

Little Book of Behavior Change

Everything You Need to Know
in a Few Fun-to-Read Pages



This book is a quick and easy guide to social marketing. It is far from comprehensive. This is not the only book you should ever read about social marketing; it may simply be the first. The goal of this little book is to give you a foundation in the field, so you can begin applying this way of thinking to your own work. If nothing else, it's a good starting point for asking the field's most basic question: How do I get people to change their behavior?

This book was produced by Salter>Mitchell, Inc., a national social marketing firm that builds behavior change campaigns and provides training in social marketing. To find out more about Salter>Mitchell, go to www.SalterMitchell.com. This book is a quick and easy guide to behavior change marketing. It is far from comprehensive.

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To find out more about Marketing for Change, go to www.MarketingForChange.com

What is Behavior Change Marketing?

Behavior change marketing is a way of thinking. It is an approach that treats your social program as a choice, not an imperative, and provides ways for making it more appealing than the alternative. It is not advertising, social media or even communications – though these are three tools used by behavior change marketers. Behavior change marketing is a systematic, research-informed way to apply such tools to make your target behavior the fun, easy and popular choice.

So here's our shot at a definition: behavior change marketing is a methodology for determining what factors might encourage a specific behavior among target actors, and then employing common marketing tools to influence those factors in the world of your target actors, to encourage positive social change.

The bottom line is behavior change

Definitions are nice, but a better way to understand behavior change marketing is through examples. Luckily, you are surrounded by examples of behavior change marketing. All kinds of people are trying to change your behavior – your parents, your spouse, maybe even your children. Who hasn't been exposed to that enormous, if informal, campaign called "Eat Your Vegetables?" You remember that one – the creative director was your mother. She really didn't care what you thought about the vegetables; she just wanted you to eat them. She was looking, like any good behavior change marketer, for behavior change (and a clear social benefit, healthier children). How did she do this? Well, if she was like our mothers, she told you two things: **Vegetables Are Good For You and/or People Are Starving in Africa.**

That didn't work too well. We eagerly volunteered our broccoli so it might be shipped posthaste to those in Chad and, as far as health went, it was not exactly our top concern. Not at age five. It'd be another 40 years before we were popping Lipitor. We were unmoved.

A marketer would have taken a different approach. She wouldn't start with a message; she would begin with a research question to better understand her audience, perhaps asking, "So, what is it you don't like about these vegetables exactly?" Maybe it's the color: a child opposed to green could be offered carrots. Or maybe it's the taste or texture, and the vegetables could be prepared differently. Just beginning the conversation with a question would have opened up dozens of possibilities.

Our mom got this intuitively, of course. But she went for a different marketing technique. After years of observing her target actors, she knew what we wanted, so she linked the target behavior (eating more vegetables) to a popular reward (dessert). This, more than any message about healthy eating, is what changed our behavior.

Your Mom's Approach On A Bigger Stage

Our mom's simple equation – eat your vegetables and you get dessert – is the underlying logic for dozens of behavior change marketing campaigns. The challenge is figuring out the second part of that equation: What's dessert?

Consider seat belt use. Seat belts prevent people from dying in crashes – that's clear. But in the early 1990s, only two out of three people were wearing seat belts. Which raises the question: How could one out of three people be so... wrong? After all, traffic safety advocates had been hammering home for years that seat belts save lives. They showed gruesome videos. They shared stark statistics. They had even gotten the message across: More than 90 percent of Americans in a 1994 survey said they would want to be wearing a seat belt in a crash. The problem: Many just didn't do it.

Why not? What could be a better offer than saving someone's life? One possibility is that people were making another calculation, perhaps subconsciously: they figured serious crashes are rare. After all, less than 1% of police-reported crashes are fatal. And, in a typical year, there is one fatal crash for every 6,400 licensed drivers. It wasn't that they didn't believe seat belts made crashes safer; it was that they never planned on getting in a crash. Their knowledge was fine. It was their behavior that was the problem.

This is a classic social marketing dilemma. We tell people why we think they should change and, while they may nod their heads, they don't change their behavior. It's why teenagers still take up smoking, why so many Americans still overeat, and why people who oppose drilling in wildlife refuges still buy gasguzzling SUVs.

The trick to changing behavior is to realize that underlying all these decisions is an exchange: If you do this, you get that. If people are not doing what we consider to be the right thing, we have to be honest with ourselves: Maybe, just maybe, we are not offering people what they really want.

Back in the early 1990s, North Carolina faced this kind of challenge with seat belts. After years of preaching safety, they tried something new: Instead of talking about the devastating results of an unlikely event, they focused on the negative (if less awful) result of a more likely event – getting a ticket. A ticket is something many of us have experienced (more than 40 million traffic citations are issued every year – one for every 5 drivers). North Carolina’s “Click It or Ticket” campaign launched highly-publicized enforcement efforts to boost the perceived risk of getting a traffic ticket for not wearing a seat belt. The result: A 10% surge in belt use. Once other states adopted a similar strategy, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed the results and determined the “Click It or Ticket” strategy was boosting belt use by an average 16%. Behavior was changing.

That’s what this social marketing thing is all about. It’s not about advertising or newspaper clips, creating awareness, persuasion or even changing attitudes. It’s about changing what people actually do.

While the equation is simple, finding each variable can be challenging: Who are the people we need to influence? What do we need them to do? And what can we give them in exchange for doing it? The answer may not always taste as good as dessert (e.g. avoid getting a ticket), but it will serve up the same effect.

Naming The Vegetable

This may seem easy. Often, it’s not. Boiling down goals into behavioral objectives means dissecting a social problem, which can trigger debates over root causes or what factors matter most. For example, what causes obesity? Is it a lack of exercise, portion sizes, poor food choices, something else or all of the above? What actions should one target first, and who needs to act?

When we began working with environmental organizations to protect North America’s Chesapeake Bay, we got a page-long list of actions people should take. We worked with them to prioritize. Often, groups cannot even name a behavior – they want people to be more “aware” or “concerned.” These are not behavior change marketing objectives. To affect outcomes, actions need to change. A true behavior change marketing objective needs to have:

- **A target group of actors.** This is a specific segment of people who need to act differently. If you are putting “general public” on this line, think again. Does EVERYONE need to change? Even if that’s the case, can we change everyone at the same time? The factors that motivate one group of actors will not influence another.
- **An observable action you want the target to take.** This is not what goes on inside someone’s head (for example, supporting protection of the environment). It’s something we can see and measure objectively (for example, cleaning out a septic tank every five years).
- **The context in which you expect that action to take place.** This is where you add some details about when and how people need to do this action for it to matter. For example, public health advocates encourage people to use a condom every time they have sexual intercourse, not just when it’s convenient (like it ever is).

Finding The Right Dessert

With the vegetable named, it's time to decide on dessert. What can we offer our target actors in exchange for adopting the behavior?

The big complication here is this: People are different. Some kids actually like broccoli (not ours, unfortunately). Some hate chocolate. Some kids yearn to survive entirely on processed cheese. It's hard to say what everybody wants because everybody includes a lot of people. Even you.

Which rings us to a very, very, very important point: You are weird. Weird. Odd. An outlier. You decided to work on a specific issue – let's pretend it's recycling – because you feel so strongly about it, you want other people to change. You are not trying to decide whether recycling is worth it. You are a recycling evangelist, studying the numbers on plastic containers and scouring the earth for converts. So, when it comes to recycling, something about you is askew, different, a little off. Otherwise, you wouldn't need a behavior change marketing effort at all. Everyone would already be recycling. Just like you.

So get comfortable with it. Say it aloud: I'm a freak. I am way, way too into this subject. I read more about my subject than I do about other critical issues in America, such as what Kim Kardashian is wearing these days, and who's competing on the Voice.

Also remember that people are not just different from you. They are different from each other. What's more, they're probably not "shopping" for a solution to your problem. They are probably focusing on other things, like making ends meet or simply pursuing happiness. You may think you are offering them what they need. But let's face it: They seem to be surviving without it.

Commercial marketers face this problem all the time. After all, who really needs a Rolex, when you can pick up a Timex for a fraction of the cost or just look at your cell phone? Back when people wore watches, we wore something called an Armitron (\$20 at Burlington Coat Factory) and it kept time fine. The reason people buy a Rolex is not just to tell time (though that's supposed to be the main purpose of a watch); it's to look nice and say something about the wearer ("I'm one rich dude"). Those are benefits some people seek. They don't need to get these benefits from a watch, but the Rolex folks have used their watch to fulfill those needs, making a tidy profit in the exchange.

Behavior change marketing is not about profits, but it is about offering people something they want. Too often, social causes try to convince people they don't know what they need.

Campaigns tell people they should want something different, something healthier or better for the planet. This is like having our mother tell our 5-year-old-selves that broccoli really tastes good. Yeah, maybe to her it does. We know what we like – and broccoli ain't it.

A strong behavior change marketing appeal is anchored not in what you want, but in what your target actors seek. It works like a strong brand. Good brands don't convince people to change their style; they speak to what people already seek and give them a way to get it. Good brands come to you.

They don't persuade you to change into what they represent. When social causes start off by saying, "Hey, you've got it all wrong," it's probably no surprise they are not shifting a lot of behavior. What they seem to want are converts. But what they should be seeking are customers – people willing to try a behavior, not adopt a whole set of foreign beliefs. Changing behavior does not necessarily require a change in what people know or believe.

What Do People Want From Me?

So here's the bottom line about your offer – if you want people to change their behavior, you have to offer them something they already want. Yes, you read it right: The desire is already there. What you provide is the link. Figuring out what people want and how your program or behavior can fulfill that need is the crux of every marketing assignment.

To succeed, you need to break down the challenge into pieces. At Marketing for Change, we look at 14 behavioral determinants, then conduct research to determine which are at play and how, for the specific social issue. These determinants fall into three categories:

- **Fun.** Maximizing the good stuff; minimizing the bad (rewards, penalties, risks, feelings)
- **Easy.** Reducing or removing barriers to action (skills/knowledge, control, context, investment, efficacy)
- **Popular.** Making the behavior feel like the right thing to do (norms, self-standards, loss aversion)

The basic concept here is that there are a bunch of common things people want out of... well, just about anything. It doesn't matter what the behavior or program is; if it's more fun, easier to do or more popular, we're more likely to do it. To be clear, the right offer isn't always going to taste as great as mom's apple pie, but with the right exchange at play, your target actors will freely choose it.

And you'll be left to savor the sweet taste of a marketing success.



For more resources, go to MarketingForChange.com/insights-center/resources



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