

Enabling a 'nudge' to achieve the desired outcome



What is a 'nudge'? A nudge is a term used to enable people to positively choose to exhibit the desired behaviour / deliver the desired outcome without prompting; even when no-one is watching!

Why is this so difficult? It's because humans are involved and we are complex. Just being told to do something or being expected to follow a risk assessment and method statement will not deliver the desired outcomes. When incentives to do the right thing are removed, if a 'Just' culture does not exist (i.e. poor investigations, lessons are not learned to address root causes and are not communicated, clear boundaries are not set and actions are not taken) or if other factors promote the unwanted choice (e.g. it's easier, quicker, the right tools or equipment are not readily available, etc.), people will revert to "undesirable" behaviour, particularly when no one is watching.

So how can we make the desired behaviour the one that is chosen, create good habits and steer the person to do the right thing? In creating this environment, we must preserve freedom of choice – compelling people will not work!

Firstly, we need to understand the problem. We need to define the desired behaviour and / or outcome and ensure this is communicated consistently and frequently.

Once we are clear on the goal, we need to understand the issue from the perspective of those we work with. We can only achieve this by discussing with, listening to and developing an understanding of the views of those involved in the issue. We should never make assumptions or judge people!

The next step is to create an environment to facilitate the desired change and embed the good habit(s) expected. This is not easy or a quick-win and involves a multi-faceted approach; including:

- Visible leaders that consistently and habitually demonstrate their commitment to the desired change
- Management systems that support the approach
- Great communication, engagement and support

Finally, it is critical that the organisation tests their understanding of the change, learns from the feedback and adapts as necessary to demonstrate their commitment to the success.

Practically, what does this look like for a leader in an organisation going through change? As already stated, there are no quick-wins or short-cuts to achieve the desired outcomes - a great leader should think about the following behaviours:

- Facilitate
- Educate
- Support
- Be open
- Enable
- Interpret

- Assist
- Provide evidence to support the change
- Provide timely and focussed feedback

Leaders should nudge people with proactive and timely encouragement and feedback to recognise small incremental steps towards the desired outcome. They should “Think: what is stopping people in terms of their situation, attitude and thought process? How can we make it easier for people to make the right decision when choosing what they want to do?”

However, always provide autonomy for decision-making to make the desired choice(s) within the context of the situation – do not tell or force the decision in an artificial way.

Read more of my blogs [here](#).

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

Brian Cable is a Director of elnet consulting ltd