, media, and community events to dramatically improve the number of physical activity hours of students, adults and the elderly over the last ten years (Matsudo, 2005).

Other examples include, 'Movember', the moustache-growing charity event held during November each year, which relies on social pressure to raise funds and awareness for men's health. Internet site www.thepoint.com helps people campaign together on similar social issues and combine forces to make things happen. The Point's differentiator is that it relies on peer action whereby campaign members only need to act when the conditions exist for them to have the greatest possible impact.

Action 6

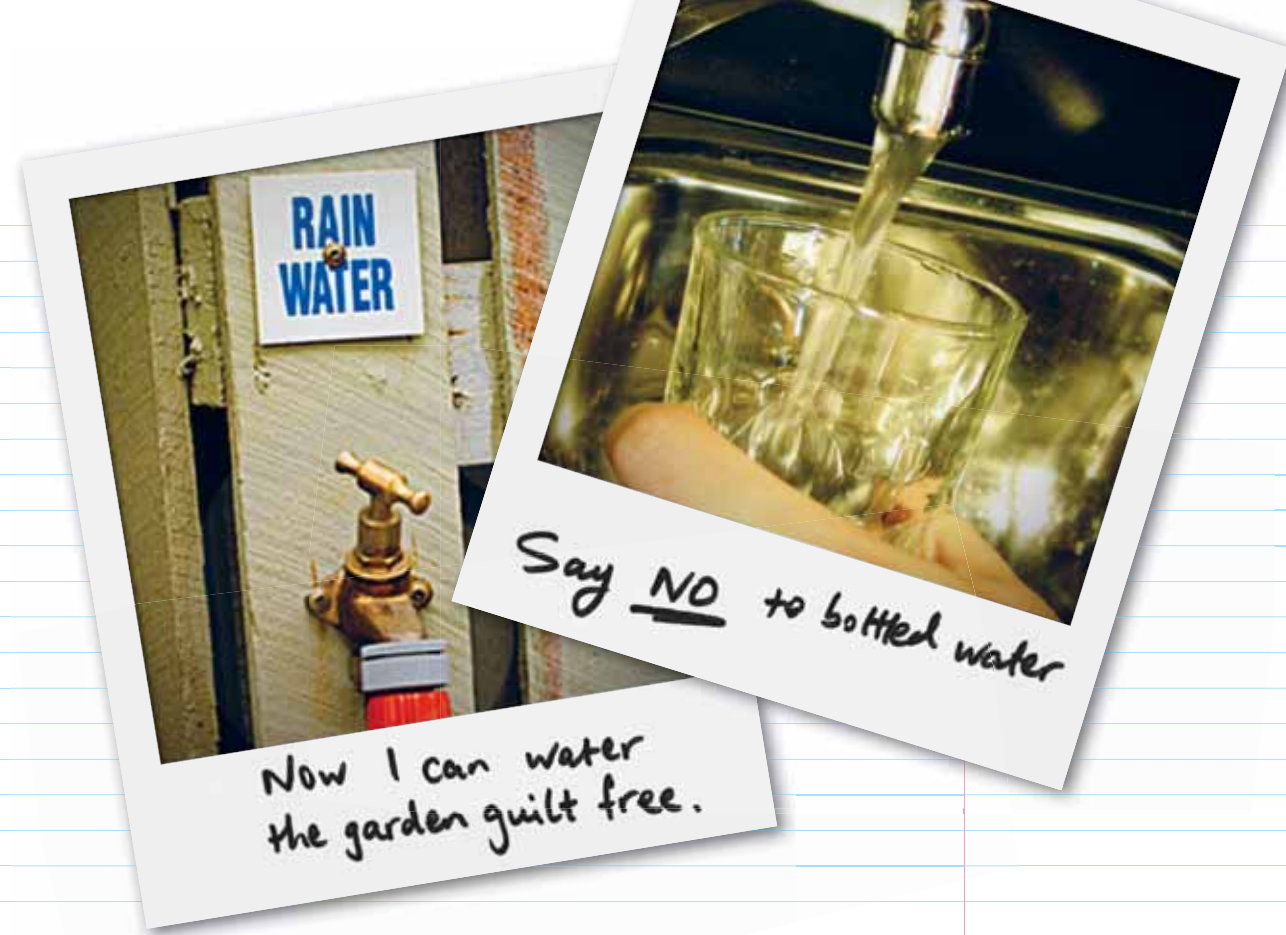
Make it easy

Being in control of the behaviour and seeing the impact is important. Energy conservation programs that encourage people to refrain from certain behaviours are generally successful if participants can observe immediately the direct impact of the change, such as a reduction in their electricity bill. However, encouraging people to change when results are not immediate can be complex (Hutton & Ahtola, 1991).

As discussed, attitudes and subjective norms have significant impact on our intentions, however, perceived behavioural control is the most influential (Ajzen, 1991; Fife-Schaw, Sheeran & Norman, 2007). This means we process information regarding change and then gauge our ability to act and how difficult we think it will be to change. In essence, perceived behavioural control is based on internal factors such as our skills, abilities, past experiences, information about others' experiences, willpower and emotions at the time of change; and external factors like time, opportunity and dependence on others (Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006). Ultimately, the easier a behaviour is, the more likely we will perform it.

A number of organisations use this approach effectively. Oxfam's successful 'Oxfam unwrapped program' enables people to purchase gifts over the internet without ever having to leave the house, let alone their chair. The gifts are actually donations to a range of worthy causes, such as safe water, poverty, HIV/AIDS and education. Similarly via the internet, non-profit organisation, Kiva, enables individuals to loan as little as \$25 to help fund small businesses run by low-income entrepreneurs around the world. Both programs make it easy for people to understand what their money will be used for and how donations will make a difference.

Targeting car usage to reduce air pollution typically requires a range of new behaviours such as new daily routines, rescheduling, trip planning and changing the type of transportation; which an individual will weigh against the benefits when making a decision to change behaviour. The problem is, the benefits gained by the actions of one individual (i.e. clearer air) can't always be measured and may not accrue unless others participate. Hence, effective change initiatives need to include tactics that allow for feedback (using this positive feedback to encourage others who didn't initially change) and provide immediate and certain rewards (such as monetary incentives or exclusive benefits) (Hutton & Ahtola, 1991).



Action 7

Sustain the action

When introducing new sustainable actions, think of strategies to make it easier for people to comply with the new behaviours and be discouraged to go back to their old ways. Introducing incentives and restricting old behaviours can be effective and relatively simple to implement.

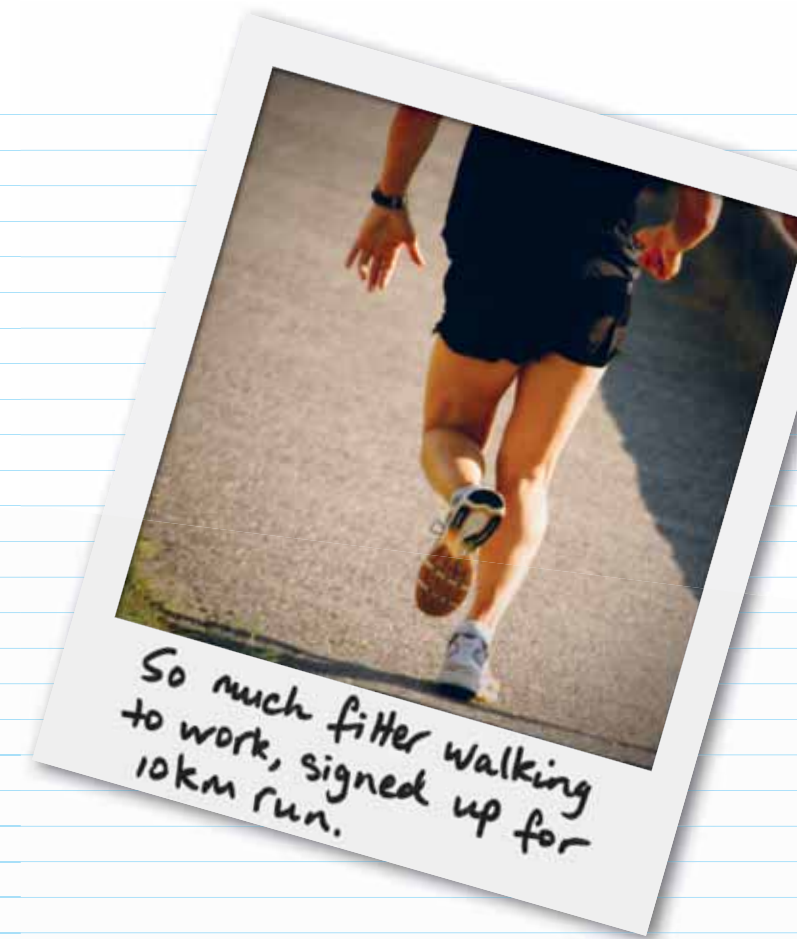
Commitment or sustaining the new behaviour is critical. Research has found that people are more likely to stay loyal to a new behaviour if they feel they changed their behaviour as a result of what they constructed themselves (Hjelmar, 2005). Therefore being autocratic and telling people what to do and how to behave may have some immediate results, but does not necessarily lead to long term results. Instead, effective behavioural change programs focus on the values underlying the new behaviours and provide a supportive environment, whilst letting stakeholders construct the related behaviours. Moreover, change programs need to ensure individuals are encouraged to continue with the new behaviour and are restricted or discouraged from returning to old behaviours.

To increase the level of residential garbage recycling to seventy per cent, the city of Toronto in Canada has recently introduced a new grey bin system for non-recycled waste, with the price of the bin increasing, the larger the size required. Similarly, The University of Auckland is trialling a new recycling system across many of Auckland's city buildings where personal rubbish bins are being replaced with small black cubes on desks which hold minimal rubbish. This approach has been designed to encourage people to recycle more waste. Likewise, an increasing number of workplaces are setting printers to default to double-sided printing and are placing paper recycling bins next to printers in an effort to reduce paper use and increase recycling respectively.

In summary

The best laid plans

As the theory of planned behaviour explains, behavioural change is a complex process that is impacted and influenced by a number of factors. Hence, a single communication or poor strategy is unlikely to result in action. Instead, long term multidimensional change plans need to be developed and implemented. These plans need to take into account all elements of behavioural change, particularly stakeholders' needs, clear messages and tactics that support, persuade and enable people to change.



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